

Images, Perceptions and Productions in and of Antiquity

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Preface

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

– William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

“It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity.”

– Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*

“The past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future too.”

– Eugene O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*

This work I present you compiles a large ensemble – geographic, temporal and thematic – of reflections, that intend to call to the present, forms, topics, paradigms, and narratives of civilizations both ancient and structuring in the shaping of the so-called Occidental Civilization.

During the XIX and yet part of the XX century, these civilizations – the ones considered the cradle of civilization – constitute that that was designated as the Ancient History and that was translated in a said Greco-Roman antiquity, justified on the texts of Classical Tradition.

With the consecration of Egyptology and Assyriology, that came to place the origins of civilization in Africa and Asia, would have been possible to break this construction. Still, some authors, defenders of a past too much consecrated, quickly created an “Ancient Oriental Age” or some “Pre-Classic Civilizations” to which was given the status of a sort of antechamber for the birth of civilization traits “per excellence”.

And so, Antiquity and the own idea of Antiquity was kept a prisoner of a vision that served the European criteria of civilization.

To counter this reality, several authors profoundly inspired by cultural studies came to restore the Ancient History against the deconstruction of its hypothesis and traditional themes. To do so, many contributed with linguistic and literary studies, which led to a more excellent care towards the language and a new wave of questioning of the fonts, that resulted on an investigation about Antiquity profoundly more informed about the limits of its assumptions and generalizations.

Other significant contribution to this change, was the intensification and amplification of the “scope” of archaeological studies about Antiquity on the second half of the XX century: Classical Archaeology and the archaeological branches of Assyriology and Egyptology led to a discussion regarding material culture in Antiquity and a new threshold. Finally, by the end of the XX century, with the emergence of the field of study of the reception of the “classics” and the use of the past in the contemporary world, the final blow was given on

the reports that nationalized origins and legacies. The Eurocentric character of Ancient History fell, definitely. The world grew, widened, and Africa and Asia emerged as structuring, by their own right, in the construction of the so-called Occidental Civilization.

Maria Helena Trindade Lopes

Chapter One

Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt – An Overview

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The next chapter addresses a set of studies about themes of archaeology, philology, religion, and Egyptian culture, all from different historical times. Still, the unity and coherence of the work reside in the fact that all of them give body and expression to one of the oldest, most prosperous, and emblematic civilizations of antiquity, the Egyptian civilisation. It emerges and develops throughout the Valley of the Nile, has a truly impressive temporal span. This longevity is, in the first place, justified by its geography². Egypt, contrary to other contemporary civilizations or cultures, benefited from natural frontiers that assured its stability and gave way to the development of a particular form of being and to relate with space. At the East and the West, it was defended by two deserts, the Libyan and the Arabic. To the South, the Nubian desert and the Nile cataracts, that were throughout history gradually “conquered”, Closed and protect the land. To the North, it opened to the world through the Great Sea, The Mediterranean. And these coordinates were paramount for the maintenance of a civilisation that lasted more than 3000 years.

On the other hand, it benefited from a river, The Nile³ (itrw) that, crossing the territory from the South to the North, assured not only the fertility and productivity of the “desertic lands” but also the circulation of men and goods⁴. The regularity of its floods determined

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²Vd. Kees, (1961)

³ Butzer 2001, 543-551. About the significance of this river, vd. the even more recents, Willems, Dahms, J – M. (eds.) 2017 and Bunbury 2019.

⁴ Tallet; Argemi (ed.) 2015: 1-29.

the counting of time, the agricultural cycle and its three seasons - Akhet, Peret e Shemu - and, afterward, the civil and administrative calendar⁵.

The understanding and apprehension of the surrounding spaces - deserts, river - lead the men to a dual vision of reality, that expanded beyond desert-river/ death-life, to the differences inside the own territory, Upper Egypt – Lower Egypt, African Egypt – Mediterranean Egypt. Geographically, climatically, and even politically the South was always rather distinct from the North. Therefore, the Egyptians referred to their territory as the “The Two Lands” (*t3wy*). The political unity congregated the geographic duality, emblematic - the red crown and papyrus, symbols of the North; the white crown and the Lotus symbols of the South – and divine – the cobra-goddess Uadjit, for the North, and the vulture-goddess Nekhbet for the South.

The installation and settlement of populations in this territory would have started around 5000 BCE, having mainly expression in the cultures of Merimde, el-Omari, Maadi, Tell el-Farkha in the North. In the South the cultures of Badari, Nagada I ou Amratense, Nagada II, or Guerezense and Nagada III. This phase corresponds to the pre-dynasty period (5000 – 3200 BCE)⁶.

At the end of Naqada III we witness, finally, the emergence of the pharaonic regime, consecrated in a unified state, that affirms itself during dynasty 0 (3200-3000 BCE)⁷. Memphis, Ineb- Hedj, “The White Wall”, is founded, consecrating the union of Upper and Lower Egypt under the domain of a single pharaoh, a divine king, whose power is legitimized by his condition of double of Horus, a sacred falcon, son of Osiris, the founding hero of this civilization. The first urban settlements⁸, the first royal burials, in Abydos, as well as the emergence of writing with the first graphic narratives in palettes.

The deepening of the process of building a State was ended by the Archaic Period, also called the Thinite Period (3000- 2686 BCE), that covers the two first dynasties⁹. In this phase, we witness the consolidation of the centralized state in the figure of the pharaoh, that already presents himself with the three names that constitute the base of the royal title: the Horus name, nominating the representative of the divine falcon, Horus, the dynastic god of Egypt; the name of the Two Ladies, which establishes a union between the king and the two titular goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt – Nekhebet e Uadjit – and the

⁵ Vd. the classic Parker 1950 and still Clagett 1989. A recent revision about this question by Martin 2015: 15-27.

⁶ Cf. Stevenson 2016: 421–468; Anđelković 2011, 25–32 and Baines 1995, 95–156.

However, we cannot forget the presence of populations (=cultures) all over the Sahara area, during pre-history, it is already attested by the testimonies left of its presence, namely through the lithic tools.

⁷ Vd. Brewer 2014, 109 ss.

⁸ Moeller 2016

⁹ Wilkinson 2001 and Wenke 2001, 413-418.

coronation name, also called the royal pre-name, introduces by the title “king of Upper and Lower Egypt”. Alongside the further development of royal ideology, the dynastic cult, and the funerary cult, with the royal necropolis in Abydos and Sakkara, we witness the creation of an administration – with the natural development and diffusion of writing – the establishment of the Calendar and the first punitive and exploratory expeditions in Nubia and the Eastern Desert.

At the artistic level should be mentioned the appearance of royal statuary and private statuary in wood and stone.

The Old Kingdom¹⁰ (2686 – 2160 BCE), also called the Memphite Period or the Pyramids Period, with its four dynasties, and the capital in Memphis corresponds to the consolidation and centralisation of the Pharaonic State.

This political model is, mainly, based on two assumptions of pharaonic ideology: the first confirms the king as the rightful owner of all land and resources and, the second, affirms that Egypt is the centre of the Universe. In this way, the policy carried out by the different royals of this period must be understood in the light of these fundamental dogmas. On the one hand, we are witnessing the appearance of broader and more specialized functionalism, necessary for the administration of the territory, which is named by and rewarded by the pharaoh. On the other, we come across a strategy of aggregation and exploration of the surrounding areas¹¹, for the natural borders of Egypt did not, of course, coincide with the boundaries of the Universe. So, the Dakhla oasis is integrated into the country's economic and social fabric, the Sinai Peninsula is regularly explored, more for economic than military purposes¹², and Lower Nubia is subjected. Contacts with the Northeast are also deepened, and Byblos and the Lebanese coast became indispensable financial partners. Concerning Asia and the western desert, there is no expansion policy, happening, sporadically, policing operations to control Bedouins and Libyans.

In political terms, during dynasty IV, the king assumes a new divine legitimation that is expressed through the title “son of Re”, conferred by the clergy of Heliopolis. This new title reinforces the connection of royalty to this solar clergy, whose power and wealth increases proportionally with the passage of the reigns of the various pharaohs.

In parallel, we see significant changes in the economic and social fabric resulting from the accumulation of functions in the administration by some families. Thus, when we reach the end of dynasty VI, we were faced with an economically devalued and weakened royalty that was, as a result of consecutive payments made by the king to his officials and the power of local governors strengthened to the point of beginning to assert their independence. The

¹⁰ Der Manuelian, Schneider, 2015; Moreno Garcia, 2004 and Verner 2001, 585-591.

¹¹ Valbelle 1990.

¹² Because of the copper mines.

situation will lead to the breakdown of the administration and the automation of the nomarchs, announcing the fall of the Empire.

Culturally speaking, the Old Kingdom is considered to be a golden age of Egyptian civilisation. Notable progress can be seen in the field of construction, of artistic techniques and representations¹³: the funerary complex of Djoser (Dynasty III), the Pyramids of Giza (dynasty IV), the development of mastabas, the constructions of the first solar temples (dynasty V), the sculptures and bas-reliefs, that reveal a mastery unparalleled in history, the jewelry, and the furniture, of sobriety, never again reached. The first funerary texts in history also appear in the Pyramids Texts¹⁴.

The First Intermediate Period¹⁵ (c. 2160- 2055 BCE), which corresponds to the VII, VIII, IX, X, and the first part of the XI dynasties, occurs after the death of Pepi II. The progressive weakening of Pharaonic power and the affirmation of local separatism, further aggravated by climate change with inevitable consequences for the economy, as stated by J. Vercoutter¹⁶, lead to a dismemberment of the unity of the Two Lands.

The monarchs, transformed into real “warlords”, fight among themselves, and establish alliances, to increase their territorial control. Deaths, epidemics, and hunger increase.

It was a period of profound political, economic, social, and mental crisis and its consequences at an intellectual and ideological level will be remarkable.

On the one hand, a pessimistic view of the world is developed¹⁷ that will have literary expression¹⁸, on the other, there is a “democratization” of the funerary beliefs that extend the *post-mortem* solar destiny, until then royal privilege, to all individuals.

To confirm it appear the “Texts of the Sarcophagus”¹⁹. But little by little, as P. Vernus and J. Yoyotte refer²⁰, local antagonisms will polarize around two “dynasties”: the heracleopolitan, which controlled the Delta and part of Middle Egypt, and the Theban that, with the help of Copts, had subdued all of Upper Egypt. And it will be precisely the Thebans, the men of the South, as always in the history of pharaonic Egypt, who will be able to impose their power and authority on the whole country, restoring the unity of the state and initiating a new phase of cyclical time: The Middle Kingdom (2055 – 1650 BCE).²¹

¹³ Vd. Kanawati; Woods 2009 and Lehner 1997.

¹⁴ Vd. Allen 2015 and Allen 2001, 95–98.

¹⁵ Willems 2010, 81–100.

¹⁶ Vercoutter 1992.

¹⁷ Grimal 1988, 194-199.

¹⁸ A pessimistic literature emerges: “The Admonitions of Ipuwer” and the “The Dispute between a Man and is Ba” in Lichtheim 1975, 149-163 and 163-169.

¹⁹ Vd. Dunand; Zivie-Coche, 1991, 190-192 and Faulkner 2004.

²⁰ Vernus; Yoyotte 1996, 125.

²¹ For this period vd. Grajetzki, 2006 and Oppenheim; Arnold; Yamamoto 2015.

This new phase of history, which comprises the second part of dynasty XI, the XII, part of the XIII and XIV dynasties, corresponds to the reunification of the Egyptian State, under Montuhotep II, to its administrative reorganisation²², which goes through the reform of state apparatus, and the centralization of real authority, supported by a stable economy and legitimised by ideology and literature that calls for fidelity²³.

In this way, the different Kings of this period will take steps to consolidate Egypt's internal and foreign policy.

Thebes becomes capital and sees the domains of his temples increased, as well as the prestige of his tutelary god, Amon, elevated to the category of national divinity. Abydos, the sacred city of Osiris, also becomes a great religious metropolis and a privileged place for pilgrimages.

The prestige and political weight achieved by these two cities make it possible to counter-hegemonic trends in great centres of the past, such as Memphis and Heliopolis. At the same time, we witness the restoration of “abandoned” temples during the First Intermediate Period, to an extension of the literate elite and the appearance of a “petty bourgeoisie”²⁴.

Egypt's foreign policy gains a new lease of life at this stage: Lower Nubia is integrated into Egyptian territory (dynasty XII, Sesostri II)²⁵, the relations with Byblos are intensified, and contacts with the Siro-Palestinian region assert themselves, reign after reign, to the point that, in dynasty XII, we witnessed a massive flow of immigrants.

Economic expeditions to Punt, to the eastern and western desert, also develop from Sesostri I²⁶. To the north, Egypt opens up to the Mediterranean, establishing relations with Cyprus and the Aegean. But the high point of the Empire is reached with Sesostri III²⁷, the true precursor of the imperialist pharaohs of the New Kingdom.

In cultural terms, the Middle Kingdom asserts itself as the founder of a new “classicism”, characterized essentially by the search for harmony and perfection²⁸. Its remains are not as impressive as those found in the Old Kingdom, but among them, deserves mention the funerary temple of Mentuhotep II²⁹, that, centuries later, inspired Hatshepsut. In sculpture and the treatment of figures, some innovations are registered. It appears, for the first time,

²² Grajetzki 2013, 215 – 257.

²³ Vd. Posener 1969 and Pinto 2016.

²⁴ Vernus; Yoyotte 1996, 94.

²⁵ Vandersleyen 1995, 61-64.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 64-67.

²⁷ Tallet 2015

²⁸ Franke 2001, 393-400.

²⁹ Vd. Arnold 1979.

the cube-statues and, in the treatment of the image, the sense of individualisation is transmitted.

In the field of literature, Egypt reaches, at this stage, its highest expression, producing some of its masterpieces. Renews an old genre, the Wisdom teachings, placing them at the service of politics³⁰. Produces poems, short stories, narrative fiction, and novels³¹.

This portrait that I have just drawn of the Middle Kingdom lasts, however, only until the end of the XII dynasty, since everything becomes obscure from there³².

Much of dynasty XIII, until the taking of Memphis by the "Asians", and dynasty XIV, simultaneous, in time, with the previous one, with two monarchies that reign, in parallel, over different areas of Lower Egypt, still belong to the Middle Kingdom.

However, this resurgence of "dynasties" or local powers already proves the weakening of the monarchy and announces a new phase of disintegration that has its expression in the Second Intermediate Period³³ (1650-1550 BCE), which comprises part of dynasty XIII, XV, XVI, and XVII dynasties³⁴.

The succession of pharaohs, each of them reigning for a very short time, ends up leading to the decay of the royal power and the erosion of the administration, which is gradually losing control over the territories. This weakening of the State will allow the weathering of the country. Egyptian power cantons in the South, in Thebes, giving rise to dynasty XVII³⁵. The eastern Delta is absolutely controlled by the Hyksos, who reigned during dynasties XV and XVI³⁶. Everything else in Lower Egypt is "abandoned" at the hands of Asian communities' vassals of the Hyksos. In Middle Egypt, until Cusae, Egyptians are installed, foreigners' collaborators.

These Hyksos³⁷ (ḥkA-ḥAswt, in Egyptian) constitute an Asian population, originating from the Levant, which, having gradually installed itself in Egyptian territory, submits the kingdom of the eastern Delta founded by Nehehy (dynasty XIV) and already densely populated by Asians³⁸. Thus, from Avaris, the capital, they advance to Memphis, where the first Hyksos king, Salitis, is crowned.

³⁰ One of the most striking expressions of this kind is the "Loyalist Teaching". Vd. Posener 1976.

³¹ The *Tale of Sinuhe* is one of the masterpieces of universal literature. Vd. Parkinson 1997.

³² Cf. Vandersleyen 1995, 115-117.

³³ Ilin-Tomich 2016 and Popko 2013.

³⁴ Dynasty XIII extends until the Hyksos took over Memphis, being supplanted, in Thebes, by dynasty XVII. The XIV, contemporary to the first part of the XIII, ends with the domain of the Hyksos.

³⁵ Vd. Valbelle 1998, 187-191.

³⁶ Vd. Vandersleyen, 1995, 168-178.

³⁷ Mourad 2015; Bietak 2001, 136-143.

³⁸ Regarding the progressive installation of Hyksos in the territory, vd. Vandersleyen, 1995, 204-206.

This sharp division of the country and the powers, despite the supremacy of the Hyksos³⁹, leads to the militarisation of the society that is, repeatedly, at war. Meanwhile, Nubia, taking advantage of the fragility of Egyptian power in the South, regains its autonomy. In the Northeast, the Hyksos kings, who adopted the traditional title and apparatus of the pharaohs, plunder necropolises and cities, simultaneously imposing some traces of their civilization. They introduce the donkey sacrifice, the cults to Canaanite deities, new weapons, and, probably, the horse.

The culture, vivid in the Middle Kingdom, loses expression. Hieroglyphic writing, for example, as well as monumental art, slowly degenerate, due to the lack of teaching on a national scale, as highlighted by P. Vernus e J. Yoyotte⁴⁰.

Meanwhile, in the South, the Theban dynasty, after more than one hundred years of Hyksos rule, starts the real war of liberation⁴¹, counting, for that purpose, with the support of recruited mercenary contingents– the *Medjay*⁴².

The final expulsion of the Hyksos and the unification of the territory will be the responsibility of Amosis, the founder of the New Kingdom⁴³ (1550-1069 BCE), which comprises dynasties XVIII, XIX, and XX.

The recent past profoundly influences this new phase in Egyptian history. The domination of Egypt by a foreign force, combined with the new material conditions (more sophisticated weaponry) will lead the kings of this period to a policy that is based, basically, on two complementary vectors: the construction of an Empire on a “universal scale” (ideological dogma) and its political-religious legitimation, through the phenomenon of royal propaganda⁴⁴ and the affirmation of “divine causality”⁴⁵, that enshrined the action of the gods on history.

The construction of a real empire will translate into a markedly expansionist policy, which begins with Amenofis I (Dynasty XVIII, 1525-1504 BCE) reaching, however, its maximum expression in the reigns of Tutmosis III (Dynasty XVIII, 1479-1425 BCE) and Ramses II (Dynasty XIX, 1279 - 1213 BCE)⁴⁶.

Tutmosis III⁴⁷, with its policy of aggression in Asia, subjecting the emerging strength of the Mitanni and with the dominance and control of Nubia, it transforms Egypt into an actual

³⁹ It should be remembered that all territories were subject to the payment of tribute to the Hyksos kings.

⁴⁰ Vernus; Yoyotte, 1996, 54.

⁴¹ Valbelle 1990, 123-125.

⁴² Liszka 2012 <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3509198>

⁴³ Vd. Murname 2001, 519-525 and Grandet 2018.

⁴⁴ Vernus 1995, 163-165.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 135-137.

⁴⁶ Vd. Valbelle 1990, 137-148.

⁴⁷ About this royal figure vd. Cline; O'Connor 2006.

imperialist state. The hegemony achieved during his reign will remain, with some oscillations, until the reign of Amenophis III (Dynasty XVIII, 1390-1352 BCE).

Ramses II⁴⁸ will have to defend the Empire from the Hittite expansionist pretensions, which had extended its hegemony to the peoples of Asia Minor and North Syria, further jeopardising Egyptian supremacy in the Mediterranean. The Egyptian-Hittite confrontation in Kadesh⁴⁹, “understood” differently by the two players, will, however, allow to restore national pride and reaffirm Egyptian demands in Asia.

A few years later, and in the face of the emergence of a third force in the eastern world - Assyria - Ramses II seals, finally, a “peace treaty” with the Hittites, thus diplomatically guaranteeing the borders of the Empire.

He will still survive the first attack of the “peoples of the sea”, during the reign of Merenptah (Dynasty XIX, 1213-1203 BCE), and their coalition with the Libyans, during the government of Ramses III (Dynasty XX, 1184-1153 BCE). But in the following reigns, the “imperial dream” is gradually lost.

The State that supported this political ideal was, of course, a strong and centralised state, both at the level of the royal figure and in the domain of its organisation, and with a solid economy, due not only to the looting and taxes paid by the submitted peoples, but also thanks to the control of the main commercial circuits.

Interestingly, in this context of the imperial dream, a revolutionary figure emerges, in political, ideological, and religious terms: Amenofis IV (Dynasty XVIII, 1352-1336 BCE), the “heretic king”⁵⁰.

Two attitudes, the change of name - from Amenofis IV to Akhenaton - and the construction of new capital, Amarna, outline Akhenaton's political-religious project⁵¹. This was, basically, based on an assumption: maintaining the hegemony of the Empire through an innovative universal belief, the atonism.

The atonism consisted of a new religious formulation that replaced the vast Egyptian pantheon with a single god, creator, father and mother of humanity, the motor of the physical world, and the providence of all living beings, Aton, the solar disk. An ecumenical god, able to bring “all peoples” together under the same belief.

⁴⁸ Kitchen 1985

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 81-91.

⁵⁰ Vd. Laboury, 2010.

⁵¹ Regarding Akhenaton's ideology, vd. Allen, 1989, 89-101.

The influence of this "heresy" will have its repercussions on art⁵², literature⁵³, and the behaviour and feelings of Egyptian men. The peace of the Empire is assured, as Amarna's abundant correspondence proves. However, neither the military nor the priestly castes support Akhenaton's political-religious project, which does not survive his death.

It is also essential to highlight the cultural development that took place in the New Kingdom to close this period of Egyptian history.

In art, monumentality and gigantism are affirmed, visible both at the level of architecture, with the exquisite divine and funerary temples, and at the level of sculpture, where the colossi punctuate.

In the literature, some genres of the past are maintained – the Wisdoms, the Novels, and Popular Tales - and others, Biographies and Epic Texts are developed.

The appearance of the Love Poetry stands out and, in the funerary texts, the composition of the Book of the Dead occurs.

The expansionist policy of the New Kingdom had allowed Egypt to have contact with other spaces, other peoples, different cultures, and even other religions. But all this will contribute to a profound change in the face of the Empire. Here, again, the installation of foreign colonies in the territory. Customs and traditions are adulterated, and even the language itself changes. At the same time, the scandals and corruption that spread in Egypt, especially after dynasty XX⁵⁴, lead, inevitably, the Egyptian man to a sceptical and critical attitude towards the institutions. And this leads them away from the belief in the intrinsic excellence of the established order - Maat - and in its immanent capacity for self-regulation. As a consequence of this rejection, the phenomenon of "religion" or "personal piety"⁵⁵ is accentuated, supported by a new channel of communication with the divine: the oracle⁵⁶.

The Empire toppled, as its bases of support gradually collapsed. The beginning of the end had begun: The Third Intermediate Period⁵⁷ (1069 – 664 BCE).

This new cycle of the history of Egypt, which comprises dynasties XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, and XXV, is characterized by a marked weakness of the "central power", which allows the progressive installation of "indigenous" forces. According to P. Vernus e J. Yoyotte⁵⁸, this period corresponds to four distinct phases.

⁵² Laboury 2011. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0n21d4bm>

⁵³ Grandet 1998, 61-64.

⁵⁴ Vd. Vernus, 1993.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 172 ss.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 193 ss.

⁵⁷ Dodson 2001, 388–394 and Kitchen 1996.

⁵⁸ Vernus; Yoyotte, 1996, 179-181.

The first comprises the time of the "kings of Tanis" and the "kings-priests" (dynasty XXI, 1069-945 BCE). Effectively, after the fall of the New Empire, Egypt started to be "governed", simultaneously, by two rival forces: in the North, a pharaoh, with the capital in Tanis; in the South, the high priests of Amon, centred in Thebes⁵⁹. This accentuated division of territory and powers (political and religious) inevitably leads to the decline of the monarchy's unifying and centralising function, also decreasing the Egyptian prestige abroad.

Meanwhile, the Libyans, who had been progressively undermining Lower and Middle Egypt, settled permanently in power, thus giving rise to the second phase (dynasty XXII, 945-715 BCE). This corresponds to the "apogee of the Libyan kings", whose capital is fixed at Bubastis. In this period, Egypt regains some of its international prestige⁶⁰. Palestine is invaded, and Solomon's temple ransacked. The Phoenician cities swear, again, fidelity and the old commercial circuits are resumed. However, at the death of Osorkon II, a succession crisis ensues degenerating into civil war, and Egypt thus enters the third phase: the period of "Libyan anarchy" (dynasty XXIII, 818- 715 BCE)⁶¹. Internal wars between the different princes lead first to a bi polarisation of power (two pharaohs reigning, simultaneously) and, secondly, to the definitive division of their territory. The last phase of this journey corresponds to the "conflict for reunification" (dynasties XXIV and XXV, 727 – 656 BCE). The South succumbs to a Nubian dynasty⁶² (dynasty XXV) that intends to extend its dominion to the entire territory. But in the North, the princes of Sais (dynasty XXIV) dispute its power. The pacification of the conflict ended up being determined by the Assyrians who precipitated the fall of the Nubian dynasty, thus opening the way to "reunification".

This enshrines a new stage in the history of Egypt: The Late Period⁶³ (664-332 BCE).

This period, which comprises the dynasties XXVI, XVII, XVIII, XXIX, XXX, and XXXI, corresponds to a phase of alternation between Egyptian dynasties, which still try to reaffirm, without much success, the dogmas of royalty, and foreign dynasties, which precipitate the fall of an entire civilization.

The reunification of the territory, after the Nubian rule, will be up to Psametic I ⁶⁴, founder of the dynasty XXVI (664-525 BC). For a century, Egypt recovered the climate of peace and

⁵⁹ Vd. Dodson 2001, 388-394.

⁶⁰ Vd. *Ibidem*, 390-392.

⁶¹ Vernus, Yoyotte 1996, 180.

⁶² Morkot 2000.

⁶³ Vd. Ladynin 2013. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zg136m8> and Lloyd 2000, 369-94.

⁶⁴ Spalinger 1976, 133–147.

economic prosperity. Reestablishes the contacts with Phenicia, Syria, and the Greek colonies. Watches the fall of the Assyrian empire but fails, nevertheless, to face the mighty army of Cambyses, which subdues Egypt in 525 BCE, giving rise to the first Persian rule⁶⁵ (dynasty XXVII, 525-404 BCE). This Period lasts for one hundred years and marks, profoundly, the Egyptian imaginary that witnesses a progressive process of “Asianization” of its civilisation. The following dynasties (XXVIII, XXIX, and XXX, 404- 343 BCE) fail to stop this “process” and sink again under the second Persian domination (dynasty XXXI, 343-332 BCE). Therefore, when Alexander the Great, Macedonian, enters Egypt, in 332 BCE, he is received as the liberator and the Hellenistic period (332- 30 BCE), with the Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies, signal the last phase of Egypt's political history.

After the death of Cleopatra VII, Egypt forever loses its independence at the hands of Rome (30 a.C.-395 AD).

⁶⁵ Vd. Wilkinson 2010, 577 – 578.

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Section 1. Ancient Egyptian Studies

When the Producer is the Product: The Demiurge's Self-Genesis in the Egyptian New Kingdom Religious Hymns (ca. 1539-1077BC)

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Abstract

The present paper constitutes a brief preliminary approach to the Creator's self-genesis in the Egyptian New Kingdom Religious Hymns (ca. 1539-1077 BC) in the context of an ongoing PhD research regarding the Creator deity and Creation in the New Kingdom's hymnology. This feature is referred to in numerous different manners in this *corpus*, which might be grouped into three main categories - self-emanation/manifestation, self-begetting/birth, and self-cast/construction - through which the present paper is structured. The term *xpr* is fundamental regarding the first, as it conveys the idea of "coming to existence" or "assuming/taking shape". As for the second category, one finds attestations of the deity's self-creation rendered by an allusion to biological processes, where the Creator would have engendered (*wT*) and given birth (*msj*) to himself. Finally, the third group relates to manual/craftwork, with the use of different terms such as *od*. However, it will be argued that these groups are not to be taken as entirely separate units but rather as operative categories. *Msj*, for instance, might refer to both a biological process and a manual task. To sum up, this paper deals with the phraseology employed to depict the Creator's self-coming into existence in this *corpus*, navigating through its diversity and taking into account its complexity.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt; New Kingdom; Creator deity; Self-Genesis; Religious Hymns

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1. Introduction

The primary goal of my on-going PhD research is to inventory and consider the phraseology attested in the religious hymns of the New Kingdom (ca.1539-1077 BC),² which refers explicitly to the creative process(es). I intend to consider the complex identity of the Creator deity, who not only reunites several names, roles, and attributes but also sets the different Cosmos's components into being through the performance of distinct tasks. Thus, my research can be structured around three core issues: the identity of the Creator; the creation's outcomes; and the mechanisms and devices used by the Creator to achieve creation.

Nevertheless, there is one particular feature in this *corpus* that somehow blurs the individuation of these analytical axes: The Creator's creation by himself. The Demiurge would simultaneously be both the producer and a product, bringing himself (by himself) into being. Thus, the Demiurge's self-Genesis seems to be the paramount point of the intersection of the three questions through which I navigate in my research: the producer is the product, and the latter is achieved by multiple processes executed by the former. However, the coming into existence of the Creator is not conveyed in a straightforward and monolithic way in this *corpus*. On the contrary, the demiurgic self-genesis is textually depicted in several distinct procedures, that range from a mere "coming into existence" or "assumption of a form" (xpr) to more concrete actions, such as manual/constructive processes ("to build", "to shape", "to form" - od, nbj) or biological ones, the Creator being described as the one who begot (wtT) and gave birth (msj) to himself.

In this paper, I intend to focus on the different ways through which the Demiurge's self-genesis is conveyed in this *corpus*, by trying to trace patterns in the allusions to this cosmogonical moment. Simultaneously, I will aim at understanding the different meanings that each creative method entails and consider possible areas of ambiguity and overlapping.

2. The self-emanated/manifested deity (xpr)

The term xpr is quintessential in this regard as it conveys a meaning of "becoming", "coming into existence" or "occurring",³ that is, the passing from a dormant state to an actual form, a transmutation from pre-existence to existence.⁴ The original setting of this notion dates back to the initial Ocean, the Nu(n) (Nw(n)/Nnw),⁵ where the Demiurge, whose name might be Khepri (xprj), deriving from xpr, is diluted before taking shape. The

² Dates according to Hornung, Krauss and Warburton 2006, 490-495.

³ Wb 3, 260.7-264.15.

⁴ Assmann 1984, 210.

⁵ Several lexical variations (such as nw or nwjj) might be translated as "water" "waters" or "primordial waters". This diversity is particularly striking in the *Pyramid Texts*, but the Coptic vocalization (*noun*) indicates us the structure nnw (Allen 1988, 4). For the purpose of this paper, Nnw is the adopted orthography to refer to the primeval Ocean.

realization of his existence triggers his self-creation.⁶ The Cosmos would have been born in these motionless waters, which already contained in themselves, in a latent state, the matter to come that would be used to constitute the universe as it is known and understood.⁷ The Egyptian creation is thus not an *ex nihilo* one. #pr is therefore instrumental when referring to the Demiurge's self-creation in the New Kingdom religious hymns and beyond.⁸ The expression xpr Ds=f, “who came into existence by himself” is indeed the most common phraseological unit attested in this *corpus*, covering the entire New Kingdom, except for Amarna, in a whole range of textual materialities, contexts and plausible functions.⁹ The isolation of the Creator in the cosmogonical start and his subsequent ontological anteriority over the other beings (deities and humans) and elements might also be rendered through this verb, at least, since Thutmose III:

xpr m-bAH nn snnw=f

(The one) who came into existence in the beginning, without an equal¹⁰

#pr might as well be used not regarding this creation “in the beginning” - *creatio prima* - but rather as the on-going cosmic recreation, re-enacted by the daily sun emergence:

jAw n=k xpr ra nb

Praises to you, who come to existence every day¹¹

The exploration of this semantics is profoundly existentially charged, something that is reinforced by the writing of several xpr-forms in the same sentence, a sequence that often reveals challenging to translate. The famous Short Hymn to Osiris, dated from Amenhotep III's reign, provides one example:

wnn=k pA xpr xprw nn xpr

You are the being who came into existence before existence existed¹²

Given that all these textual fragments present a general sDm=f form, it is difficult to assert whether they refer to the initial “exit” of the Creator from the cosmic Ocean (*creatio prima*)

⁶ Vernus and Yoyotte 2005, 442.

⁷ Sauneron and Yoyotte 1959, 22.

⁸ See, for instance, the late-dated Papyrus Bremner-Rhind.

⁹ The list of references is very extensive. For an overview of the present state of the research regarding this particular topic, see the table in the final section of this paper.

¹⁰ TT 84(8), 2, temp. Thutmose III (Urk. IV, 942-943; STG 102; ÅHG 80).

¹¹ BM EA552, 1, temp. Tutankhamun (Urk IV, 2100-2102; Edwards 1939, 31, pl. 27; Martin 1989, 92-93, pl. 109-110).

¹² Lyon H 1376, 1, temp. Amenhotep III (Dévéria 1896, 55-112, 82-90; Varille 1931, 497-507; Urk. IV, 1914-1915; Barucq and Daumas 1980, n°12).

or instead to the permanent emergence of the solar deity at every dawn (*creatio continua*).¹³ The phraseology attested for the verb *bsj*, “to flood out, to emerge”,¹⁴ however, seems to hint at the former:

bsj=k tpy
You emerged (yourself) first¹⁵

The concomitance of this verb and *xpr* might be regarded as a reinforcement of this perception:

bsj.n=f xpr [Ds=f]
(After) he had emerged, he came into existence by himself¹⁶

These textual excerpts record the creator’s self-genesis in the Primeval Ocean framework, presenting this act as an emergence or an appearance. However, one also finds other terms that depict the Demiurge’s coming into existence, namely, biological ones.

3. The self-begetter/born deity (*msj/wtT*)

Giving birth and being born undoubtedly suggest a creative act. Hence it is only logical that this bio-physic imagery, covered by the verb *msj*,¹⁷ shall be convoked in order to address the coming into existence of the different beings and entities, starting with the Creator himself. This feature is attested, at least, since Thutmose III:

jnD Hr=k Jmn-Ra mss(w) sw Tnw wn.wt pr(j) m mw.t=f m-Xr.t-hrw Htp m Xn=s r nw=f
Hail to you, Amon-Ra, who gives birth to himself every hour, who comes forth from his mother every day and rests in her in his (due) time¹⁸

The above-quoted passage refers to *creatio continua*, as it points to a continuously renewed process: the sun’s daily journey. The continuous demiurgic self-genesis might also be

¹³ For an introduction to the distinction between *creatio prima* and *creatio continua*, see Knigge 2006, 67-70. According to Bickel, this differentiation begins precisely in the New Kingdom (Bickel 1998, 169).

¹⁴ Wb 1, 474.5-18.

¹⁵ pLeiden I 350, IV.1, temp. Rameses II (Gardiner 1905, 12-60; Zandee 1947; Erman 1923, 363-373; Wilson 1950, 368-369; Roeder 1959-1961, 282-301; Oswalt 1968, 61-89, 196-219; HPEA 72; Assmann 1995, 159; Foster 1995, 68-79; Mathieu 1997, 109-152; ÄHG 132-142).

¹⁶ TT 50(7/8), x+4, temp. Horemheb (STG 62d); and Hymn of Tura, 10-11, probably written between the end of the 18th dynasty and the beginning of the 19th dynasty (Bakir 1943, 83-91; Oswalt 1968, 51-57, 188-194; HPEA 74; Assmann 1995, 161-163; ÄHG 88).

¹⁷ Wb 2, 137.4-138.17.

¹⁸ Chicago E14053, 2, temp. Thutmose III (STG 165; ÄHG 75; Stewart 1966, 63).

rendered through the concomitance of the verb *msj* and the expression *Ds=f*, something that is attested only after-Amarna:

rdj jAw n Ra-(j)tm-xprj-Hr-Ax.ty

jnD Hr=k pA Hwn nTry ms(j) Ds=f ra nb

To give praises to Ra-Atum-Khepri-Horakhty.

Hail to you, the divine young one, who gives birth to himself every day!¹⁹

This “daily birth” refers to the quotidian emergence of the sun at dawn. It is noteworthy that praised deity is here adored in four names - Ra, Atum, Khepri, and Horakhty - all of them connected different aspects and features of the sun-god(s). The fact that these names/gods correspond to distinct solar phases concurs to the covering of a cycle, manifested in the journey featured by the creator deity, a process that culminates in the eternally expected and awaited morning solar (re-)birth.

If there seems to be no doubt regarding the *creatio continua* quality covered by the above-quoted excerpt, others are open to a certain ambiguity:

jnD Hr=k pAwty tA.wy nb MAa.t jwty nw=tw wa mss msj sw jr w mw.t=f omA d.t=f prj
m Ax.t Ax hn(a) kA=f

Hail to you, primordial of the Two Lands, Lord of Maat, who has no equal, the only one! Child/Begetter/Who gave birth²⁰ that gave birth to himself. Who made his mother, who created his hand. Who comes forth from the horizon, transfigured with his kA²¹

Once more, primordially and uniqueness seem intimately connected to self-creation. Moreover, the creator’s singularity, who allows himself to give birth to himself, is characterized by his self-sufficiency: he himself is enough to set his existence into being. By assigning the creation of his mother to the deity, the hymnographer emphasises the god’s autonomy concerning his creative task. Furthermore, the mention to the hand’s creation suggests an allusion to a fundamental Egyptian cosmogonical motif: the demiurgic

¹⁹ Berlin 7316, 1-2, 18th dynasty, after Amarna (Roeder 1924, 134; HPEA 47; ÄHG 60).

²⁰ Scholars have differently interpreted this passage. Whereas Barucq and Daumas (1980, X) have interpreted *mss* as “child” (“enfant qui s’est enfanté lui-même”), Assmann (1999, X) renders that word as “Procreator” (“der seinen Erzeuger zeugte”). As for Jorgensen (1998, 74), *mss* should not be understood as a noun but rather as reduplicated verbal form: “Who gave birth to that which gave birth to ThyselF”. The lack of classifier hinders a definite answer to this problem. Regardless of the chosen translation/interpretation, there seems to be no doubt that we are facing here a self-creation textual mention. Simultaneously, it is important to bear in mind that a deliberate ambiguity might be at hand.

²¹ Copenhagen AEIN 655, 7-9, temp. Thutmose III-Thutmose IV (Koefoed-Petersen 1951, 31, pl. 64; Jorgensen 1998, 74-77; Mogensen 1930, XVII-A.72, 19; ÄHG 51; HPEA 53; Stewart 1966, 63).

masturbatory act. According to the Heliopolitan cosmogonical cycle, after causing himself to exist in a *causa sui* instance, the deity engenders the first divine couple through expectoration/spit or masturbation.²² Thus, the reference to the god's hand, which would be in some instances hypostasized as a deity, may be envisaged as an indication of the god's ability to create their own body parts that perform as tools in the creative task. The god is able to provide himself with the required devices to set creation into being, which ultimately relies exclusively on his own existence.

Statements that claim that not only did the god give birth to, he also begot himself reinforce the self-sufficiency of the demiurgic bringing to existence. One finds thus a concomitance of the verbs *msj* and *wtT*, "to beget",²³ which seems to be a post-Amarna feature:

pw Hr-Ax.ty pA Hwn nTry jwa nHH wtT sw msj sw Ds=f nswt p.t tA HoA dwA.t Hr(y)-
tp spAt Jwgr<.t> [prj] m mw sTA sw m Nnw rnn sw sDsr msw.t=f

It is Horakhty, the divine young one, heir of the nHH-time, who begets and gives birth to himself! King of sky and earth, sovereign of the Duat, the foremost of the Igeret-necropolis, [who comes forth] from the waters, who drags himself out of the Nun, who nurtures himself and sacralises his birth!²⁴

The Creator's begetting and bearing proprieties are presented in the context of his coming into existence out of the Nun. Furthermore, the affirmation of his superintendence over the Cosmos as a whole - he both controls and administrates the three existential levels (celestial, terrestrial, and the netherworld) - aligns with his self-manageable caretaking of himself. Thus, the Creator's agency seems to operate both on a cosmic and an individual level.

Nevertheless, the negation of the Creator's birth constitutes a fruitful strategy to posit the deity's top position in the cosmic hierarchy. Through passive forms, the Demiurge is said to be the only entity that comes into existence without being born. Such is the case in the stela of Suty and Hor:

jnD Hr=k jtn n hrw omA tm.w jrj anx=sn bjk aA sAb-Sw.t xpr sTs sw Ds=f xpr Ds=f
jwty ms.tw=f Hr sms Hr-jb n njw.t

²² This cosmogonical motif is attested since the *Pyramid Texts*, namely, in PT 527. One also finds attestations of this reality in other *corpora*, including the *Coffin Texts* (CT 321, CT IV 147b-e). The inclusion of two references to this cosmogonical motif in Papyrus Bremner-Rhind, written in Roman times, attests to the continuity of this perception in the Egyptian thought (BM EA10188 26'24-27'1; 28'27-29'1).

²³ Wb 1, 381.10-382, 9.

²⁴ BM EA551, 3-5, temp. Tutankhamun (Meyer 1877, 148-157; Urk IV 2094-2099; Edwards 1939, 31-33, pl.28; Martin 1989, 29-31, pl.21-22; Scharff 1922, 58-60; Stewart 1966, 51-53; HPEA 24; Foster 1995, 45-47; ÄHG 57).

Hail to you, sun-disk of the day! Creator of the humans, who makes them live!
Great falcon, with variegated plumage! Scarab, who elevated himself, who came
into existence by himself, without having been born! Horus, the eldest in the sky!²⁵

In this passage, the Demiurge is identified with two animals: the falcon and the scarab. If the former entails a clear link to Horus, explicitly mentioned further ahead, the later enables a wordplay with the verb *xpr*, thus enhancing the symbolical meaning of the text and possibly its aesthetic quality as well.²⁶ Simultaneously, it is interesting to notice that anthropogeny is acknowledged prior to the god's own coming into existence. The hymnographer recognizes the deity's importance as the Humanity's author but mainly as its sustainer and caretaker: the god does not limit himself to create human beings, he also provides them with their living sustenance. As for the phraseology directly connected to the demiurgic self-creation - *xpr Ds=f jwty ms.tw=f* - it shall be noted that the exact same one is attested in another 18th dynasty hymn. However, in this particular instance, the expression is employed to praise Thot:

jAw n=k +Hwty nb #mnw xpr Ds=f jwty ms.tw=f nTr wa

Praises to you, Thot, lord of Hermopolis, who comes into existence by himself,
without having been born! The sole god!²⁷

In this excerpt, Thot is praised as a self-created god, who shares the oneness attribute commonly linked to the sun-birth creative god and usually not ascribed to the lunar god. One might posit the hypothesis that the religious-theological concepts around Thot were somehow influenced by the profound transformations that were occurring vis-à-vis the sun god in this period. However, one should bear in mind that this hymn follows another one in the same document, addressed to a three-named god, Re-Atum-Horakhty, whose solar nature is evident.²⁸ Thus, we may be here dealing with a standard phraseological repertoire, intended to praise the beneficial deeds of a given deity. Simultaneously, this could aim at displaying a textual cohesion and coherence.

However, one should bear in mind the polysemy covered by the word *msj*. This verb also comprehends more general creative notions - "to create" - or even procedures that are not

²⁵ BM EA826, 8-9, temp. Amenhotep III (Edwards 1939, pl.21; Varille 1941, 25-30; Urk IV, 1943-1949; Pierret 1870, 70-72; Breasted 1934, 275-277; Sainte Fare Garnot 1949, 63-68; Wilson 1950, 367-368; Stewart 1966, 53-55; Fecht 1967, 25-50; HEPA 68; ÄHG 89; Foster 1995, 56-58; Murnane 1995, 27-28; Shubert 2004, 143-165; Lichtheim 2006, 86-89; Baines & McNamara 2007, 63-79; Guylas 2009, 113-131).

²⁶ According to Verns (2005, 442) *xpr*, "Scarab/the one who takes a from", would have derived from the verb *xpr*, duplicating the final consonant, possibly even before writing. This process is well-attested for both animal and family names.

²⁷ BM EA551, 18-19.

²⁸ BM EA551, 1-17.

(necessarily) biological, such as “to fashion”.²⁹ This is even more relevant if we take into account that this verb is often graphed without the woman giving birth hieroglyph (B3/B4). The context of some instances of the lack of this classifier hinders their respective translations. Indeed, some occurrences of *msj* introduce a certain ambiguity between biological and manual-crafted procedures.

3. The self-crafted/fashioned deity (*msj*; *od*)

Some occurrences of *msj* introduce a certain ambiguity between biological and manual-crafted procedures. It seems to be the case in the following example from the aforementioned stela of Suty and Hor:

PtH=tw nbj=k Ha.w=k mss jwty ms.tw=f wa Hr xw=f sbb nHH Hry wA.wt m HH.w Xr
sSm=f

You are a sculptor! You cast your (own) body. Child-bearer/Modeler who is not born/modelled! Unique in his kind, who traverses the nHH-time [= eternity] over the paths, with millions under his command!³⁰

The consistent lack of classifiers in this text hampers its translation. Firstly, the word *ptH* with no further classifier induces a possible premeditated ambiguity between the god *Ptah*, the noun “sculptor” and the verb *ptH*, “to form, to create”.³¹ This persistent absence also channels the way into diverse interpretations regarding the second element of the above-quoted passage, *msj*, not being clear whether a biological or artisanal creative procedure is intended. While the latter would fit in a manual and crafted conception of the self-genesis, the former would serve to amplify and diversify the utilized narratives and devices in order to convey that paramount cosmogonical moment. Both solutions seem to be possible, linguistically and subject-wise, and one must bear in mind the possibility of deliberate ambiguity. The self-creation via an artisanal work is reinforced by the verb *nbj*, which might be translated in various ways, all of them connected to manual activities,³² applied to the emergence of the god’s body. The craftsman is simultaneously the crafted piece: creator and creation conjoin in the same being - the producer is the product. His self-made

²⁹ Wb 2, 137.4-138.7.

³⁰ BM EA26, 3.

³¹ Wb 1, 565.11. Barucq and Daumas (1980, 188) interpret *ptH* as “le Sculpteur”. Foster (1995, 56) harmonizes with this perspective: “Fashioner of yourself”. Assmann (1999, 210), on the contrary, prefers to translate this passage as “Du bist ein PTAH”. Barucq and Daumas (1990, 188, [b]) argue against this option, as that should be covered by *ntk PtH*. The scholars suggest instead that *ptH* is a past participle of the verb *ptH*, “to mold/to sculpture”. However, further problems arise as this verb is only known from ulterior sources (Wb 1, 565). Lichtheim (2006, 87) presents a more neutral option: “Self-made”.

³² “To melt, to cast, to fashion, to model, to guild” (Wb 2, 236.6-9; 241.8-29).

condition ranks the Demiurge as a unique entity, the only one of “his kind”, and thus assuming the Cosmos conduction and the control over time.

The diversity of images that may cover expressions linked to the artisanal/manual creative conceptions in the religious hymns of the New Kingdom also includes the verb *od*, “to form, to fashion, to build”.³³ Although its attestations in this *corpus* occur earlier, it only refers to the demiurgic self-genesis from the Amarna period onwards. Such is the case in the so-called Short Hymn to Aten:

pA nTr Sps(y) od(w) sw Ds=f jr(w) tA nb omA(w) nty Hr=f m rmT.w mnmn.t aw.t nb(.t) Sn.w nb rwd(w) Hr sAtw anx=sn wbn=k n=sn ntk mw.t jt n jry=k

The noble god, who builds himself (by himself), who makes every land and creates what is in it: humans, every big and small animal, and every tree that grows upon the soil. They live when you rise for them. You are the mother and the father of what you have done!³⁴

In this excerpt, the self-creation is presented amid a vaster array of creative outputs. The god is indeed accounted for the creation of “everything that exists”, even if his own is the first to be mentioned. The whole creation relies and depends on the god’s deeds who performs as a provider and caretaker of his creatures, to whom he is both a “mother” and a “father”.³⁵ Simultaneously, this extract is most probably intended to convey a *creatio continua* process, given the Atenism’s features. As previously stated, the xpr Demiurge’s self-genesis seems to be absent from the Amarna hymnology. Aten was supposed to be everlastingly eminent, and the affirmation of a “coming into existence” would somehow weaken this perspective: Aten is not supposed to “take a shape” because he was, is, and will always be the sun-disk. Thus, it is interesting to note a replacement of the common expression xpr Ds=f by od sw Ds=f.

Shortly after Amarna, this verb is written in a sDm.n=f form explicitly referring to the self-creation of the Demiurge as in this previously considered passage:

jnD Hr=k wbn m jtn=f prj m Nnw r sHD tA.w xpr xprw omA Ha.w=f jrj D.t=f> jrj sw m a.wy=f bs.n=f xpr [Ds=f] <a.wt=f nb Hr md.w Hna=f od.n=f sw n(j) xpr.t p.t tA jw tA m Nnw r-jmjtw

³³ Wb 5, 72.8-73.24.

³⁴ Short Hymn to Aten, 3-4, temp. Akhenaten (Davies 1903, pl.XXXVII; Davies 1906, 27-30, pl.XVI, XXIII, XXIX, XXXII-XXXIII, XL, XLIII; Sandman 1938, 10-16; Grandet 1995, 121-133, 153-159; Scharff 1922, 67-69; Murnane 1995, 157-159; Lichtheim 2006, 90-92; Hoffmeier 2015, 217-218).

³⁵ The binomial “father/mother” in connection to the Demiurge is well attested in the New Kingdom’s hymnology. Its attestations cover a vast period, from Thutmose III until the 20th dynasty. The author is currently preparing a paper where this phraseology will be discussed more in-depth.

Hail to you, when you rise up in/as his sun-disk! You came forth of the Nun to illuminate the Two Lands. The existence that came into existence, who created his limbs, who made his body, who made himself with his arms! He emerged, coming into existence by himself, all his members talked with him. He built himself when the sky and the earth had not yet come into existence, when the land was still in the Nun, inert!³⁶

This extract asserts the Creator with an ontological anteriority and primordially over the other cosmic entities. Its account presents more a cosmogonical tone rather than a cosmological one,³⁷ and so its *creatio prima* aspect seems rather undoubted.

As it happens for other verbs, in Ramesside times, *od* can also be attributed to the shaping of the god's corporeality, notably, his limbs:

NN Dd=f jj Ra msj MAa.t jty jr nn r-Aw od Ha.w=f nbj D.t=f omA sw mss Ds=f rdj=f
mA<=j> nfrw=f m Xr.t-hrw st.wt=f wbn Hr Snb.t=j

NN, he says: "O Ra, who gives birth to Maat! Sovereign, who makes all this (in totality)! Who builds his limbs and casts his body! Who creates himself and brings himself forth! May he make me see his beauty daily (and may) his rays shine upon my chest!"³⁸

This small laudatory text attests to the phraseological diversity when addressing the creator's self-genesis in this *corpus*, which is referred to through four different verbs: *od*, *nbj*, *omA*, and *msj*. Moreover, the Demiurge is once more portrayed as the author of "all", and he is responsible for the emergence of Maat (MAa.t) a deified Egyptian concept connected to ideas of social justice and cosmic balance.³⁹ The creator is thus in charge of both creation and its maintenance, looking after his creatures and promoting a cosmic harmony. This also resonates on the individual level. This praise is followed by a personal plea, in which the worshipper asks for the permanent presence of this god in his life. The deity is, therefore, in charge of both human collective issues and individuals' demands.

4. Final Remarks

³⁶ TT 50(7/8), x+3-x+4; and Tura Hymn, 10-12.

³⁷ Indeed, as noted by Brague, "cosmogony" points into a diachronic conception, contrary to "cosmography" that would correspond to a description of the world as a unit and therefore would be more associated with a synchronic perspective. These concepts are as well related but distinct from a third one - "cosmology" - that suggests a reflexive nature that intends to answer to ontological questions related to the world as we know it (e.g., origins of the Evil, the relation between humankind and the divine) (Brague 2015, 291-292).

³⁸ TT 263(7), temp. Rameses II (STG 224).

³⁹ About this fundamental notion for the Egyptian civilization see, most notably: Assmann 1999.

The creative mechanisms performed by the Demiurge creation (particularly his own) in the religious hymns of the New Kingdom are quite diverse and complex. Firstly, it shall be noted that it looks as if materiality (the support of the text) does not significantly influence the administration and distribution of the cosmogonic contexts concerning the creative procedures, nor does it necessarily determine the praised deity.⁴⁰ It seems that they tend to be extremely contextual, with a high degree of variation from text to text, both synchronically and diachronically. Hence, the establishment of a universal pattern is certainly not the simplest of tasks, and perhaps even not a desirable one.

However, it is possible to trace a textual distribution of terms - both the ones dealt in this paper and the ones that could not be included in it - among this *corpus*. The following table and graphic intend to sum the data in the present moment of my research:

	xpr (Ds =f)	Multi ple xpr/ xpr ra nb)	prj (m m w; m Nn w)	sTs sw (Ds =f; m Nn w)	xaj m Hb b.t	jrj (=f, sw Ds= f; D.t =f)	om A (s w; Ds =f; Ha w)	SA a=f sw	w t T s w	msj (s w; Ds =f)	jwtj ms.t w=f	ptH =tw	nbj (Ha w=f; sw Ds=f, D.t)	od (s w, Ds =f, Ha w)	H m w sw	E g g
TT 53(10), 3 (Thutmosi s III)	x					x										
Chicago E14053, 2- 3 (Thutmosi s III)										x						
TT 84(1), 1-2 (Thutmosi s III)	x															x
TT 84(8), 3-4 (Thutmosi s III)	x															
Copenha ge n AEIN 655, 7-9 (Thutmosi s III- Thutmosis IV)										x						

⁴⁰ Bickel 1998, 167.

Statue of Nendjuref, 4 (Thutmose IV?)	x														
Lyon H 1376, 1-2 (Amenhotep III)		x													
BM EA826, 3 (Amenhotep III)									x	x	x	x			
BM EA826, 8-9 (Amenhotep III)	x			x						x					
BM EA826, 12-13 (Amenhotep III)						x									
TT 57(6), 5-6 (Amenhotep III)	x				x										
TT 192(3), H (Amenhotep III/ Amenhotep IV)												x			
Short Hymn to Aten, 3-4 (Akhenaten)													x		
BM EA551, 3-5 (Tutankhamun)			x	x					x	x					
BM EA551, 18-19 (Tutankhamun)	x														
BM EA552, 1 (Tutankhamun)		x							x						

BM EA552, 2 (Tutankhamun)									X	X					
TT 49(3) (south), 3-4 (Ay?)							X			X					
TT 50(7/8), x+3-x+4 (Horemheb)	X	X				X	X							X	
Berlin 7316, 1-2 (18th dynasty, after Amarna)										X					
Berlin 7317, 1-6 (end of the 18th dynasty)	X														
Hymn of Tura 9-12 (end of the 18th dynasty/beginning of the 19th dynasty)	X	X				X	X							X	
BM EA10471,2 1, 11-16 (end of the 18th dynasty/beginning of the 19th dynasty)			X	X					X	X					
BM EA10471,2 1, 31-32 (end of the 18th dynasty/beginning of the 19th dynasty)	X														
TT 41(4), 6 (Horemheb-Seti I?)							X								

TT 41(6), 1-2 (Horemheb - Seti I?)								X						X			
Leiden T2 SR vel 2, 11-13 (beginning of the 19th dynasty)	X																
BM EA9901,1, 11-12 (beginning of the 19th dynasty)									X	X							
Turim 1517 = Cat. 50085, 1 (Seti I?)	X																
TT 106(3), 22-24 (Seti I-Rameses II)	X	X							X								
TT 106(4), 3 (Seti I - Rameses II=	X																
TT 106 (Seti I - Rameses II)	X	X															
Dublin Trinity College 4 = MS 1661, 1- 11 (Rameses II)	X																
Leiden I 350 recto, II.3 (Rameses II)													X				
Leiden I 350 recto, II.25-28 (Rameses II)		X					X							X	X	X	

Leiden I 350 recto, IV.9-11 (Rameses II)	x							x					x				x
TT 45(4), 1-7 (Rameses II)			x							x							
TT 157(8.1) (Rameses II)										x							
TT 157(2) (Rameses II)	x									x			x				
TT 157 (8.2), 3 (Rameses II)							x										
TT 26(3), 4 (Rameses II)								x		x							
TT 178(7), 1-6 (Rameses II)										x							
TT 387(1), 1-2 (Rameses II)										x							
TT 263(7) (Rameses II)								x		x			x	x			
TT 183(8), 1 (Rameses II)		x															
TT 23(3), 1-2 (Merenpta h)										x							
TT 23(3), 8 (Merenpta h)	x																
TT 23(3), 10 (Merenpta h)										x							

TT 23(15), 3 (Merenpta h)													X			
BM EA10470,2 0-21, 7 (19th dynasty)	X															
BM EA10470,2 0-21, 26-27 (19th dynasty)									X	X			X			
Berlin 7270 (B) (19th dynasty)	X															
Leiden I 344 verso, I.3-4 (19th dynasty)													X	X		
Leiden I 344 verso, III.4-5 (19th dynasty)	X								X					X		
Leiden I 344 verso, IV.7-8 (19th dynasty)													X			
TT 187(1), 1-2 (19th dynasty)									X							
TT 163.1, 1 (19th dynasty)	X															
TT 105, 1-3 (19th dynasty)									X							
TT 127(12), 4-5 (Ramessid e)									X							
TT 296(1), 1-2 (Ramessid e)	X								X							

TT 296(1), 3 (Ramessid e)	x																
TT 30(4), 1-2 (Ramessid e)	x																
TT 30(4), 5 (Ramessid e)									x								
TT 373(1.1), 1- 2 (Ramessid e)	x																
TT 373(1.2), 4-5 (Ramessid e)	x																
Gebel el- Silseleh Stelae, 2-3 (Seti I - Rameses III)							x										
BM EA10042 recto I = Harris 501, 8-9 (19th/20th dynasty)	x																
BM EA10042 recto III = Harris 501, 3-5 (19th/20th dynasty) (19th/20th dynasty)						x											
BM EA10042 recto III- IV = pHarris 501, III.10 (19th/20th dynasty)	x																

BM EA10042 recto III- IV = pHarris 501, IV.2 (19th/20th dynasty)	x									x					
TT 158(5.1), 3- 5 (Rameses III?)															
TT 158(5.2), x+9 (Rameses III?)	x														
TT 158(8.1), 1- 3 (Rameses III?)	x														
oGardiner 305, 4-5 (first half of the 20th dynasty)										x					
TT 65.1, 4 (Rameses IX)							x								
TT 68.1 (20th dynasty)	x														
TT 68.2 (20th dynasty)										x					
Chicago E7196, 7 (20th dynasty?)	x														

Table 1 - Self-Creation in the Religious Hymns of the New Kingdom: sources and respective vocabulary (chronologically)

The self-creation may be accounted independently or be framed within the broader cosmogonical picture where theogony, anthropogeny, or the creation of other beings (animals, plants, “everything”) is also mentioned. When the latter is the case, the Demiurge’s ontological anteriority, primordially, but also unknowability and transcendence are often stressed and emphasized. Not only was he the first being to come into existence - in some texts, he emerged even before his mother - he is the most important one. His features (aspect, name, figures) remain hidden and unknown to the others and thus, although proactive in the cosmic balance, he endures a rather transcendent being, especially in Ramesside times.

The agency of the Demiurge is a multi-folded one that conveys a very hyphenated reality where the borders between different and individual creative procedures are not always clear, and so overlapping and symbolical continuity are instrumental in approaching this issue.⁴¹ The Creator can simply come into existence by himself or inaugurate his own existence. Nevertheless, he is also said to have been shaped, built, cast, formed. We are told that he makes, creates, begets, gives birth, or merely produces himself. He can sculpture his limbs or originate the egg in which he would subsequently emerge. However, all this diversity harmonizes on one very profound level: he only owes himself for his own existence. His creative deeds demand no further subordinate or helper. On those grounds, he can truly be acknowledged as a legitimate self-sufficient entity. He himself is enough.

⁴¹ Bickel 1998, 165-166.

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Paper Eight

On the Egyptian diplomatic ties with the Aegean during the reign of Necho II (610 - 595 BC)

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Abstract

This paper approaches the cross-cultural contacts between Egypt and the Greek world during the 26th dynasty Egyptian “Saite” ruler Necho II (610 – 595 BC). Saite rulers relied on foreign mercenaries as the backbone of their military campaigns. As their imperial agenda flew, the military duties increased, turning Greek navy and heavy infantry into a strategic pharaonic matter. Therefore, it was mandatory to develop a good diplomatic relationship with the gateway for Greek mercenary manpower: the Aegean and Ionian cities. The nature of such diplomatic ties was mostly based on religious ties, celebrated via Egyptian offerings in Greek temples.

Polytheistic societies are familiar with the phenomenon of “translating” foreign gods and pantheons. Such translation of Greek gods into Egyptian equivalents and vice-versa depends on previous awareness of the other’s culture. The acceptance that a given god is the representative of a universal force, rather than a mere cultural element, promotes mutual tolerance and respect. Plus, it enables the temple to become a place to stage foreign policies as offerings of a victorious king acts as a tool for recruiting stimulus. What we may call “*interpretatio graeca*” or “*interpretatio aegyptica*” are the product of intercultural relations that can be analyzed under an anthropological perspective of its iconographic and linguistic elements. Archaeological and literary sources allow us to debate the dynamics of the Greek-Egyptian intercultural relations from a religious standpoint. The significant role played by Rhodes in the Greek-Egyptian contacts of state character may be reflected in the discovery of a series of faience inlays with the titulary of this pharaoh Necho II from the Sanctuary of Athena at Ialysos, which have been considered to decorated adorn a small shrine, a gift of royal either made for Necho II or commissioned explicitly by him.

Keywords: Herodotus; Greek mercenaries; *Aegyptiaca*; Saite Egypt; Rhodes

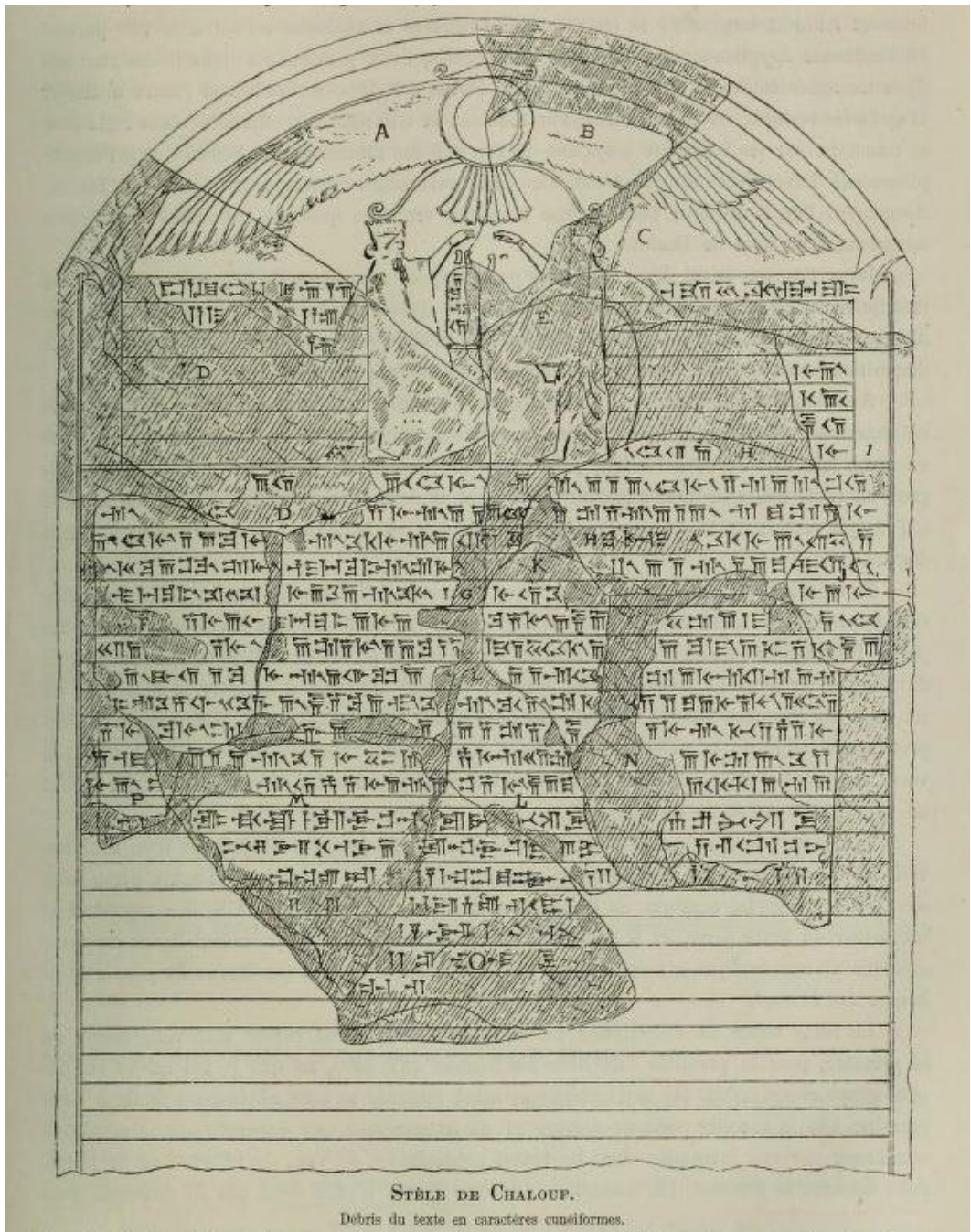
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On Pharaoh Necho II (*Wehem-ib-Ra Nekau*)

Necho II (610 – 595 BC) was son and heir of pharaoh Psamtik I (664 – 610 BC), the founder of the 26th dynasty, from Sais. Following the footsteps of his predecessor, Necho II pursued the objective of restoring Egypt to the status of imperial power in the region. However, if on the one hand, the usage of mercenary soldiers by Psamtik is very-well documented, thanks to Herodotus, Necho II's rule is poorly mentioned by Greek sources.

According to Herodotus, Necho II was the first Egyptian ruler to try the construction of a canal between the Nile and the Red Sea (Hdt. II, 158). Despite being told to quit the project by his counsellors, the canal was finished anyway by Darius I, the Great (550 – 486 BC).

The Achaemenid epigraphy from the 'Shaluf stele' (27th Dynasty) seems to confirm Herodotus' assertions on this topic, although it is not known whether or not the canal referenced is, in fact, the one that Herodotus suggests was built by Necho II during his reign.



The Shaluf Stele.

© Facsimile from Menant (1887, 145).

Here it follows the translation provided by Petrie (1905, 366).

[...] King Darius says: I am a Persian; setting out from Persia I conquered Egypt. I ordered to dig this canal from the river that is called the Nile and flows in Egypt, to the sea that begins in Persia. Therefore, when this canal had been dug as I had ordered, ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia, as I had intended [...].

Another reference on Necho II's reign is the disputable tale told by Herodotus, featuring the dispatching of Phoenician ships to complete the first periplus of the African continent after a three year long expedition (Hdt. IV, 42).

Despite the credibility of that tale, it undisputable that Herodotus's narratives relate Necho II with grand maritime ambitions (Lloyd 1977). Regardless of the veracity of that whole Phoenician enterprise, Necho II's reputation was that of an ambitious Egyptian king who hired foreign sailors for his pursuits.

Indeed, Herodotus recounts how Necho II became worried with the wars in the Levant (Fantalkin 2006). His campaigns in the Levant led Egypt to victory at Magdolos/Migdol and Cadytis (Hdt. II, 159). Testimonies of both expeditions are also provided by Jeremiah (46: 5).

Egyptian armies and navy were regularly composed by foreign mercenary forces. In fact, a fragmentary inscription of Necho II found in Sidon hints that its sphere of influence extended to the Phoenician coast (Kuhrt 1997, 643). On that subject, Spalinger (1978 20-21), claims that Necho II may have used Greek shipwrights, or even Greek sailors for his maritime pursuits, based on Herodotus (II,159) that cites landing-engines that were still visible at his time.

‘Religious Diplomacy’ in the South-Eastern Aegean

Regarding the great military achievements during Necho II’s Levantine expedition, Herodotus says:

“[...] He [Necho II] (...) met and defeated the Syrians at Magdolus, taking the great city of Cadytis after the battle. He sent to Brachidae of Miletus and dedicated there to Apollo the garments in which he won these victories. [...]” (II, 159).

Unfortunately, the Pan-Ionic and Pan Aeolic sanctuary of Brachidae, nearby Miletus was destroyed by the Persians in 494 BC. However, it is still possible to analyze the political implications of Necho II’s offering. It would be possible to understand Necho II’s offering to a Greek sanctuary as a form to show respect and gratitude for his foreign troops. However, behind such apparently altruistic act, there was a deeper set of interests playing a role (Kousoulis and Morenz 2007, 188).

Firstly, Apollon was the Greek equivalent of Horus, the pharaonic tutelary god. As Apollon-Horus are also warlike powers, that sanctuary was a wise choice to celebrate a military victory. Secondly, it was not a common Egyptian practice to perform offerings of armour and weaponry to appease the gods. That was precisely a Greek expression of religiosity. So, Necho II was deliberately addressing to Ionians and Aeolians when he made the offerings. Under the Greek perception of that offering, the pharaoh would have been recognized as a successful warlord (or even a “hero”). Therefore, for the Egyptian political agenda, such offering would have also worked as a propaganda instrument to assure more mercenary support in the future.

Archaeological evidence confirms that Egyptian artefacts are present across several sanctuaries in the Aegean (Skon-Jedele 1994) and Cyprus (Jacobson 1994). It is important to bear in mind that eastern Greek sanctuaries cumulated religious, economic and social functions. The same goes to the Dodecanese, where Rhodes, Kos and Samos are strong representatives of Egyptian objects in sanctuaries and funerary context (Kousoulis and Morenz 2007, 192). Once these sanctuaries were influenced by a more “oriental” form to deal with religion, economy and politics, it was highly attractive to Egyptian kings to use them as a platform for securing their agenda.

In fact, Egyptian religious objects also started to be copied by local artisans reflecting Greek assimilation to Egyptian religious elements. The result of that assimilation and reproduction of Egyptian votives by non-Egyptians is called “aegyptiaca”. Egyptian and Egyptianizing artefacts of religious and magical character: amulets, figurines scarabs and vases made of different materials - faience, steatite, bronze, etc. – were widely spread to Syria/ Palestine, Italy, Sardinia and Carthage in the Early Iron Age.

An impressive abundance of this material has been found in the Aegean. The first phase of diffusion is placed between the 11th and 8th century BC and is primarily associated with Cypro-Phoenician and Euboean trade activity, but the high concentration is dated to 8th - 6th centuries BC, roughly corresponding to the Saite Period, when direct contacts between Egypt and the Aegean was intensified with the recruitment of Ionian mercenaries by Psamtik I and the establishment of the Greek emporion at Naukratis (Webb 1978).

Aegyptiaca in the Aegean are mainly concentrated in South–East Greece, especially on coastal sanctuaries of female deities (at Samos and Rhodes), and secondarily in burial contexts. Those sanctuaries to female deities were strategically chosen accordingly to the *interpretatio aegyptica*. The Heraion of Samos was a proper choice since Hera was identified to Hathor, the symbolic “mother” of pharaohs. The sanctuaries of Athena at Ialysos, Kameiros and Lindos (all in Rhodes) are also related to the identification between the Greek goddess and Neith, the protective deity of Saite rulers.

In fact, the island of Rhodes hosts the greatest amount of aegyptiaca (Gates 1983,19-22; 41-43). Thus, the intense influx of Egyptian and Egyptianizing prestige and luxury artefacts. In that context, Necho II donated to the sanctuary of Athena-Neith at Ialysos an exquisite shrine decorated with faience inlays.

Faience Inlays from the Shrine of Necho II at Ialysos – on display at the KB´ Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Rhodes



© Photo by Ronaldo G. Gurgel Pereira (December 2016).

Direct cultural relations between Saite Egypt and the Greek world were intensified during the 7th and 6th centuries BC, as exemplified by the flourishing Greek trade activity in the Nile Delta, which culminated in the first Greek Emporion at Naukratis, the diplomatic relations between Saite kings and Greek cities mentioned in Herodotus histories, the recruitment of Ionian mercenaries by Psamtik I.

The general historical context of cultural interaction between Greeks and Egyptians in the 7th century BC indicates that the wide distribution and dedication of Aegyptiaca in Greek sanctuaries is mostly related with Greek traders, mercenaries or travellers, whereas the establishment of an imitative workshop in 7th century manufacturing objects of apotropaic and magical character is in line with the gradual contact of Greek population settled in or travelling to Egypt with Egyptian popular religious beliefs.

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Chapter II

Ancient Near and the Middle East

The Mesopotamian Civilization – An Overview

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The vast geographical area comprised in what is traditionally known as “Ancient Near and the Middle East” saw the rise of several cultural, political, social and linguistic identities, throughout time. From the middle of the 4th to the end of the 1st millennia BCE, Sumerians (in Lower Mesopotamia), Semites (in the Levantine Corridor and Upper Mesopotamia), Indo-Europeans (in Anatolia and the Iranian Plateau), amongst others, established themselves in this vast region, becoming main historical protagonists of Antiquity. The geographical characteristics of this area allowed for close contacts between all of them, which prompted the valuable transfer of knowledge processes that would imprint their mark in centuries to come. In this chapter, we will focus our attention on the Mesopotamian world, given its pivotal role in several developments, which actively contributed to these processes.

The land between the rivers – the importance of geography

The designation of the ancient civilization that developed in what is nowadays Iraq and part of Syria was attributed by ancient Greeks - Mesopotamia, the “land between the rivers”³. They seem to have identified the importance of the rivers as geographical elements that gave cohesion to multiple political, cultural, social and linguistic identities which were present in the territory, for millennia⁴. This external designation that is still in use today

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³ Fenollós 2012: 32.

⁴ Throughout time, the populations that inhabited Mesopotamia used several forms to identify themselves, whether referring to familiar ties and/or social, cultural and political affinities. About this topic, vd. the different contributions in Szchuman 2009, namely the one by Anne Porter, 2009:

was, therefore, a geographical one. Hence, as the ancient Greeks did, we must start by looking into the geographic characteristics of this area to understand its civilizational developments better.

First, and naturally, the Tigris and Euphrates, both of which emerge in the Anatolian Mountains, at over 2000 metres altitude. Together with their tributaries⁵, they constitute a vital fluvial system for the fertility of the land, at all levels, from Upper to Lower Mesopotamia⁶. The two main rivers, with their long⁷ and navigable courses, also allowed in-depth communication between regions. In the south, where the two eventually merged⁸, an extremely fertile alluvial plain was formed, which in time saw the rise of the first cities and the invention of the first known writing system.

On the other hand, the climatic changes observed from 10.000 BCE onwards, after the last glaciation, allowed the softening of temperatures and an increase of rainfall and the rivers' caudal. The combination of these features allowed for the existence of an abundant autochthone fauna and flora, and deep irrigation of the soils, which thus prompted not only hunter-gathering activities but also the development of agricultural and cattle breeding practices, very early in time⁹.

Alongside, the permeability of Mesopotamia natural borders contributed to a profound dynamism in the relations with direct and indirect regions. Though one can find mountain ranges and deserts¹⁰ enclosing the land between the rivers, the fact is that these geographical accidents were continuously transposed, whether through fluvial roots or by terrestrial ones. Thus, the circulation of people, goods, and ideas was facilitated not only between Mesopotamia and direct neighbouring regions (such as Anatolia, the Iranian Plateau, and the Levantine Corridor) but also between these and more distant areas, such as the ones of Central Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the contact with regions encompassed by the Arabian-Persian Gulf and even with the Indus Valley was

201-225. One also finds the use of expressions that stands for "country", such as **kalam** and *mātu*, respectively in Sumerian and Akkadian. Fenollós 2012: 32-33; Sanmartín & Serrano 1998: 11.

⁵ The main tributaries are the Diyala and the Upper and Lower Zab for the Tigris, and the Khabur and Balikh for the Euphrates.

⁶ Upper and Lower Mesopotamia, the northern and southern areas, probably had their border in Antiquity in the region of ancient Babylon, where the Tigris and Euphrates come closer. Upper Mesopotamia thus encompasses the Upper and Middle Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries, as well as the plateaus near the Taurus and the Zagros mountains. Lower Mesopotamia, in turn, encompasses the alluvial plain, displaying higher levels of fertility, when compared to the northern area. About the characterization of both regions vd. Postgate 1992 and Pollock 1999.

⁷ Circa 2302 km for the Tigris, and 2720 km for the Euphrates

⁸ *Shaar al-Arab* is the name of the river formed by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates, in what is nowadays the city of al-Qurnah, which is circa 74 km northwest of Basra. From then on, this new fluvial course runs circa 200 km until it flows into the Arabian-Persian Gulf.

⁹ About the neolithization processes in the Near and Middle East, vd., for instance, Cauvin (2000).

¹⁰ The mountains of Taurus and of the Zagros delimitate Mesopotamia in the north and east, respectively, while in the west and southwest there are the Siro and Arabian deserts.

possible through coastal navigation, which is attested at least since the 5th millennium BCE¹¹.

Though extremely rich, when referring to natural or domesticated fauna and flora, Mesopotamia territory lacked precious stones and metals, as well as resistant woods, which encouraged trade with the abovementioned areas. The course of the main rivers and their tributaries, which allowed communications in both axes North-South and East-West, combined with the permeability of its natural borders, allowed for it to become a commercial platform, again, very early in time¹².

Hence, it comes as no surprise that these ecological and geographical characteristics appealed to the fixation of human groups and the development of their settlements throughout the territory.

The development of human settlements- from small villages to complex urbes

During the transition from the 9th to the 8th millennia BCE, several animals and plants were already domesticated and controlled by human groups present in Mesopotamia. The archaeological data shows that, throughout the 7th millennium BCE, sedentary lifestyle started to become predominant, with the edification of small villages, which carried along labour and social divisions, the development of pottery work, and the establishment of commercial routes¹³.

Later, in the 6th millennium BCE, Mesopotamia saw the arrival of populations from the Zagros and the Taurus mountains, who established themselves along the riverbanks, in larger communities, thus intensifying the agricultural work and trade¹⁴. The archaeological studies developed in the last decades allowed to identify several Mesopotamian material cultures throughout the 6th until the 4th millennia BCE, such as the Hallaf, the 'Ubaid and the Uruk ones¹⁵. It is important to look closer to these last two, given its diffusion processes, intrinsically linked with the geographical aspects discussed above.

The 'Ubaid material culture originally developed in the alluvial plain, between c. 5800 and 42000 BCE. The archaeological work led in some southern sites, such as Eridu (modern Tell Abu Shahrain) and Tell el-'Oueili, identified complex features, such as the evident use of a religious/cultic architecture; a spatial configuration subordinated to the social

¹¹ Pollock 1991: 43. Sanmartín & Serrano (1998:127) also allude to a terrestrial route that connected the Indus Valley region with Lower Mesopotamia, through the oriental coast of the Arabian-Persian Gulf.

¹² About these commercial contacts vd. Hudson 2012.

¹³ Sanmartín & Serrano 1998: 118.

¹⁴ Bottéro 1987: 98-99.

¹⁵ About the several material cultures in Mesopotamia vd., for instance, the different contributes in Potts *et al.* 2003, Bolger & Maguire 2010, and Steadman & Ross 2010.

hierarchization (even though the social variations were, still, on a small scale); a standardized plan of the habitation structures (with a tripartite shape)¹⁶; and a distinctive ceramic set, where one can find the famous “lizard-head” figurines¹⁷.

One of its most interesting features, however, has to do with the diffusion processes it went through. Human agglomerates with ‘Ubaid characteristics are identified in a broad extension of *circa* 1800 km, encompassing territories not only in Upper Mesopotamia but also in the northern areas of modern Syria, Anatolian hinterland, the Arabian Peninsula and the southwest of modern Iran. As Stein and Özbal¹⁸ stressed, this diffusion was marked by gradual migratory movements, during the 5th millennium BCE, which gave rise to multiple transference processes between the protagonist of the ‘Ubaid material culture and the populations already fixed in the areas they arrived to. However, it should be mentioned that the spatial dimension and social divisions of Upper Mesopotamian communities were not significantly different from the southern ‘Ubaid ones, which shows that, throughout this long period, the diverse Mesopotamian populations made similar use of the natural resources of the territory¹⁹.

Notwithstanding, the ‘Ubaid movement implies a profound economic development in the land between the rivers, which undoubtedly was accompanied by demographic and commercial growth. These alterations were facilitated and even driven by the geographical characteristics already mentioned.

When one observes the 4th millennium BCE archaeological data, the situation changes, and cleavage between Upper and Southern Mesopotamia is easily identified. In the first half of this millennium, the communities along the banks of the Khabur and Upper Tigris and the Euphrates continued to develop at a rapid pace, which was not accompanied, for instance, by the neighbouring Levantine region. In fact, while Upper Mesopotamian settlements were developing certain urbanistic traits, “the Levante drops out of the picture at this time as a result of a still not well-understood process of collapse that marks a clear hiatus in indigenous processes of social evolution in that area”²⁰. However, from the third quarter of the 4th millennium BCE on, these early northern centres also started to decline. Instead, multiple disperse smaller agglomerates, where the agricultural work was continued alongside transhumance practices, became more predominant²¹.

¹⁶ Stein & Özbal 2006: 359.

¹⁷ About these figurines vd. McAdam 2003.

¹⁸ Stein & Özbal 2006: 360-361. The authors underline how the ‘Ubaid artifacts found in the sites of this wide region were often modified/adapted or even abandoned, after a given period of use, which manifests gradual diffusion processes, rather than a colonization one.

¹⁹ Algaze 2005:1-2.

²⁰ Algaze 2005: 2.

²¹ Algaze 2005: 2-3.

On its side, during the same millennium, Lower Mesopotamia went through severe changes, with a new material culture, the Uruk one, displaying high levels of originality and complexity, when compared to previous and coeval material cultures of the Ancient Near and the Middle East²². Their populations took advantage of earlier patterns of production and commercial trade, as well as the exceptional natural resources and geographic characteristics of the alluvial plain, which lead them to take a leap, at all levels²³. For instance, it was during this period that irrigation channels were first constructed, thus improving the agricultural activities and, therefore, the productivity of the land.

From *circa* 3500 BCE onwards, a consolidated surplus economy within southern agglomerates led to the development of urbanism. Smaller communities were, thus, merged into great urban centres, which displayed an extraordinary socio-economic organization, becoming not only self-sufficient but also politically autonomous. Large defensive walls were constructed to protect these *urbes* from attacks, such as the raids of nomadic populations from the Zagros mountains²⁴.

During the same period, and similarly, with what had happened with the 'Ubaid populations, a diffusion process began. Through the rivers, the protagonists of the Uruk material culture started to spread, erecting enclaves (in some cases *ex nihilo*, in others by penetrating the already preexisting agglomerates they came across with) throughout a large area of the Near and Middle East. But, differently from the gradual diffusion processes of 'Ubaid, the Uruk one seemed more commercial wise driven, with the enclaves being erected strategically near essential trade routes. Moreover, the archaeological data displays a rather abrupt introduction of their material culture and *modus vivendi* in the regions they arrived to²⁵. The communication between these enclaves and the original southern Mesopotamian *urbes* was continuously maintained, which gave rise to intense dynamic commercial, technological and cultural fluxes, in both ways²⁶. With these advances, towards the end of the 4th millennium BCE, southern *urbes* became increasable more complex, which naturally led to the consolidation of centralised political powers in each one, to the

²² Stein & Özbal 2006: 356–370.

²³ About the relation between the geographic and ecological conditions of the alluvial plain with its early developments vd. Algaze 2008.

²⁴ Algaze 2005: 7-11.

²⁵ Stein & Özbal (2006: 336-368) designate these new enclaves as colonies, stressing how they “have the full repertoire of Uruk ceramics. These same sites also have distinctive South Mesopotamian Uruk domestic or public/ritual architecture (...). Culturally specific aspects of technological style such as brick dimensions and bricklaying patterns exactly match the practices in southern homeland. A third distinctive feature of the Uruk colonies is the presence of the full range of South Mesopotamian administrative technology such as cylinder seals, bullae, tokens, and clay tablets with numerical inscriptions used to monitor the circulation of goods”.

²⁶ In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in a first phase, the commercial influx to southern Mesopotamia was mainly made of finished goods, namely the metal ones. Yet, rapidly the commercial agents brought to the south the technologies that allowed to work the raw materials, thus diminishing the acquisition costs. Trade, therefore, quickly evolved to a different phase. Algaze 2005: 13.

emergence of new metiers and of new elite groups, and to the transformation of the social organization, that became more intricated and hierarchized.

Simultaneously, and to answer the imperative need to register the vast amount of economic data, a true revolution of the human spirit²⁷ took place: the invention of the first known writing system, *circa* 3200 BCE. From pictograms that allowed to record goods, workers, payments, costs with infrastructures, and so on²⁸, signs that allowed to represent objects, sounds and ideas were quickly developed²⁹. From the 3rd millennium BCE onwards, the cuneiform writing, as it became known given the shape of its signs, allowed the production of an extremely rich literary corpus, and the development of a new highly specialized and influential profession, the scribal one³⁰.

The consolidated development of urbanism and the invention of writing in Lower Mesopotamia thus constituted a turning point in the history of the land between the rivers. Northern populations soon absorbed these innovations, and new *urbes* appeared alongside the Upper riverbanks. Likewise, the cuneiform writing system of the south was adopted and adapted by northern human groups. From Mesopotamia, it was diffused throughout the Ancient Near and the Middle East in centuries to come³¹. On the other hand, this early spread and prolific use of the writing system also helped scholars to identify the linguistic and cultural matrixes present in Mesopotamia, at this time.

A hybrid civilization: the encounter between Semitic and Sumerian matrixes

From the second half of the 4th millennium BCE onwards, two main matrixes can be identified in the Mesopotamian territory, firstly through a material, architectonic and iconographic data, and secondly through written documentation: the Semitic and the Sumerian ones³². Their own agency alongside the close interactions between them both would leave an indelible mark in history to come.

In what concerns the origins of the Semitic matrix, linguistic studies allow to point out to the Arabian Peninsula, given that archaic Semitic languages display close parallelisms with

²⁷ Bottéro 2004: 15

²⁸ Algaze 2005: 22-23.

²⁹ About the development of writing vd. Bottéro 1987: 132-165. On the relation between art and writing vd. Schmandt-Besserat 2007.

³⁰ The scribes learned their métier in schools, the **edduba**, following complex *curricula*. About this topic vd. George 2005.

³¹ The cuneiform writing system invented in Mesopotamia was used, over the centuries, by different societies, from Elam, to ancient Persia, from Hatti to Mittani, and also Ugarit (Finkel & Taylor 2015: 8).

³² The linguistic identities of preexistent human groups, which were somehow absorbed by Semites and Sumerians, are very difficult to determined, given that “seule une poignée de vocables, et en particulier des toponymes irréductibles au sumérien et au sémitique” survived. Bottéro & Kramer 1989: 28-29. Notwithstanding, the archaeological studies focused on previous material cultures that are being conducted in the last decades, allows to draw a new picture on the activities, movements and even religious and cultural aspects of these populations.

ancient Egyptian, Berber and some other idioms that preceded the Ethiopian. Hence, its original territory should have been one close to the regions where these languages evolved³³.

The Arabian Peninsula went through an intense desertification process, during the 6th millennium BC, which forced their populations to migrate in search of better living conditions. Between the 5th and the 4th millennia BCE, as Bottéro suggested³⁴, these human groups, predominantly nomadic, gradually started to move north, towards the Levantine Corridor, and, from there, they headed to Upper Mesopotamia, following the Euphrates course. The natural conditions of this northern area contributed to the fixation of these Semitic groups, though their preexisting nomadic lifestyle was not wholly abandoned. As we have seen, during the second half of the 4th millennium BCE, there were multiple communities in Upper Mesopotamia which combined agricultural with transhumance activities.

As for the Sumerian matrix, its autochthonous or foreign Mesopotamian origins constitutes a rather intricate question that divides scholars since the decipherment of the Sumerian language, in the late 19th century. Given that Sumerian is an isolated language, linguistic studies cannot help as they did in the Semitic case. Hence, the “Sumerian problem”, as it was dubbed by Henry Frankfort (1932), continues to be analyzed and discussed from different perspectives, whether philological, archaeological or anthropological ones, to cite just a few³⁵.

Yet, independently of their point of origin, the protagonists of the above-mentioned developments in Lower Mesopotamia are traditionally designated as Sumerians, according to “Sumer”, the designation of this region as it appears in 3rd millennium BCE written sources. In a way or another, the cultural and linguistic identity so-called Sumerian was intrinsically linked with the final phase of the Uruk material culture, whose populations, as we have seen, headed north, to establish their enclaves with commercial purposes.

There, they would find Semitic groups, “newcomers” to Mesopotamia, with their own identity and idiosyncrasies. In the transition from the 4th to the 3rd millennia BCE, these northern populations adopted urbanism, which they clearly imported from the south. It is important to note, however, that the northern Semitic *urbes* displayed, from the start, their own originality and features, adapted to their inhabitants, namely their social

³³ Bottéro 1998: 25.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ About a synthesis on the “Sumerian problem” vd. Ziskind 1972 and Sołtysiak 2006.

dimorphism³⁶. Likewise, and as already mentioned, soon they would also adopt cuneiform, which they used to record their language.

Simultaneously, the economic growth of Lower Mesopotamian *urbes* led to an increase of the need of workforce, which impelled workers from the northern area to move south. Moreover, the nomadic lifestyle of the Semites was naturally prone to commercial activities. So, a fruitful economic relation, based firstly in this commercial and labour complementarity was developed between the two.

It is thus with the movements of these human groups that both Semitic and Sumerian matrixes came across one another, and together, during centuries, embarked in a journey marked by profound interactions that gave rise to a hybrid civilizational product. Their mythologies, ritual traditions, cosmovision, *modus vivendi*, social practices, legal regulations and lexicon were shared, mixed, combined and adapted in such a close way that it becomes almost impossible to truly isolate what is *just* Semitic or *solely* Sumerian³⁷. Thus, for the very beginning, at its core, Mesopotamian civilization was the product of the encounter between these two matrixes.

In time, the Semitic populations became predominant in the land between the rivers, given that systematic migratory waves from West continued to arrive at this territory. On the contrary, the so-called Sumerian people constituted a relatively closed group, which cut ties with their origins (whatever they might have been). Without fresh blood, as Bottéro put it, they dissolved within the Semites, but their memory endured, as texts written in Sumerian continued to be copied, edited and analyzed for centuries to come³⁸.

The intricate political history – the clash between city-states, kingdoms and empires

The expansion of urbanism in Upper and Lower Mesopotamia, during the 3rd millennium BCE, gave rise to the formation of true city-states. The economic abundancy within the land between the rivers granted independence to each *urbs*, though the necessity to control commercial routes and to establish contacts with foreign territories led to some tensions. In fact, throughout most of this millennium, it can be identified as a highly competitive climate, especially between the southern cities, which gave rise to a latent state of war. The main goal of these conflicts, however, was not of political unification, but instead to gain economic hegemony³⁹. An urban logic, where each city was political autonomous was thus the paradigm.

³⁶ Mari, the well-known city of Middle Euphrates is a good example of these adaptations. It was erected *ex-nihilo* in *circa* 2900 BCE, by Semitic populations. About the evolution of this *urbs*, during the 3rd millennium BCE, vd. Margueron 2004.

³⁷ Bottéro & Kramer 1989: 33.

³⁸ Bottéro 1998: 28-30.

³⁹ Bottéro & Kramer 1989: 34.

This situation changed in the 24th century BCE when the armies of the Semitic ruler known as Sargon of Akkad faced the forces of Lugalzagezi, the ruler of the city of Umma. They both seem to have had the same main goal, to unify the Mesopotamian territory for the first time in history. The Umma ruler had already succeeded in controlling some powerful alluvial cities, such as Lagaš and Uruk⁴⁰. As for Sargon, though his figure is still shrouded in mystery⁴¹, he seemed to have become preeminent in the city of Kiš, and from there, he started to spread his power, controlling the area between Upper and Lower Mesopotamia.

The military encounter was won by Sargon, who thus instituted a new era with his dynasty and new capital, Akkad, forever changing the political and military horizons of future Mesopotamians rulers. From then on, every single one tried to repeat the unification of Upper and Lower Mesopotamia (and even aimed to conquer lands beyond), to become the *šarrum*⁴².

The Akkadian rulers, however, had to deal with internal tensions and external menaces, which made the maintenance of the new empire quite a challenge. The independent spirit of ancient city-states, whose economic power granted them political autonomy, was soon felt, with several rebellions taking place. Simultaneously, a new wave of Semitic

⁴⁰ A royal inscription of this sovereign attests the goal of unifying the land between the rivers, namely between lines 44-57: “and all the lands at his feet / he had placed, / and from East / to West / he had made them subject to him, / then, / from the sea, / the lower one, / along the Tigris / and the Euphrates / to the sea / the upper one, / their roads / he put in proper order for him.”
CDLI p431232 https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P431232 [accessed September 2020].

⁴¹ Modern academia firstly came across Sargon of Akkad in 1870, when Henri Rawlison published the translation of a tale about his origins, known as *The Legend of Sargon*, which he had found three years before, while excavating the famous library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (r. 669- c. 631 BCE). Given the mythical characteristics of this composition, Sargon was first thought to be a legendary figure. Later discoveries of material, iconographic and written records allowed, however, to attest his historical existence. Yet, most of the Mesopotamian sources that refer to Sargon are posterior to his reign being, therefore, prone to legendary inclusions. The fact that Akkad, his capital city, was not yet identified prevents more details on this paradigmatic Mesopotamian royal figure. Nevertheless, there are several inscriptions dated to the Akkadian period that shed some light into his deeds.

About the *Legend of Sargon* and other written documentation vd., for instance, Lewis 1980, Cooper & Heimpel 1983, and Westenholz 1997. About the Akkadian empire vd. Foster 2015.

⁴² Until then, three different royal titles appeared in written documentation, **en**, **lu.gal** or **ensi**, which attest not only the political independency of the city-states but also the specific traditions of each *urbs*. After the Akkadian unification, when Sargon adopted the title *šarrum* to better suit his imperial politics, these terms were used with different symbolic meanings, as Michalowski (2008: 33) stressed: “The Sumerian terms en, lugal and énsi are seen by some to have very different symbolic histories and function; in fact, they are just different local words for “sovereign”, the first one originally used in the city of Uruk, second in Ur, and the third in the city-state of Lagash. These quasi-synonyms were remodeled within the context of centralized states as part of new political and symbolic languages. Thus, in the Ur III kingdom, around 2100 BC, there was only one lugal in the world, and that was the king of Ur. In poetic language he combined both the status of en and of lugal, that is, he was characterized by “sovereignty of Ur and kingship of Uruk”, and all his governors were énsi, as were all foreign rulers. Like all inventions, this one played with tradition, but it has to be understood not in evolutionary perspective, but within the contexts of a new language of empire.”

populations, the Amorites, arrived north, while Zagros groups, such as the Gutians, attacked the territory. Eventually, Akkad collapse and after a short period of fragmentation, a new unification was achieved by the monarchs of the Third Dynasty of Ur (*circa* 2112-2004 BCE)⁴³.

The exceptional geographical and ecological characteristics that provided economic abundance and impelled dynamic contacts were likewise a factor of disruption. Each city had access to the natural resources needed to become rich and powerful and thus was capable to eventually defy the ruling dynasty of a given period. On the other hand, this richness attracted foreign populations, who took advantage of the permeability of the natural borders to systematically penetrate in Mesopotamia, bringing instability to the unified and centralized power. Hence, these factors would actively contribute to the intricate political history of the land between the rivers. As every ruler hoped to become the next *šarrum*, elevating his city to the capital status of a strong, unified state⁴⁴, for the next two millennia Mesopotamia saw the rise and fall of several kingdoms and empires. These Mesopotamian powers not only digladiated with each other but also had to deal with the political and military aspirations of different Ancient Near and Middle Eastern potencies. Thus, until the conquest of Cyrus, the Great, in 539 BCE, and the following integration in the Achaemenid empire, Mesopotamia was marked by multiple inner and external political tensions, battles and alliances⁴⁵.

Yet, during this long time, Mesopotamia was also enriched by the development of particular internal identities, such as the Babylonian and the Assyrian ones, as well as the contributes of other external players, such as the Hittites, the Hurrians, the Elamites, the Siro-Palestinians and the Egyptians ones. As soldiers, merchants, artisans, sages, and others passed and/or fixated in the territory, their *modus vivendi*, languages, cultural, social and religious traditions were brought to the land between the rivers, increasing the dynamism of this civilization. Each particular period thus constitutes a fertile area to analyze not only political and military clashes but also multiple interactions, that changed the ancient Mediterranean world⁴⁶.

⁴³ About the fall of the Akkadian dynasty and the subsequent Ur III unification vd. Liverani 2014: 133-170.

⁴⁴ The royal title “King of Sumer an Akkad”, which was first used by the Akkadian monarchs, and which exuded the goal of unification, was systematically used, throughout time.

⁴⁵ For a summary of the Mesopotamian and other Ancient Near and Middle Eastern political powers vd., for instance, Kuhrt 1995 and Liverani 2014.

⁴⁶ For an overview on the contributions of ancient Mesopotamia (and ancient Egypt) to the development of the Mediterranean civilization vd., for instance, Lopes & Almeida (2017).

The advent of Archaeology – From the oblivion to the rediscovery of Mesopotamia civilization

After the capture of Babylon by the Persians and the loss of its political independence (ancient Mesopotamia was integrated into the Achaemenid empire as one of its provinces), the land between the rivers was subjected to a slow process of decay. The ancient cities that had been the centre of an intense cultural and religious life – Uruk, Ur, Akkad, Nineveh, Babylon – began to collapse and were soon forgotten. Their architecture did not help. Built almost entirely in clay bricks (sun-dried or baked), the buildings that made up the architectural matrix of these cities collapsed, giving rise to the formation of extensive artificial hills, which are known today by the Arabic word *tell* or the Turkish word *tepe*. Mesopotamia succumbed to a long oblivion that would last for centuries.

It was only during the 19th century that it was resurrected, due to the work of enthusiastic explorers and archaeologists, as well as ambitious linguists. The first traces of this ancient civilization to come to light were dug up by the explorer Paul Émile Botta. The French consul in Mosul with no experience in archaeological excavations, he first decided to investigate the mounds of Nebi Yunus and Kuyunjik, in Nineveh. Villagers had told him about the inscribed bricks and artefacts unearthed in those places. But the diggings prove to be below his expectations⁴⁷. So, he moved into a new location – Khorsabad. And the art of the ancient Assyrian empire was soon revealed. Amongst walls covered in luxuriant bas-reliefs, portraying strange figures and animals, were statues of huge winged bulls never seen before and incomparable to other known artistic canons, such as the Greek or the Egyptian. At the time, Botta believed he had found the ancient city of Nineveh, but in truth, he was excavating the capital of Assyrian monarch Sargon II, built at the end of the 8th century BCE, and called Dūr-šarrukīn (that is, “the fortress of Sargon”).

These findings caused a stir in Paris and Europe, driving to a real treasure hunt amongst the leading European powers of the time. Soon after the first treasures were exhumed, in 1842, they were exported to Paris, where the first exhibition of Assyrian antiquities was to be inaugurated, at the Louvre Museum, in 1847. In the race for Mesopotamian relics, England did not want to be left behind. Hence, through its diplomat, Henry Layard started excavations in the mound of Nimrud, in 1845, and four years later in Nineveh⁴⁸. As had happened before, the slabs and sculptures unearthed were transferred to Europe and, this time, housed at the British Museum. The excavation and the process of transfer of antiquities were closely followed by the British press, and Layard soon became a national hero. Mesopotamia had come out of the oblivion to take the limelight.

⁴⁷ The fact is that Botta did not dig very deep, concentrating on the highest and most sterile levels (Fagan 2007: 100).

⁴⁸ About the excavations of Layard, vd. Larsen 1994.

The following decades were characterized by the multiplication of excavations, both in the north and in the south of the territory of ancient Mesopotamia. Although initially, the south did not bequeath great treasures (essentially, explorers looked for the most exuberant artistic testimonies, and did not pay much attention to small artefacts or inscribed tablets), several teams worked there – Henry Rawlinson, William Loftus, John George Taylor, and Ernest de Sarzec excavated at Borsippa, Warka/Uruk, Larsa, Ur, and Telloh/Girsu⁴⁹. But the real results came mainly through German archaeology, which, for the first time, applied scientific methods in excavations carried out in Mesopotamian soil. In this context, the work of Walter Andrae in Assur and of Robert Koldewey in Babylon stand out. It goes without saying that the physical rediscovery of this civilization was accompanied by the linguistic studies that led to the deciphering of cuneiform, an aspect which we will discuss in another chapter⁵⁰.

Many of these excavations would be interrupted with the advent of the First World War, a conflict that would forever change the geopolitical map of the Near and Middle East, with the fall of the Ottoman empire. In the post-war years, excavations continued, and some of the most important discoveries and studies of ancient Mesopotamia took place. Examples of these are the stratigraphy of Uruk (a site excavated from 1928 onwards by a German team) or the discovery of the royal tombs of Ur (excavated by Leonard Wooley from 1922 to 1932).

In recent times, the heritage of Mesopotamia suffered several attacks that, unfortunately, have resulted in irrecoverable damages. The Iraq War and more recently the destruction left by the imposition of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. This contemporary context draws our attention to the urgent necessity of implementing political and social measures able to defend this unique legacy. Mesopotamia is not the antiquity of *the other*, but *our* antiquity, the antiquity of all of us; it represents the place (alongside Egypt) where western urban roots were born, where the human need for eternalization through writing was first felt, where the astrological vision and time counting emerged⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Matthews 2003: 8 and 10.

⁵⁰ Vd. chapter IV of this book.

⁵¹ Interestingly, modern division of time into 60 minutes derives from the Mesopotamian sexagesimal counting system (Finkel and Taylor 2015: 93).

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Section 1. Ancient Near and Middle Eastern Studies

The Divine Feminine in Mesopotamia: the rosette/star and the reed bundle symbols in early Diyala's glyptic (c. 3100-2600 BC)

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Abstract: The Oriental Institute of Chicago's archaeological expeditions in the Diyala region, during the 1930's, brought to light several sites whose origins date back as far as the end of the 4th millennium BC. The material culture recovered there allows identifying initial aspects of the Mesopotamian civilisation, namely early characteristics of its religious system. Particularly thought-provocative is the discussion about the roles, attributes, and functions of Mesopotamian goddesses, for a period that lacks substantial written sources. Hence, this paper deals with this subject matter, by analysing the iconographic contents of cylinder seals, found in the Diyala sites' cultic structures, and dated to the end of the 4th millennium BC and the Early Dynastic I and II periods (2900-2600 BC).

By addressing the relation between other iconographic elements with the rosette/star and the reed-bundle, two symbols whose connection with Inanna/Ištar is well attested for coetaneous epochs, we hope to contribute to the discussion about the conceptualisation of this goddess, in particular, and the Mesopotamian Divine Feminine, in general.

Keywords: Archaeology; History of Religions; Jemdet Nasr style; cylinder seals; Inanna/Ištar

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1. Introduction

The Mesopotamian religious system was composed of a multiplicity of deities, whose specific roles, attributes, and functions are still being scrutinised and under debate. This is particularly evident in what concerns the Mesopotamian goddesses, given “the layers of cultural ‘filters’ through which we approach the problem”³.

The disproportion of Mesopotamian material, iconographic and textual sources available represents a difficulty, given that particular periods lack evidence (such as the earlier ones) and historical contexts have a much richer *ensemble* of data (like the ones from the 1st millennium BC). Moreover, in what concerns religious expressions, the “official spheres” produced most sources available⁴, thus expressing discourses that might not have represented the personal religious feelings and experiences of the Mesopotamian *homo religious*⁵.

Furthermore, and probably due to the preeminence of mythic textual records, where deities were strongly depicted with humanly traits and behaviours, there was a historiographical tendency to consider that Mesopotamians envisioned their gods and goddesses, firstly and mainly, as having an anthropomorphic shape⁶. Studies from the last decades, however, question this postulate. Barbara Nevling Porter, for instance, evokes several literary, material, and iconographic examples, where Mesopotamian deities seem to display non-anthropomorphic forms⁷. Also, Tallay Ornan identified a strong Mesopotamian tendency for restraint (an even, rejection) to use the human form when depicting deities, mainly from the 2nd millennium BC onwards⁸. These authors, thus, alert to the danger of

³ Westenholz 1998, 63. In the following pages, the author summarizes the main analytical distortions that can arise from the use of religious, socio-political, cultural, contextual and gender filters by a modern observer who investigates Ancient Near Eastern goddesses (63-65).

⁴ By “official spheres”, we are referring to the mythical elaborations and cultic practices emanated from the political and religious powers (the ruler and the priestly groups), which, therefore, were filtered and somehow institutionalized. It must be recalled that the religiosity of a given community can also be familiar or personal and that these different levels can differ or overlap regarding the understanding a particular aspect of the religious phenomena.

⁵ This problem was addressed by Leo Oppenheim in the 1960’s. In a subchapter of his *magnum opus* (provocatively entitled “Why a ‘Mesopotamian Religion’ should not be written”) the author critically analyzed the methodological and theoretical constrictions on studying the Mesopotamian religious system, in two intertwined orders of arguments: the nature of the sources available and the modern views on them (Oppenheim 1977, 172-181).

⁶ See, for instance, Jacobsen 1976 or Bottéro 1998.

⁷ Porter 2009, 4-6. Regarding literary compositions, particularly the hymnic tradition, Porter recalls how Nanna/Sîn “is described as being the moon itself, rising, setting, and giving off light to the earth”. Additionally, she refers an Assyrian ritual text that alludes to “the procedure for a ritual in which the king and a priest present food offerings to gods that appear to have been represented by statues in anthropomorphic form, to some of the same gods in the form of crowns, stars, and other material objects, and also to gods identified, for example, as a lion, light, various city gates, temple doors, and the lock of those doors, in most cases with the DINGIR sign identifying a god written before their names”(5).

⁸ Ornan 2005, 1-2. Interestingly, the author identified that divine anthropomorphism was maintained in literary compositions. Given that iconographic constructions can be coetaneous of textual creations, but can precede them as well, Ornan advocates the imperative need for a more profound analysis of divine images and symbols (11).

underestimating the complexity of divine conception elaborated by the Mesopotamians, if anthropomorphism is mainly considerate.

Plus, given that the religious discourse (whether material, iconographic or textual) is profoundly metaphorical/symbolical, it must be reminded that the use of a given form to depict divine beings might display information about features that were particularly chosen to be highlighted. Hence, only the combined analysis of anthropomorphic, celestial, zoomorphic, vegetal, material objects, and even other forms that are yet to be disclosed, can shed some light on the full range of roles, attributes and functions ascribed to Mesopotamians gods and goddesses. In order to achieve it, it is necessary to approach the subject matter in a multi and interdisciplinary perspective, where History and Archaeology, amongst other scientific disciplines, join forces towards a better understanding of this aspect of the religious phenomena.

With all this in mind and following the work we have been developing together in the last few years⁹, in this paper, we chose to concentrate our analysis on two symbols, the rosette/stand the reed-bundle, that evoke the goddess Inanna/Ištar.

⁹ The MA dissertation in Archaeology (Gonçalves 2019) led and supervised by the authors, respectively, is focused on a multi and interdisciplinary approach to the representations of the Mesopotamian Divine Feminine, in the Diyala glyptic material.

The focus will be on the cylinder seals identified during the 1930's archaeological expeditions led by teams of the Oriental Institute of Chicago¹⁰, in Khafajah (ancient Tutub)¹¹ and Tell Agrab¹².

The choice for the cylinder seals as the archaeological object to be examined justifies itself given their multiple roles and transversal use throughout the Ancient Near Eastern contexts¹³. The development of these objects, coetaneous to the birth of writing, seems to have been linked with the administrative sphere. However, from the onset, their roles surpassed this domain. As objects made from precious materials, cylinder seals were also used as personal adornments, which correspondingly marked the status of its user/owners. Simultaneously, their iconographic and/or textual contents provided them with a magical and apotropaic value, as well as votive roles, namely when deposited as *ex-votos* in cultic

¹⁰ Many distinguished Assyriologists participated in these expeditions, such as Henri Frankfort, Pinhas Pierre Delougaz, Seton Lloyd, and Thorkild Jacobsen. It is worth noting that these scholars used the state-of-the-art archaeological methodologies, for their time, which allowed a detailed register of the findings. Those registers can be found at the "Diyala Archaeological Database (DiyArDA)". Oriental Institute/University of Chicago. Accessed January 2020, <http://diyala.uchicago.edu/pls/apex/f?p=105:1:15038863272084>

Along with the sites referred to in this paper, Tell al-Asmar (ancient Ešnunna) and Tell Ischali (probably ancient Nerebtum or Kiti) were also subjected to archaeological works. About these two sites see, for instance, Frankfort, Lloyd and Jacobsen 1940; Delougaz, Harold and Lloyd 1967; Hill, Jacobsen and Delougaz 1990; and Reichel 2018.

¹¹ Located in modern Iraq (Diyala Governorate), 19 km southwest from Ešnunna. Latitude: 33° 21' 18.2448"; 33.3550682° N. Longitude: 44° 33' 20.2168"; 44.5556158° E.

The site of Khafajah was excavated for seven seasons, during the 1930's, in a vast area that comprised four *tells*. The structures found at Tell A, such as the habitational and the cultic ones (the Oval Temple, the Temple of Šin and the Temple of Nintu), showed that the site was already occupied at the end of the 4th millennium BC, reaching a peak during the Early Dynastic period. Later, after the fall of Ur III, and judging by the royal inscriptions found at Ešnunna, it fell over the control of this city (Frankfort, Lloyd and Jacobsen 1940, 198). The structures identified at the rest of the three *tells*, which are dated to the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylon periods, indicate that the site was still occupied at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

About the cultic structures of Tell A, see Delougaz 1940 and Delougaz and Lloyd 1942. About the findings at Tells B, C, and D, see Hill, Jacobsen, and Delougaz 1990, 207-237. For the archeological plan of the site, see Frankfort 1955 Pl. 93.

¹² Located in modern Iraq (Diyala Governorate), *circa* 20 km southeast from Ešnunna Latitude: 33° 34' 0.00" N. Longitude: 44° 46' 0.00" E.

The site of Tell Agrab was excavated between 1936 and 1937. Though some ceramic evidence points to the possible occupation of the site, as early as the end of the 4th millennium BC (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 219 and Frankfort 1955, 11), its main cultic structure, the Temple of Šara, is dated to the Early Dynastic period. Domestic structures, though extremely damaged, dated to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, were also identified, which points to a probable occupation of the site, during this period (Frankfort 1955, 11; Delougaz, Hill and Lloyd 1967, 267-268). Afterwards, following the domination of the region by the First Babylonian Dynasty, Tell Agrab seems to have been abandoned. In fact, apart from Ischali, the other three Diyala sites display profound levels of destruction dated to the Old Babylonian period, only to be reoccupied during the Kassite period (Adams 1965, 49; Mieroop 2005, 43-49). For the archaeological plan of the site, see Frankfort 1955, Pl. 95.

¹³ About the development and uses of cylinder seals in the Ancient Near East, see, for instance, Porada 1993, Collon 1987, and 2001.

structures¹⁴. The intertwined analysis of their location in archaeological contexts and their symbolic content can, therefore, enable the identification of several religious significances. On the other hand, the choice for the chronological scope, focusing on cylinder seals that were found in archaeological levels dated to the end of the 4th millennium to the Early Dynastic I and II periods, was made given the need to analyse further divine symbolic representations for epochs which lack substantial written sources. Moreover, the dispersion of the surviving glyptic material, but also the nature of our analysis, led us to a *longue durée* methodology, which we believe better suits the identification of gradations within the continuous symbolic expressions, regarding the Mesopotamian Divine Feminine.

Our sampling¹⁵ was thus defined having two criteria in mind: the presence of the two symbols under analysis and the common stylistic traits displayed, which fall into the Jemdet Nasr style category¹⁶. From the 26-cylinder seals selected, 16 were exhumed in Khafajah, at the Temple of Sîn¹⁷, in Tell A¹⁸; and ten were found in Tell Agrab, at the temple of Šara¹⁹.

¹⁴ Pittman 2013, 319-320. As the author emphasizes, their multiple roles and the elements they contained made them “carriers of culturally salient meaning” (320).

¹⁵ The identification of our sampling was made following Frankfort’s catalogue (1955), who counted *circa* 1002-cylinder seals exhumed in the Dyala region, by the 1930’s Oriental Institute of Chicago archaeological campaigns, in the four mentioned sites and dated to the end of the 4th millennium BC until the Old Babylonian period.

¹⁶ Jemdet Nasr is an archaeological site in modern Iraq (Babil Governorate), that was first excavated in 1926 and 1928. The characteristics of the findings allowed to determine a short historical period (c. 3100-2900 BC) and a glyptic style, which appears in archaeological levels before and after the homonymous period. However, there is still a strong debate about this period/style. On this matter, see, for instance, Matthews 1992a and 1992b. In this paper, we follow Frankfort’s classification as Jemdet Nasr style for the selected cylinder seals, indicating the dating of the identified levels.

¹⁷ The designation of this cultic structure follows an inscription found at the precinct, dedicated to the Mesopotamian lunar god: “Urkisal, *Sāngû*-priest of Sîn of Akshak, son of Nati, *pashishu*-priest of Sîn, for the protection presented [this]”. Moreover, several pendants in the shape of the lunar crescent were also identified in two levels of the precinct (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 13).

It is interesting to note that this cultic structure’s most ancient *stratum* was identified at a depth of nine meters and that it was possible to identify 10 archaeological levels, from the end of the 4th millennium until the Early Dynastic III period (*circa* 2600-2334 BC). However, due to the poor conditions of the ground and the destruction provoked by illegal excavations, the dating of the 10th level is debatable. The finding of a “puzu-head” amulet on this level, which is typical of the Early Dynastic III period, contributed to this dating hypothesis (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 78).

¹⁸ From this set, 14 were found in levels dated to *circa* 3100-2900 BC, and one was found in a level dated to the Early Dynastic II period (*circa* 2750-2600 BC). There is one seal (Frankfort 1955, Pl. 21, no. 219), however, whose archaeological level raises doubts, whether belonging to the final years of the 4th millennium BC or to the Early Dynastic I period (*circa* 2900-2750 BC).

¹⁹ All these 10-cylinder seals were found in levels dated to the Early Dynastic II period. It is interesting to note that six were identified in the main *cella*, three were found at adjacent cultic chambers, and one was exhumed from a second sanctuary, next to the main one (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 239-265). About this cultic structure, see, for instance, Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 218-285. For its plan, see Frankfort 1955 Pl. 26.

2. The Rosette/Star

The rosette/star was “the major symbol of Inanna/Ishtar throughout ancient Mesopotamian history down to the Neo-Babylonian period”²⁰. Its use is well-attested to the second half of the 4th millennium BCE, namely in what concerns the archaeological assemblage recovered at Uruk (the Southern Mesopotamian *urbs* under the goddess’s tutelage), which manifests an early abundant iconographic and material presence of the symbol within its cultic structures²¹. Accordingly, this is the most represented symbol in our sampling, appearing in 15 of the 16-cylinder seals from Khafajah; and in nine of the ten identified in Tell Agrab.



Fig. 1. Rosette/star enclosed by geometrical motifs.
Khafajah, Temple of Sin, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
Modern impression, Frankfort, 1955. Pl. 11, no. 87.
© *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

²⁰ Westenholz 2009, 333.

²¹ Clay rosette/stars seem to have been incrustated on the walls or as part of wall friezes, as decorative elements. The symbol also appears in Uruk’s glyptic material (Szarzynska 2000, 67).



Fig. 2. Left: Rosettes/stars enclosing an animal, and geometrical motifs.
 Right: Rosettes/stars flanking an animal, and geometrical motifs.
 Khafajah, Temple of Sîn, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
 Modern impressions, Frankfort, 1955. Pl. 10, no. 77 (left) and no. 78 (right).
 © *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

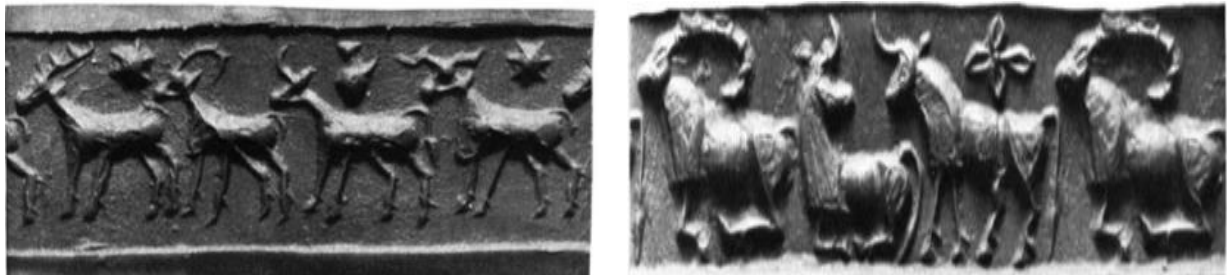


Fig. 3. Left: Rosettes/stars topping a group of animals.
 Right: Rosette/star topping one of the group's animals.
 Khafajah, Temple of Sîn, *circa* 3100-2900 BC (left) or *circa* 2900-2750 BC (right).
 Modern impressions, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 7, no. 39 (left) and Pl. 21, no. 219 (right).
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Fig. 4. Group of animals topped by rosettes/stars.

Tell Agrab, Temple of Šara, *circa* 2750-2600 BC.

Modern impressions, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 79, no 851 (left); Pl. 78, no. 841 (center) and Pl. 81, no. 858 (right).

© Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

The rosette/star appears exclusively alongside geometrical elements in eight of the Khafajah's set and in two of the Tell Agrab ones, such as the example in Fig. 1²². Bearing in mind the apotropaic value of these objects *per se*, which could be reinforced by its contents, we believe that the presence of the symbol might go beyond a decorative purpose, being also an evocation of the goddess's protection to its user/owners. Furthermore, as stated above, both sets were found within the cultic structures of the *urbes*, which might add to this suggestion, if we understand this location linked to an eventual ultimate use of the objects as *ex-votos*.

The remaining Khafajah's set and five of the Tell Agrab cylinder seals²³, which depicts this symbol, do so in close relation with zoomorphic elements. It must be stressed that in these scenes, whether single or in a group, the animals are flanked/enclosed [Figs. 2 and 7] or topped by the rosette/star [Figs. 3-6]. We believe that this relation between the rosette/star

²² Due to the lack of space, the Khafajah's 7 remaining seals and the two exemplars from Tell Agrab, which depict the rosette/star with only geometrical motifs, will not be displayed in this paper. They can be found in Frankfort 1955, Pl. 11, no. 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94 and Pl. 23, no. 241 (Khafajah); and Pl. 75, no 815 and Pl. 82, no 869 (Tell Agrab).

²³ The Tell Agrab's cylinder seal, which depicts the rosette/star with the reed-bundle [Fig 10], will be analyzed in the following section. Another seal found at this site (Frankfort 1955, Pl. 79, no. 848), dated to the Early Dynastic period II, depicts the rosette/star and a scorpion, a scene that has no parallel in our sampling. The use of this animal as unequivocally connected with religion and divine entities, specifically with the goddess Išhara, is only fully attested for the late Kassite period (Black and Green 1992, 160.) Given that this goddess was understood as a hypostasis of Inanna/Ištar, a deeper analysis of the connection between the scorpion and the Mesopotamian Divine Feminine for the end of the 4th and the 3rd millennia BC, is thus necessary, encompassing more cylinder seals whose contents fall into other stylistic categories. The authors are currently preparing a preliminary analysis on this particular subject matter.

and the zoomorphic elements reinforces the protective significances of the symbol, through the evocation of Inanna/Ištar as the provider of fertility upon cattle. Moreover, the adding of the standardized representation of the cultic structure [Figs. 6-8], which suggests the sacred precinct (the earthly dwelling of Mesopotamian deities), also deepens the sacredness of the group, which can be understood as the goddess's flock²⁴.

In this regard, one of the seals where these three elements appeared combined is particularly interesting [Fig. 8]. Enclosed by the cultic structures, the animals seem to be feasting from the rosettes/stars, which could be read as feasting from the goddess herself. This scene recalls the sacred ceremony where the goddess's flock is fed from her very own symbol/self, attested in other glyptic material, found at Uruk²⁵.



Fig. 5. Group of animals flanked by posts (reed-bundle?) and topped by a rosette/star.
Khafajah, Temple of Sîn, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 20, no. 214.
© *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

²⁴ Joan Scurlock (2002, 370) indicates that the depiction of deities' symbols in association with groups of animals confirms the transversal use of this affiliation: the rosette/star with Inanna/Ištar; the sun disk with Uttu/Šamaš; crescent moon with Nanna/Sîn, and the spade for Marduk, for example.

²⁵ In two-cylinder seals found at the vicinity of Uruk, the **en** is depicted feeding the herds of the goddess with rosettes/stars, enclosed by reed-bundles (Szarzynska 2000, 67). The presence of the **en**, who was chosen by the goddess to rule in her name, and her double symbolic presence, through the rosette/star and the reed-bundle, adds a profound sacred value to this "ceremony". The multiple forms of the goddess's presence reinforce, therefore, her role as the divine provider and divine ruler of Uruk (Almeida 2015, 135-136). For the referred seals, see Amiet 1980, Pl. 43 no 636b and 638.



Fig. 6. Rosette/star topping one of the two animals, which are facing the standardized representation of the cultic structure.

Khafajah, Temple of Šin, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
 Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 9, no. 74.
 © *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

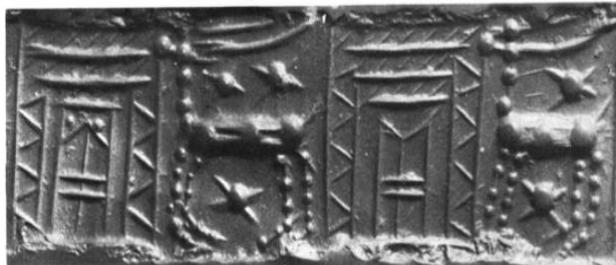


Fig. 7. Animals enclosed by rosettes/stars and flanked by the standardized representation of the cultic structure.

Tell Agrab, Temple of Šara, *circa* 2750-2600 BC.
 Modern impressions, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 81, no. 859 (left) and Pl. 80 no. 855. (right).
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Fig. 8. Two animals flanked by the cultic structure, apparently feeding from a stylized plant/bush with rosettes/stars.

Khafajah, Temple of Sin, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
 Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 6, no. 32.
 © *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

With all this in mind, we argue that the symbol's dual direct reading (as a rosette or/and as a star) might have been deliberated, in order to better intertwine (and confuse) two leading roles and attributes of the goddess. On the one hand, the rosette as a symbol of fertility, which Inanna/Ištar granted to the land through her divine agency; and on the other hand, the star as an identifier of the goddesses' sovereignty on the skies, through her astral identity as Venus.

Moreover, it must be recalled that Venus, extremely radiant and visible at the naked eye, is (and was) commonly observable after sunrise and after sunset, which granted it the epithet of "morning and evening star", in many historical contexts, such as the Mesopotamian one. Likewise, Inanna/Ištar, by embodying Venus, encompassed a dual character, from the very beginning: texts dated to the Uruk III period (*circa* 3100-2900 BC) display different offerings to "Inanna morning" (^dInana-UD/hud₂) and to "Inanna evening" (^dInana-sig)²⁶, also referring to different cultic festivals for each of these goddess's expressions²⁷.

Hence, her dual astral identity might have been consciously expressed in a symbol that contains a double understanding: astral sovereignty and earthly abundance. As we have seen in the cylinder seals discussed above, up in the sky, Inanna/Ištar presided over her flock, but, simultaneously, her symbolical presence and agency enclosing (or feeding) the animals, enhanced the fertility of the land she granted.

²⁶ In these texts, the cultic festivals are designated as ezen-^dInana-hud₂ and ezen-^dInana-sig, respectively (Szarzynska 2000, 65).

²⁷ "The simultaneous cults of Morning and Evening Inana are not surprising because in fact they concerned only one goddess identified with the planet Venus, with the distinction of having two phases and two times of day in which it appears in the sky" (Szarzynska 1993, 10).

3 The reed-bundle

The association between the goddess Inanna/Ištar and the reed-bundle, a vegetal symbol composed by a pole with intertwined reeds, is also well-attested for the second half of the 4th millennium BC. This symbol presents close resemblances to the proto-cuneiform sign MUŠ₃, which was used to designate the name of the goddess, but also, as Szarzynska pointed out, to indicate her cultic/administrative structures and her earthly representants, during earlier times²⁸. Simultaneously, the Late Uruk iconography, from the eponymous *urbs*, profusely depicts the reed-bundle²⁹, further attesting this connection³⁰.

In our selected sampling, however, this symbol only appears in four-cylinder seals (two from Khafajah and two from Tell Agrab), which might be explained by the distance between the Diyala region and the Uruk's area of influence and/or by the general abandonment of the symbol, during the 3rd millennium BC³¹. Notwithstanding, all the four exemplars follow the traditional depiction of the reed-bundle in glyptic material: represented in pairs, they appear as flanking/enclosing the standardised representation of the cultic structures [Figs 9 and 10] or other elements [Fig. 5 and 11].

This iconographic consistency led Elizabeth Williams-Forte to suggest the apotropaic value of the reed-bundle pair, which very much like sentinels, guarded and protected the elements enclosed by them³². Westenholz, on her hand, intertwined the above-mentioned connection between this symbol and the proto cuneiform sign MUŠ₃ with the role of Inanna/Ištar's as "representing the numen of the city's central storehouse³³". It thus seems that for this author, the reed-bundle points to an agricultural aspect of the goddess's function on the fertility of the land.

²⁸ Szarzynska 1993, 64. The author further adds that it was only during the Uruk III period that the use of the determinative **dingir**, before the MUŠ₃ sign, became more frequent, thus allowing to identify when it was referring to the goddess herself.

²⁹ Szarzynska (1993, 7) emphasized how the high frequency of the reed-bundle depiction had no match when compared with the representation of other symbols connected to divine beings, during the Late Uruk period.

³⁰ Such is the case of the famous Warka Vase, found in the Eanna precinct, the main cultic structure of Uruk, dedicated to Inanna/Ištar and An/Anu, where the reed-bundle is displayed twice. About the symbolism of the Uruk Vase, see, for instance, Bharani 2002 and Suter 2014. For its recent turbulent history, see "Lost Treasures from Iraq - Objects". Oriental Institute. Accessed January 2020, http://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/14_2.htm

³¹ Black and Green 1992, 154.

³² Williams-Forte 1983, 174-199. The author also admits the possibility that this symbol was an echo of an ancient Inanna/Ištar's totem, which was first proposed by Adam Falkestein.

³³ Westenholz 1998, 73.



Fig. 9. Upper register: Group of animals.
 Lower register: group of animals facing a structure (probably a cultic one), enclosed by several reed-bundles.
 Khafajah, Temple of Šîn, *circa* 3100-2900 BC.
 Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 6, no 33.
 © *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*



Fig. 10. Upper register: Rosettes/stars and several elements, whose combination resembles a human visage. Curved line which seems to separate both registers.
 Lower register: The standardized representation of the cultic structure flanked by the reed-bundle pair.
 Tell Agrab, Temple of Šara, *circa* 2750-2600 BC.
 Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 84, no 880.
 © *Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*



Fig. 11. Reed-bundle pair flanking a group of animals, sided by the standardized representation of the cultic structure, at the left. Wavy motif below the group of animals.
 Tell Agrab, Temple of Šara, circa 2750-2600 BC.
 Modern impression, Frankfort 1955, Pl. 80, no. 854.
 © Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

However, the presence of the zoomorphic elements enclosed by the reed-bundle pair [Fig. 5 and 11] or facing the probable cultic culture [Fig. 9] lead us to add other significances to the combined fertile and apotropaic value of the symbol. In Fig. 9 (like in Figs. 6, 7, and 8) the goddess's presence through the reed-bundle could also express the sacredness of her flock, which she protected³⁴. The absence of the cultic structure in the seal of Fig. 5, which instead depicts the rosette/star topping the scene, suggests, as discussed above, the astral sovereignty of Inanna/Ištar over earthly elements. In this seal, the repetition of the goddess's presence, through the rosette/star and the reed-bundle pair, further reinforces her divine agency over earthly domains.

In what concerns the seal in Fig. 11 we find yet another element that concurs to this interpretation: the wavy motif, that not only delimitates the scene, at the bottom but also implies the presence of water, the primary element that allowed for economic wealth³⁵. The

³⁴ It must be referred that the location and unique material characteristics of seal in Fig. 9 further adds to an apotropaic reading. Firstly, it was found in an adjacent chamber of Khafajah's cultic structure that communicated only with the *cella*. Secondly, it had a silver clip and was incrustated with small jasper and nacre triangles, a type of decoration that was typically used in stone vessels, during later epochs. Due to these traits, alongside its *locus* and iconographic contents, it was thought to be used primarily as an amulet (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942, 15-16).

³⁵ Besides the obvious importance of the Tigris-Euphrates fluvial system for the development of agriculture and cattle breeding, we must also refer to the importance of the Mediterranean Sea and of the Arabo-Persian Gulf, namely in what concerns their commercial routes, which linked Mesopotamia with other regions. The primary economic role of the aquatic element was, accordingly, transposed to the mythical sphere, becoming a divine primeval substance. That is attested in the Sumerian mythic narrative *Enki and Ninmah*, whose origins can be traced to the 3rd millennium BC, where Namma/Nammu is referred as the primeval aquatic deity, and also in the famous Babylonian epic poem *Enūma eliš*, where the primeval divine couple, Tiamat and Apsū,

combined presence of the cultic structure with the reed-bundle pair, the aquatic and zoomorphic elements, thus suggests a strong message of abundance, which was to be fulfilled by Inanna/Ištar's protective action. A similar reading is also possible for the seal in Fig. 10, given the repetition of the reed-bundle pair, which is flanking the sacred precinct, and of the rosettes/stars, which top the scene. The combination of both symbols and their multiple significances grant protagonism to the goddess on this object's scene³⁶. Hence, we argue that the reed-bundle, like the rosette/star, could be read as the goddess herself, not just in the role of agricultural fertility, but as a divine ruler and provider over earthly domains³⁷.

Additionally, given the function of delimitating the space where the sacred flock and/or the sacred precinct stand, in all of the scenes discussed above³⁸, we also argue that the reed-bundle could be used to signify a specific characteristic of Inanna/Ištar, which is closely connected with her astral identity: her liminality. Just like Venus transits from day to night, and vice-versa, Inanna/Ištar's behaviour was marked by a consistent transition between limits, which she defied but also ruled. As the mythic literary tradition from the 3rd millennium onwards attests, this goddess was able to travel between the celestial, earthly, and subterranean domains, and between the urban/civilised and the steppe/uncivilised worlds³⁹. All these areas, but the netherworld (which she, nevertheless, tried to control), were her own, where she ruled as the true "Queen of Heaven and Earth". Accordingly, and having in mind that iconographic symbolic constructions often precede the textual ones, by

represent the salty and sweet waters, respectively. For the Sumerian narrative, see *ETCSL*, t.1.1.2, and for the Babylonian epic of creation, see Dalley 2000, 228-277.

³⁶ The human visage depicted has no parallels within the Diyala glyptic material we analyzed. The multiple (and problematic) identification of this element, which can refer to a cultic attendant, to the user/owner of the seal, or a family member of his/her, or even, as Dupla (2016, 144-146) suggested, the goddess herself, deserves a particular attention, which falls out of the scope of this paper. However, it is important to stress that the depiction of the eyes, extremely highlighted, and the grave/solemn expression, which parallels the depictions of Mesopotamian anthropomorphic statues, used as *ex votos*, might imply a similar significance: the awe that the presence of the numinous powers provoked on their human worshippers.

³⁷ Again, we recall and stress the message of the Uruk seals mentioned in note 23, where the combination between the **en**, the reed-bundle pairs, the rosettes/stars, and the animals imply significances that clearly surpasses the protection of the goddess solely over the agricultural fertility. In these scenes, the combination of the four elements also alludes (and perhaps, mostly) to her role as the divine provider and ruler of Uruk. For references, see note 23.

³⁸ Going back to the Warka Vase, in the upper register, we find two pairs of this symbol that also evokes this boundary function: first, and following Williams-Forte suggestion, as a pair of sentinels that not only guard and protect the elements before them but also delimitate the space between the outer and inner zone of the goddess's own sanctuary. Secondly, within the inner zone, the sentinels again protect and delimitate a smaller scene, probably ritualistic (Almeida 2015, 147-146).

³⁹ For instance, in *The Descent of Inanna/Ištar to the netherworld*, the goddess travels to the subterranean realm of the dead, trying to conquer it (*ETCSL*, t. 1.4.1 and Dalley 2000, 154-162). In *Inanna and Enki* it is depicted her journey from her earthly domains, Uruk, to the city of god Enki/Ea, Eridu (*ETCSL*, t.1.3.1). In *The epic of Gilgameš*, the goddess, through her human representant, Šamhat, travels from the city to the steppe, to meet (and civilize) Enkidu. Later, Inanna/Ištar leaves her heavenly domains towards her earthly one, in order to find the hero of the epic (Dalley 2000, 33-153).

delimitating distinct areas of the above analysed glyptic scenes, which are all, in a way or another, areas where Inanna/Ištar's influence and the agency is felt, the reed-bundle could also allude to her liminal character.

4. Final Remarks

The analysis we conducted on the rosette/star and the reed-bundle in earlier Diyala's glyptic material allows some considerations about Inanna/Ištar.

First, the parallels with the Urukian assemblage confirm the use of these symbols in close relation with Inanna/Ištar's protagonism within the Mesopotamian pantheon of the time. Indeed, several materials, textual, and iconographic piece of evidence from different *urbes* of the end of the 4th millennium BC point to "a pan-Mesopotamian religious league centred on Uruk and its chief deity, Inanna", which was enhanced during the first centuries of the 3rd millennium BC⁴⁰.

Secondly, the cylinder seals depicting her symbols can point to strong religious piety regarding this goddess, through their apotropaic value and personal use as votive objects. Moreover, given that all the discussed seals were found within cultic structures, their possible final use as *ex-votos* or as amulets that protected the sacred precincts, adds to this consideration⁴¹.

Thirdly, these glyptic scenes display an amplified function of the goddess as the divine provider: Inanna/Ištar was not only responsible for agricultural fertility but also (or mainly) for every aspect of earthly abundance. The depiction of zoomorphic elements and cultic precincts (which were also political and economic structures) in relation to her symbols undoubtedly points to a function of power. The analyzed glyptic scenes display her divine authority in protecting and bestowing abundance upon the land and its inhabitants. In a world where economic growth was dependent on husbandry and livestock, fertility was richness, and richness was, of course, power.

Lastly, her dual and liminal character, fully attested in later mythical textual sources, seems to be already present by the intentional use of symbols that intertwine those attributes. The dual reading of the rosette/star and the liminal significance of the reed-bundle⁴² thus point to a complex iconographic elaboration of Inanna/Ištar's personality.

As we indicated at the beginning of this paper, the Mesopotamian deities could assume different forms besides the anthropomorphic one. So, alongside the multiple significances

⁴⁰ Westenholz 2009, 335-336.

⁴¹ In this regard, we should stress that the seals were found in the Temple of Šin (Khafajah) and in the Temple of Šara (Tell Agrab), who were deities bound to Inanna/Ištar by family ties. As it is well-known, the lunar god was transversally considered the father of the goddess, and some textual narratives indicate a possible earlier connection with Šara, as her son. This tie was, nevertheless, abandoned given the goddess's reluctance to fulfill the traditional marital functions (Almeida 2015, 136-137 and 295). The presence of cylinder seals with the goddess's symbols in the cultic structures devoted to her father and son might thus imply a personal cultic expression that evoked those family ties.

⁴² An aspect that might concur to this consideration, and that was not subject to consideration in this paper, is a closer analysis of the kind of animals depicted as topped by the rosette/star and/or enclosed by the reed-bundle. If many are clearly tamed animals, others raise some doubt. The possible identification of wild animals enclosed by the goddess' symbols would add to her dual and liminal character, who controls the civilized and uncivilized worlds, as attested in later written sources.

these symbols evoke, they should also be understood as Inanna/Ištar herself. The polysemic nature of symbols permits for the simultaneous reading of all the suggested meanings, and others yet to be disclosed, which leads to new and exciting (re)analysis in the future.

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Building Identities in the Neo-Assyrian Period

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Abstract

During the first millennium BC, Assyria was constituted as the power with more significant territorial extension in the Ancient Near East, incorporating at its peak territories from Anatolia to the Zagros Mountains and from Armenia to the Persian Gulf. Given its' geographical range, the Assyrians resorted to instruments of political-military and diplomatic nature which, combined with textual and visual records, embodied and effected their power.

From an ideological point of view, the purpose of the Assyrian expansion was to develop the project of a civilised world dominated by the king of Assyria on earth, reflecting the rise of Aššur as leader of the pantheon in the divine world.

The territories beyond the Assyrian domain were considered to be hostile, chaotic, savage but spaces that belonged to the Assyrian king by right. War, legitimised as a means of restoring order and simultaneously as a symbolic instrument of structuring and monopolising Assyria, became the quintessential place of contact and encounter with the "non-Assyrian".

The iconographic materialisation of the royal figure and his achievements, as a tool for appropriating ways of seeing and organising the world, mirrored the diversity of historical and cultural experiences, supporting the self-definitions of groups and their members. In this sense, the present paper consists in the analysis of Assyrian bas-reliefs that portray the "other" to understand how these representations assumed a fundamental role in the guidance of social behaviour and practices for understanding the perceptions that Antiquities settled among themselves.

Keywords: Assyria; first millennium BC; identities; representation of the other; perceptions.

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Within the International Congress "' In Thy arms, I lost myself' – Images, Perceptions and Productions in/of Antiquity" we presented this paper entitled "Building Identities in the Neo-Assyrian Period" which the primary purpose was to understand the Assyrians' perceptions of themselves and other Antiquities, through the analysis of palatial bas-reliefs of the first millennium BC.

The rise of Assyria is associated with the foundation of the city of Aššur as a city-state governed by an *ensi* in the second millennium BC. Given its proximity to rivers that allowed land irrigation, the city of Aššur had an excellent geographical position that not only provided the creation of communication routes throughout Mesopotamia but also enabled the constitution of warehouses and commercial colonies that aimed to control and manage strategic routes.⁴⁴

Although Assyria had been a target of constant attacks given the permeability of its borders, the conservation of its geographical core – demarcated by what became known as the "Assyrian triangle" formed by the cities of Aššur, Nineveh and Arbela⁴⁵ – made possible a self-defence process that led Assyria to an expansionary trend.

From an ideological point of view, the rise of Aššur - patron god of the city of the same name - as leader of the pantheon was projected on earth through the recognition of the supremacy of his representative: the Assyrian king, who's actions were legitimised by the god. Royal decisions, including the conquest of territories, were understood as a wish of the god himself since it was up to the ruler to carry out divine verdicts.

As a result, this process of expansion led to a crisis of identity concerning other life forms, realities and organisational systems.⁴⁶ What initially corresponded to a territorial advance of a province around the city grew with the addition of new provinces that were considered an integral part of the original land. This region called *māt Aššur* alluded to the idea of a territory close to a deity and separated from the rest of the world.⁴⁷

Therefore, the visual representation of the Assyrian ruler showed an idealised image of the king as an intermediary between the gods and humanity. Royal imagery didn't match the idea of a portrait as we understand it today⁴⁸, because it was based on a set of ideological criteria and royalty attributes such as the distinctive headdress (royal crown) that allowed the identification of the figure represented as king.

⁴⁴ Further reading Toro 2014, 91-109.

⁴⁵ See Harmanşah 2012.

⁴⁶ Parpola 2004, 13.

⁴⁷ Harmanşah 2012, 61-65.

⁴⁸ The terms used in the Assyrian royal inscriptions for the designation of a variety of supports (sculptures, statues, steles, reliefs) that included the image of the ruler – *šalam šarru* whose meaning can be roughly translated as "image of the king" and *šalam šarrūtiya* as "image of my royalty" – show us that the representation of the royal figure withdraw from the king's individuality. These expressions depart from the Akkadian term *šalmu*, which evoke a broader sense of the concept of image and representation. In order to explore this concept, see Winter 2010, 78 and Monte 2013, 44.

The king's image did not have exact and realistic features, as individuality was replaced by elements regarding his position. This doesn't mean that the Assyrian king was understood as a god, quite the contrary only his office is sacred.⁴⁹

Instead of likelihood, the king's depiction focused on particular aspects of his appearance that had been shaped by the gods and which resembled or could be attributed to them, so that the characteristics of the ruler conveyed the qualities of an ideal king divinely sanctioned. For example, the pronounced size and muscular physique indicate power/force, as well as the long beard, implies wisdom and knowledge; the physical appearance is associated with exceptional psychological characteristics that justified the choice of that individual as ruler.

Assyrian written and iconographic records were inevitably imbued with the royal ideology that promoted and ordered its production as we can see through the representations of the Assyrian kings. Understanding the king's identity as inseparable from his position resulted in an official image⁵⁰ that, although it could establish some kind of visual relationship with his physiognomy, was primarily a cultural and political construction.

The centrality of the royal figure in written and iconographic records highlighted its relevance as a cohesive element of a heterogeneous and growing Assyria where the very act of governing implied the creation, maintenance and dissemination of social differences.

The distinction between cultures allowed the construction and affirmation of an "Assyrian identity" since self-definition corresponds simultaneously to the delimitation of otherness.⁵¹ This means that to know what it was to be an Assyrian, we would have to contrast it with its opposite. This resulted in a power relationship between the dominant pole (Assyrian) and the pole that was included within its operational field ("the other, the non-Assyrian").

As we know during the first millennium BC, Assyria was constituted as the power with a greater territorial extension until then, affirming itself with great supremacy in the Ancient Near East. Under these circumstances, what we now call the Neo-Assyrian Empire was, in reality, a political entity composed of multiple populations and tribes of different origins.

Assyria needed to implement, carry out and maintain the social hierarchy inherent in the institution of royalty through diplomatic and ideological strategies. Among them was the policy of Assyrianization⁵² that sought out to replace the ethnic identities of the conquered

⁴⁹ Although the king is never deified in Mesopotamia, the proximity between the ruler and the gods was accentuated, resulting in a conception of sacred royalty. Regarding this matter see Winter 2008, 75-101.

⁵⁰ See Shafer 1998, 66; Winter 2009, 265-68.

⁵¹ Hall 2010, 421-424; Reguillo 2002, 65-70.

⁵² Assyrianization included the replacement of local power by Assyrian administrators and the reconstruction of capitals according to Assyrian models after the destruction and/or abandonment of the sites. This process of acculturation was driven by exchanges, participation in military expeditions, construction projects and enterprises, as well as continuous interaction between

territories with a unique identity. This consisted essentially of a common unifying language (Aramaic)⁵³ and a standard system of religion, culture, and values. Thereby, the initially heterogeneous population gradually became socially and culturally homogeneous.

This acculturation was also visible in the early visual records depicting "the other". The figures were characterised by the so-called "Assyrian style"⁵⁴, that is, they were represented within the same canon, with almond eyes, wavy hair, beards with curved and straight sections, all elements that would allow us to identify the characters as Assyrians.

For example, a relief from the Central Palace in Nimrud, dating from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (ca. 744-727 BC), depicts the capture of a city where people and animals are expelled and deported, we can see in the middle of the representation two scribes recording the spoils obtained in this military campaign.⁵⁵ The scribe on the left holds what appears to be a clay tablet and a stiletto suggesting that he was writing cuneiform signs, that is, writing in Akkadian. While the scribe on the right seems to have in his hands a brush and parchment, means associated with Aramaic language. The last scribe presumably comes from the western region of Assyria, but as an Assyrian officer, he is visually indistinguishable from his colleague.

This means that although there are distinctive features in the representations of "the other", they were treated within the Assyrian canon, agreeing with the Assyrian ideology itself that intended to keep active the memory of the conquest and subsequent neutralisation of the other.

In a bas-relief from Sennacherib's reign (ca. 704-681 BC), present in a corridor linking the Ištar Temple to the Southwest Palace in Nineveh, we see two officers who at first seem identical to us. However, upon a closer look, we realise that the general characterisation of the figure on the left side is Assyrian: he has a bow, a quiver with arrows and a sword. The clothing and headband indicate that he may have belonged to Aramaic-speaking communities. While the figure on the right displays a turban held by a long-brimmed band with short slightly curved upward robes, identifying it as coming from Palestinian territories.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the representation of these figures as members of the royal guard reveals that the Assyrians integrated soldiers from all Assyrian regions assimilating "the other" into their culture.

When the representation didn't include records of "foreign" persons in high office or near the Assyrian king, "the other" was stereotyped. The stereotype, although presented as essential and natural is formed from the lived, memorable, easily perceivable and

segments of the population in all aspects of daily life. Further reading about assyrianization see Parker 2014, 288-91; Rede 2018, 97; Feldman 2011, 142-45; Parpola 2004, 5-10.

⁵³ From the 7th century BC, Aramaic became the *lingua franca* in the Ancient Near East, because it has an easier writing system, ideal for business purposes. Nevertheless, the Akkadian language in the Assyrian variant retained its predominance in literary and religious texts.

⁵⁴ Feldman 2011, 135; 142-45.

⁵⁵ Brown 2014, 515.

⁵⁶ British Museum Collection Database n.d.

recognisable characteristics of a person or a group, exaggerating or simplifying these same aspects.⁵⁷

The second frieze from the bottom of a relief depicting the military campaign between Assurbanipal and Taharqa, king of Egypt and Kuš (that was present in the room M of the North Palace in Nineveh) is entirely dedicated to the exhibition of prisoners. On the left side, we see a group of men whose semblance as well as the fact that they are bald and some have headbands with feathers, indicate that they would be Nubians or at least from Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁸

Other prisoners rather than being particularised through clothing or hairstyles were differentiated by the objects they wore or carried underlining that we are facing the deportation of a population.

It is interesting to note that the presence of women in visual records was rare and practically confined to deportation scenes⁵⁹, as seen in this case. In the royal inscriptions, when the Assyrian king took possession of women from an enemy king, he validated his masculinity and virility.⁶⁰ Despite that, in visual sources, the emergence and strong correlation between women and children intended to insinuate that populations were affected.

The representation of the deportee's queues established a relationship with the scenery itself, in this case, a fortress whose shape starts from pillars suggesting Egyptian constructions. The identification of this space as Egypt was further enhanced through the presence of the Nile River at the bottom of the representation. This means that certain details emphasised the connection between particular populations and specific landscapes. These examples show that what allows us to distinguish Assyrians from the rest of the population was not physical or ethnic aspects, but attributes that the figures presented such as clothing, hairstyles, specific geographical terrain, material culture, etc. As Assyria incorporated more territories, the images of "the other" gradually began to add identifying and distinctive elements including inscriptions in the reliefs themselves.

For example, the relief depicting the Battle of Til-Tuba, present in the room XXXIII of the Southwest Palace in Nineveh, consists of approximately eleven concrete and critical episodes identified by various inscriptions, beginning with the crash of the char of the Elamite king Teumman and his son Tammaritu. The focus on specific enemies that were identified in the epigraphs served to demonstrate that the enemy leader was the real

⁵⁷ Hall 2010, 429.

⁵⁸ Brown 2014, 528-30.

⁵⁹ See Albenda 1987.

⁶⁰ "With a rejoicing heart and a radiant face, I rushed to Babylon and entered the palace of Marduk-apla-iddina (II) [Merodach-baladan] to take charge of the possessions and property therein. I opened his treasury and brought out (...) a substantial treasure, (together with) his wife, his palace women, female stewards, (...) and I counted (them) as booty." – Sennacherib First Campaign Cylinder 001, 30 *in* Novotny and Jeffers, 2015-16.

responsible for bringing the Assyrian king to violence and simultaneously the presence of text and image created a real presence.⁶¹

At the collective level, a profusion of bodies expresses the chaos of battle however the two armies are distinguished firstly by the war equipment they present: the Assyrians wear pointed helmets, mostly holding spears and shields, trying to work in pairs; while the Elamites have headbands around their heads tight at the back with a knot and quivers decorated with palmettes. Secondly by their positions: the dominant action of the Assyrian army is continuous and moving at a constant speed, whereas the movement of the enemies is fragmented and faltering as regards their direction agreeing with the distorted postures they present.⁶²

In this sense Assyria's invincibility was projected through the supremacy of the winners – Assyrian soldiers are never tired nor prostrate of war – and this was intensified by the image of the inevitable fate of defeated enemies represented dead, fallen, naked or humiliated. To distinguish Assyrians from non-Assyrians was to give them not only an identity, a form of existence, but also a destiny.

It should be noted that the moderate and gradual distinction of visual records was "radical" and explicit in written records where it reiterated a *topos* of Assyrian self-identification based on a universal conspiracy that opposed "us against them." This was further underlined by the fact that the image of "the other" was fixed in natural and biological aspects⁶³ that were assumed as ways and differences of being:

(...) On my sixth campaign, I marched against Urtaku, the king of the land Elam who did not remember the kindness of the father who had engendered me (nor) did he honour my friendship. (...) Urtaku, with whom I did not start a fight, set his attack in motion (and) hastily brought war to Karduniaš (Babylonia). (...) Afterwards, Teumman, the (very) image of a *gallû*-demon, sat on the throne of Urtaku. He sought out evil ways to kill the children of Urtaku (...).⁶⁴

The enemy's revolt, in this case of Urtaku, was considered an immoral act, ungrateful and unfair behaviour that contrasted with the attitudes and actions of the always pious and faithful Assyrian king. Thus, the characterisation of the enemy became a process through which a relationship was established between the world and things, justifying the actions of individuals and consequently reflecting the position that people occupied in society.

Describing "the other" as barbaric or cowardly even in comparison to animals and mythical creatures – in this case, the mention of Teumman – the Assyrians distinguished what was

⁶¹ Collins 2014, 631-32.

⁶² Albenda 1992, 226.

⁶³ Brown 2014, 518-19; Sêga 2000, 129.

⁶⁴ Assurbanipal Royal Inscription 003, iv, 15-68 in Novotny and Jeffers, 2015-16.

expected and acceptable from what was strange and unacceptable; they defined what belongs, from what doesn't belong; the "I" from the "other", highlighting the way Assyrians and non-Assyrians should act, that is, always acting in accordance with the precepts defined by the Assyrian king.

The pejorative characterisations of "the other" centred on the characters' behaviour and attitude because otherness was not based on notions of enmity but rather on the dehumanisation and violation of Assyrian social and legal codes.

In a bas-relief that represents a battle of Ashurbanipal against Arabs, present in the room L of the North Palace in Nineveh, the dispute takes place in an empty setting, perhaps reflecting the Assyrians' conception of the Arabs and the steppe itself, a desolate place.⁶⁵ The enemies' territories were characterised as hostile, hard to reach, distant, inhospitable spaces, but spaces that belonged to the Assyrian king by right.

For this connection between a threshold state and the Arab population also contributed to the representation of men wearing only short skirts and moving on camels. In Mesopotamian society, clothing was considered a necessary attribute of a sophisticated person, so the lack of garment was associated with the antithesis of urbanity⁶⁶: the rusticity that carried connotations of savagery and amorality.

In addition, this enemy is technologically inferior to the Assyrians since it used spears in war instead of bows and arrows. These aspects evoked the Assyrian royal ideology, where it was up to the king to bring Aššur's order to *the four quarters of the world* through a civilisational process. That said, we understand that the Assyrians corresponded to order and the civilised world while the non-Assyrians alluded to the forces of chaos and the savage.

In both written and visual records, "the other" was not represented in a neutral portrait but in accordance with a previously thought and planned image and message.⁶⁷ What was simply described – an ethnic group with its characteristics in conflict with the group it describes – was represented for particular purposes, corresponding to what the Assyrian king intended to perpetuate. These representations exposed a specific way of conceiving the world and the position of each individual within a group that made up that same world. We conclude that the representation of "the other" had as its primary purpose to construct and communicate the role of the Assyrians and non-Assyrians within ideology. On the one hand, cultural differentiation was accentuated to highlight the norms of Assyrian conduct, strengthening the dominant power and reinforcing the sense of hierarchy. On the other hand, "the other" that integrated the Assyrian values was also represented, embodying the feeling of community through the assimilation of subordinate groups.

⁶⁵ Brown 2014, 534.

⁶⁶ Cifarelli 1998, 220-224.

⁶⁷ Brown 2014, 519.

In short, the Assyrian reliefs where otherness was present sought out to establish ways of understanding and living in the world directly assisting the self-definitions of groups and their members or indirectly helping to shape how Assyrians defined and interacted with different cultures and populations of its vast territory.

We understood that the Assyrian perceptions of the remaining "antiquities" stemmed from the contact between communities and regions made possible by the navigability of rivers and seas. By expanding the boundaries of the known world, there was a revolution in thinking and understanding about "the other". The commercial, economic, cultural and linguistic transformations and dynamics gave way to mutual influences on their mentalities and what was once regarded as a steppe world ruled by opposites became Antiquity: a world resulting from the symbiosis of various civilisations.

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Chapter III

Classical World

Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome– An Overview

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The history of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome goes back to the Bronze Age, though these two people developed in different ways. In the Aegean, it is possible to see the development of two civilizations – the Minoans and the Mycenaeans, whose wealth came both from agriculture and commerce. The paintings remaining from these civilizations, frescoes and ceramics, tell us how different they were. In Knossos they were about nature – plants, animals, fish, dolphins or octopus and are almost everywhere – while in the mainland they represented mostly war scenes. But they also show their fineness and their way of living: the elegance of the ladies, with their jewels and their stylish hairdressing; or the relevance given to the gods.

We have an even better knowledge of these people after the 8th century BCE. Since then, the Greek city-states developed in different ways: politically, while cities, like Sparta, kept their kings, some other, like Athens, evolved into a democracy; at the same time, there were other cities ruled as tyrannies or oligarchies. Socially and economically, some evolution took place too, due to the development of their trade in the Mediterranean. In the 5th century BCE, Sparta and Athens were the main cities in Greece – Sparta well known for its military power and Athens for its sea empire, with a strong navy.

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Interestingly, none of the Greek cities ever built an empire, in the political sense of the word, even if in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE they founded colonies along the Mediterranean basin. These colonies were independent cities, and their contacts with their metropolises were mostly commercial, though they could ask for their help, whenever they felt in danger. This is strongly connected with the importance Ancient Greeks gave to freedom, both in a personal and a public sense. If we believe that they defined themselves by comparison with other people with whom they were in contact, we can see how proud they were for not being subject to any man, but being all equal towards the law, giving them a real sense of freedom. Also, their organization in cities politically independent from each other was a sign of their freedom. Whenever a city became too powerful, this was felt as a danger by the others, as if it could overcome the other cities. This happened in the 5th century BCE when Athens economic empire was felt like a threat by Sparta and other cities in the Peloponnesian League, resulting in the longest war affecting the Greek cities – the Peloponnesian War. When it ended, after 28 years, they were too feeble to face the new Macedonian king – Philip II, who was looking forward to a more prominent role in the Balkan Peninsula. After their defeat in Chaeronea (338 BCE), the Greeks tried to regain their independence after Philip's death. Yet, Alexander subjugated them, before he departed to Asia Minor, thus initiating the conquests that led to one of the largest empires in Antiquity. Alexander's death put an end to these conquests and, politically, to his empire. Though for some time his generals – the Diadochi – gave the impression that they wanted to keep the conquered territory under their control, soon the rivalry between them led to the division of the empire into three principal monarchies that lasted until Roman rule: the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Seleucids in Asia, and Macedonia also dominating over the Greek city-states.

Yet, if politically they were independent kingdoms, culturally, Alexander's conquests resulted in a larger open world, where being Greek depended on being, or not, educated.

It is time, now, to talk about the other power in the so-called Classical World.

Founded by the Tiber, Rome became the head of one of the largest empires of ancient times². According to the legend, the place was chosen by Romulus and Remus to celebrate the place where they were found and fed by the she-wolf. Yet, long before that, the site was considered essential for the trade with the mountaineers, namely the salt one (thus the Via Salaria, the road going from Rome to Castrum Truentinum, on the Adriatic coast), as the river was an easy way of communication; it was also a favourable region for cattle breeding.

² Polybius mentions it more than once in his *Histories*. In I.1 he says 'There can surely be nobody so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover by what means and under what system of government the Romans succeeded in less than fifty-three years in bringing under their rule almost the whole of the inhabited world, an achievement which is without parallel in human history.', which he stresses in VI.2.

Besides, strategically, its location was easily defensible. Therefore, by the middle of the 8th century BCE, it became clear that it was the best place for the new city.

The history of Rome is one of struggles and battles. Surrounded by other people, its inhabitants soon realized the importance of alliances with their neighbours, which wasn't always easy, leading them to fight and expand their territory. But internal fights are equally relevant. For over two centuries Rome was a monarchy, first with a rotation between Roman and Sabine kings, then with Etruscan kings. The ruthlessness of Tarquinius Superbus led to the abolition of the monarchy. The system of government after the monarchy, the Republic, established rules to prevent the return of any king. During this period, Rome initiated its conquests ruling not just most of the Mediterranean basin, but also the Western and Northern Europe. The Republic lasted for over four centuries. But internal quarrels led to the civil war and, after Caesar's murder, Augustus, his nephew and heir, became Rome's first emperor. With him began a system of government that, even if under different names, lasted in Europe for centuries, until the French Revolution.

It is possible to see in this brief description a vast difference between Rome and the Greek city-states: the way they were organized. While Greece was divided into several city-states, each of them with their specific constitution, Rome became the head of an empire, ruling over most the world known at the time. This had consequences on the development of these people and their cultures, as we are about to see.

Cultural development in Greece and Rome

As we tried to show above, these two powers in the Mediterranean basin evolved in different parallel ways. In common, they had the fact that they spread around the Mediterranean, looking for the supplies to their needs. Yet, they did it differently, the Romans imposing his power more consistently.

Greek culture goes back to Minoan times. But from the Minoans and the Mycenaeans, all we have are paintings and utensils. In the 8th century BCE, the alphabet enabled the development of poetry and other literary genres. It begins as a succession of poetic genres, first with the Homeric poems, followed by Hesiod and several other poets in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. This is almost the same as saying that the sequence begins with epic poetry, followed by didactic poetry, elegy and lyric poetry. These poems focus on the humankind and its relationship with the surrounding world, including the gods. The Homeric poems describe the man and his values: the warrior, in the *Iliad*, with qualities that would be relevant in the centuries to come for the citizen with his responsibilities towards his city-state; Odysseus, in the *Odyssey*, is simultaneously the resourceful man, able to find a solution to any situation he falls himself into, and the curious man, looking forward to acquiring more knowledge, travelling in unknown places that he tries to discover. Female are no less important in both poems: seductive, powerful, mourning, intelligent; each one has something to accomplish in the poems. Hesiod emphasizes the importance of justice and work to fight corruption. Elegy and lyric have different concerns, focusing on several feelings: suffering, love, joy, human life, fate, old age are just some of them.

These poets are from different places (e.g. Ionia and Lesbos), using different dialects (e.g. Ionic and Aeolic), which means that Greek literature emerged in its eastern territories. The first philosophers were also from Ionia.

The 6th century and the beginnings of the 5th century saw a shift to the West, namely to Magna Grecia, where the Syracusan tyrant was favourable to culture and literature, surrounding himself with poets. Only during the 5th century BCE Athens acquired cultural relevance. In this period, coexisted different literary genres: history, philosophy, tragedy, comedy, lyric poetry, among others. The man was still the central topic, but now as a member of the city, he was raised to serve. Even myth was used by poets to stress the problems affecting the humankind.

When Ptolemy I Soter reigned over Egypt, he decided to develop Alexandria as a new Athens, and so did his successors. The Museum and the Library, on the grounds of the royal palace, testify to this. These monarchs also surrounded themselves by a group of *philoi* (friends) of the king – writers, mostly poets, writing in Greek. With this, they meant to present themselves as protectors of arts and culture. But this politics also favoured the importance of Alexandria as a cultural centre, where it was possible to meet doctors, geometers, poets, philosophers and artists. Alexandria was a vivid metropolis, full of life

and culture. New poetic genres developed there, as the epigram or the bucolic poetry: different times, different ways of living, different literary themes. The city-state and the duties of the citizen were not important anymore. Literature, following the new philosophical doctrines, turned itself to the individual and what affected him. Menander's comedy presents a vivid description of Athenian life in these times: lost children, people travelling around, personal issues over the public ones.

In short, for eight centuries literature evolved from a creation that tried to present explanations to men, teaching values essential for the life in society, to a more individual one, offering knowledge as well as leisure.

As it happened with the literature, so it happened with art. Though we can see it both with painting and sculpture, the last one offers us more examples of this development. With its scope on the human figure, either men or gods, it evolved from a static representation to the beauty of the movement: gods and goddesses, athletes, warriors, female figures they all represent the beauty of the human figure – proportionated, strong, healthy. Later, in the Hellenistic Age, there is a shift in this representation: statues like *The Dying Gaul*³ or *Laocoön* (Vatican Museum) depict the human suffering; the *Crouching Venus* (British Museum) together with some statuettes (which can also be seen in the British Museum), represent the daily life, combining deformity and ugliness with beauty.

In Rome, things evolved differently, as the Romans felt the need to stabilize their situation in Italy and the Mediterranean. Therefore, the first written literary work dates from the 3rd century BCE, and it is a translation of the Homeric *Odyssey* in the Saturnian metre. The Greek hexameter would be introduced later that century by Ennius in his *Annales*. The Punic Wars originated a hostile reaction against the Greeks and their culture. Some, like Cato, criticized the study of Greek writers and wanted to expel the philosophers from Rome, defending the Roman culture. Yet, Scipio and his circle changed this situation, pointing out the importance and refinement of Greek culture, namely Stoic philosophy. Latin literature and art followed the tracks of Greek culture. Yet, despite some tradition that pretends the Romans did nothing more than imitating the Greeks, Roman literature has an excellent level of originality.

One of the fields where this originality is noticed is mythology. Despite the acceptance of Greek gods and their legends, Romans developed their historical legends. And in the 1st century, authors like Vergil and Livy use this same mythology to celebrate Augustus, presenting him as a descendent of Venus and Mars, coming to establish peace and prosperity.

³ As many others, this statue is known to us through the Roman copy of the Hellenistic sculpture, that is in the Capitoline Museums (Rome).

Roman and Greek Studies

Greece is often referred to as the cradle of European civilization. But if the Romans spread the Greek culture in Europe, it arrived in several other places in the world, due to the European expansion since the 16th century. Together with Christianity, it reached distant regions that ancient Greeks never thought of. This is one of the reasons that justify the study of Greek and Roman civilizations. The knowledge of the past contributes to the understanding of the future. And when we talk about a civilization focused on the human being, not just as an individual, but also in its relationship with the rest of the surrounding world, this knowledge becomes even more relevant.

When we talk about the study of Greek and Roman civilizations, we are talking about two different things: the study itself and its reception. A description of what has been and still is the study of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome would be exhaustive and too long to do it here. Let us just enhance that it comprises several independent fields, like History, Linguistics, Literature, Philosophy or Religion, just to keep with the traditional ones. Gender studies, social studies, and many others that had developed in the last decades have a rich and interesting field for research in the so-called Classic Civilizations.

One aspect should be noted in this respect, and it concerns the way the Hellenistic Age has been considered. For a long time, scholars dedicated themselves to the Archaic and the Classical Ages. The period following Alexander conquests was thought as one of decadence, thus not representing the ideal of Greek measure and perfection. The second half of the 20th century marked a shift on this, and the amount of studies about the Hellenistic World is increasing.

As to the studies on the reception of Greek and Roman culture, we should point out some stages. And in these, I am going to start with the translation of the texts, though usually, it is not a subject included in this topic. The edition and translation of ancient texts is one of the most relevant aspects on the study of ancient Greece and Rome. The more accurate they are, the best will be our knowledge of the civilizations they describe. Yet, when we think of Chapman's or Dryden's translation, for instance, we realize how their poetic vein influenced their English version of Homer.

Clearly, the most usual studies on reception are those on how ancient authors influenced writers and poets. This influence can be found in the recurrence to the same topics or figures, the language, the influence of some philosophical doctrines, or adaptations of works or subjects. Going back to the early 16th century Portugal, we may mention a poem by António Ferreira – “Amor fugido de Mosco” (Fugitive Love by Moschus). As the title indicates, the author is closely following Moschus’ poem ‘The Runaway Love’. The Portuguese poet describes the same situation – Venus (or Cypris) concerned after Cupid (or Eros) run away. The child is depicted in the same way in both poems, though Ferreira insists on the mother’s suffering and concern.

The mention to classical figures – gods, heroes, either real or mythic – is a usual resource for several authors. Luís de Camões does it, in *The Lusíads*: gods, like Venus or Dionysus, appear in the poem as well as the mythic Odysseus or the very real Alexander and Trajan. But Camões did even more – he wrote his epic poem following the steps of Vergil and Homer and adding episodes that prove he knew other poets⁴.

Adaptations are one of the most interesting ways of reception of classical authors: it gives the possibility to revisit the theme, giving a different interpretation of it. This is what Eça de Queirós did in one of his short stories “Perfeiçãõ” (‘Perfection’). He goes back to the episode of Odysseus at Calypso’s island, in Book 5 of the *Odyssey* and retells it, stressing the reasons why the hero prefers going home to his wife Penelope to immortality with a goddess: “Therefore, I will endure with a patient mind all sufferings, with which the gods may charge me on the dark sea, to go back to my mortal Penelope, whom I command and comfort, reproach, and accuse, teach, humiliate and dazzle. It is for these things that I love and with a love that feeds on the wavering moods just as fire nourishes itself from the opposing winds!”⁵

In the same way, Maria Alberta Menéres wrote her *Ulisses* (Odysseus). As she points out in the beginning, she is adding some more to Odysseus’ adventures. Margaret Atwood (*The Penelopiad*) gives us an exciting interpretation of the *Odyssey*, through the eyes of Penelope. But it is not the same Penelope of the Homeric poem. Atwood’s Penelope, like a 20th or 21st-century woman, has a critical view on the story.

⁴ I am thinking about the episode of Adamastor, whose love for Thetis can be compared to the passion the Cyclops Polyphemus felt for Galatea and that is told to us by Theocritus.

⁵ The English translation from the Portuguese was done by me and reviewed by the late Simon Edwards.

Another way of reception is what Margaret Doody and, more recently, Steven Saylor do in their mystery novels. *Aristotle Detective* and the series *Roma Sub Rosa* depict the life, respectively, in Athens and Rome as faithfully as any historical novel. Also, Mary Renault's novel *The Persian Boy* offers a view of Alexander and his politics from the point of view of a young Persian. In this case, it worth mention how she kept most of the information given by the historians of Alexander, namely Ptolemy.

In this brief introduction, I tried to enhance the most significant aspects of Greek and Roman civilizations and how relevant they are for us in a cultural, historical and literary way.

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Section 1. Roman and Greek Studies

Cicero's personal omens: *Pater Patriae* and *Electus Diuorum*

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Abstract

Should the modern reader go through the works of Ancient Romans, he would be baffled by the several hundreds of omens narrated in those living words of the Roman World. Through those works written by and about men of whom we have more questions than answers, we are left with a series of omens, tell-tale of the belief that gods sent signs of what the future held regarding Rome and its leaders.

By the time of Cicero, and to his great distress, the Republic was in crisis as the consequences of the Empire's expansion were felt. The political changes of the Late Republic also resulted in the rise of personal omens regarding the future of the city's political leaders, omens showing their predestination to greatness or their looming death. Cicero was no exception.

This paper provides a brief symbolic analysis and explanation of those omens and, more importantly, uses those omens' constructed narrative to effort a better understanding of Cicero's image being conveyed, in which context, and by whom. Additionally, those omens are used as a case study for the dominant narrative constructions of Late Republican personal omens. Thus, the aim is to provide a better understanding of Cicero and his omens' place in his time, of how they are part of a broader phenomenon of late republican omens, and of how the operation and manipulation of popular opinion, political propaganda and Roman religion worked together to construct such portrayal of him.

Keywords: Cicero; Omens; Roman Religion; Roman Republic; Symbolic Thought

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So much of Rome, from Roman individual and collective behaviour to Roman literature and even Roman civic, familiar and individual daily life was built upon the idea that the world had an encompassing divine element. A powerful and vital, but extremely fragile, bond between Rome and its Gods. Gods who should be understood as citizen gods (Scheid, 1985, 51; Ando, 2008, 6; and Scheid, 2011), an integral part of the community they thus protected (*Cic. N.D.* 1.115–16). Religion and politics were inseparable in Ancient Rome.

So, that perceived importance of the bond between gods and Rome explains why Romans put so much emphasis on acquiring ritual and divinatory knowledge about the gods, and on using that growing and mutable knowledge to discern the state of the *pax deorum* (Ando, 2008, 14-17). Because of the importance of divination, ancient authors left records of several hundreds of omens, tell-tale of the belief gods sent signs of what the future held to the Urbe and its leaders, a phenomenon transversal to the varied periods of Roman history (Engels, 2007 and Wagner, 1898). Those omens are necessarily the byproduct of their time and the world they were part of. As Cicero said at the beginning of his *De Divinatione*: *gentem quidem nullam video neque tam humanam atque doctam neque tam immanem atque barbaram, quae non significari futura et a quibusdam intellegi praedicique posse censeat*² (*Cic. Div.* 1.2.). Romans put such importance into prodigies and omens that they were of the first events to be recorded by Romans, in the *Annales Maximi* (Hornblower and Spawforth, 1999, 98). In the very own legend of Rome's foundation, the disagreement regarding the founding location of the city was settled by Romulus and Remus through the taking of auspices, meaning, the consultation of the gods (*D.H.* 1.86; *Liv.* 1.6-7; *Plut. Rom.* 9).

In the works of Livy and several other authors who wrote about the early and mid-republican period, those omens were almost exclusively public prodigies, addressed to the whole community (Rasmussen, 2003; Engels, 2007, 745-768; Aldea Celada, 2010, 287). Yet, as the consequences the Empire's expansion were felt in every area of the Republican system, from the social and economic tissue to the political behaviour and dynamics of the elite, more non-civic/non-traditional forms of divination were brought into the public sphere (de Castro, 2017, 101-108). So, as the Republic starts to near its end, we notice an intensification of omens involving, for example, astrologers, dreams, and what is usually labelled inspired, or non-ritual, diviners (following the terminology and conceptualization of Bouché-Leclercq, 1879, 107). Accompanying this rise of non-ritual divination, there was also a gradual diminishing of public prodigies and a gradual but steady increase of omens regarding the future of the most important leaders of Rome (Santangelo, 2013, 235-272; Engels, 2007, 778-797; Aldea Celada, 2010, 287).

² Translation (by Falconer, 1923): Now I am aware of no people, however refined and learned or however savage and ignorant, which does not think that signs are given of future events, and that certain persons can recognize those signs and foretell events before they occur.

We have material and written evidence of the importance the elite put into influencing and courting the public opinion, and the vital role it played in the political behaviour of the elite (see, for example, Vanderbroeck, 1987; Brunt, 1988; Millar, 1998; Morstein-Marx, 2004; Rosillo-López, 2017). Besides the existence of a sort of “election guide” such as the *Commentariolum Petitionis* of Quintus Tullius Cicero, Marcus Tullius Cicero himself shows that reality by conveying the anxiety of the elite when it came to the “popular” element of Roman political life, writing that *nihil est incertius volgo, nihil obscurius voluntate hominum, nihil fallacius ratione tota comitiorum*³ (*Cic. Mur.* 36).

Cicero’s omens, just like other late-republican omens, need to be studied and analyzed by also taking under consideration that reality, and, thus, the possible use of omens to influence public opinion and, consequentially, to shape the construction process of medium and long-term collective memory (Wildfang, 1997; Vigourt, 2001, 377-462; Ripat, 2006; and de Castro, 2017, 112-166).

Therefore, from the Late Republic, we are left with several personal omens regarding the fate of men such as Marius, Silla, Pompey, Julius Caesar, Octavianus or Cicero himself (Engels, 2007, 544-714). Omens showing their predestination to power, to leadership, their *Felicitas* and divine support, or their looming deaths. This paper will focus on the omens recorded by ancient authors regarding Cicero. We shall attempt to understand not only what image of Cicero is conveyed by those omens and the possible political and propagandistic intents behind them, but also how those personal omens of Cicero need to be understood as a part of that wider trend in Late Republican omens.

Regarding Cicero’s birth, Plutarch writes that:

τεχθῆναι δὲ Κικέρωνα λέγουσιν ἀνωδύνως καὶ ἀπόνως λοχευθείσης αὐτοῦ τῆς μητρὸς ἡμέρᾳ τρίτῃ τῶν νέων Καλανδῶν, ἐν ἣ νῦν οἱ ἄρχοντες εὐχονται καὶ θύουσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἡγεμόνος. τῇ δὲ τίτθῃ φάσμα δοκεῖ γενέσθαι καὶ προειπεῖν ὡς ὄφελος μέγα πᾶσι Ῥωμαίοις ἐκτρεφούσῃ. ταῦτα δὲ ἄλλως ὀνειράτα καὶ φλύαρον εἶναι δοκοῦντα ταχέως αὐτὸς ἀπέδειξε μαντεῖαν ἀληθινὴν ἐν ἡλικίᾳ τοῦ μανθάνειν γενόμενος, δι’ εὐφυΐαν ἐκλάμπας καὶ λαβῶν ὄνομα καὶ δόξαν ἐν τοῖς παισίν, ὥστε τοὺς πατέρας αὐτῶν ἐπιφοιτᾶν τοῖς διδασκαλείοις ὄψει τε βουλομένους ἰδεῖν τὸν Κικέρωνα καὶ τὴν ὑμνουμένην αὐτοῦ περὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ὀξύτητα καὶ σύνεσιν ἱστορῆσαι, τοὺς δ’ ἀγροικότερους ὀργίζεσθαι τοῖς υἱέσιν ὀρῶντας ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς τὸν Κικέρωνα μέσον αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τιμῇ λαμβάνοντας.⁴ (*Plut. Cic.* 2.1-2)

³ Translation (by Clark, 1908): “Nothing is more uncertain than the common people, — nothing more obscure than men’s wishes, — nothing more treacherous than the whole nature of the comitia.”

⁴ Translation (by Perrin, 1919): It is said that Cicero was born, without travail or pain on the part of his mother, on the third day of the new Calends, the day on which at the present time the magistrates offer sacrifices and prayers for the health of the emperor. It would seem also that a phantom appeared to his nurse and foretold that her charge would be a great blessing to all the Romans. And although these presages were thought to be mere dreams and idle fancies, he soon showed them to be true prophecy; for when he was of an age for taking lessons, his natural talent shone out clear and he

So, it is said that Cicero's birth was relatively easy for his mother and that it occurred on the 3rd of January. Then, Plutarch also writes that a supernatural figure appeared to the baby's nurse, his caretaker, and told her that Cicero would be a great blessing for Rome. Additionally, Plutarch also writes about Cicero's prodigious level of intelligence, as it was showcased during his childhood and early education. The easiness of his birth and the impressive level of intelligence shown by Cicero from an early age are meant to establish how unique Cicero was, and how he was above regular children. This goes hand in hand with the heroization that was made of Roman leaders during the Late Republic and, especially, during the Empire, a heroization that, as Fernando Lozano Gómez has already argued in one of his papers, has clear parallels with the heroization of mythological super-human figures (Lozano Gómez, 2008, 159-162).

On the other hand, the message received by Cicero's nurse and the fact that his birth-day was on the same day that, during the empire, the magistrates would make offerings to the gods in the name of the emperor's well-being, establishes Cicero's predestination to leadership.

The uncovering and destruction of the Catiline conspiracy became the most defining moment of Cicero's career and resulted in his receipt of the title *Pater Patriae*. And yet, his execution of the conspirators without a proper trial allowed Clodius to prompt his exile in 58 BC and his posterior return in the following year.

It is only natural that such episode plays a pivotal role in the omens of Cicero, whether because it was one of the most defining moments of his career, or because Clodius' actions afterwards demanded some sort of positive propaganda supporting the actions of Cicero.

*nam ut illa omittam, visas nocturno tempore ab occidente faces ardoremque caeli, ut fulminum iactus, ut terrae motus relinquam, ut omittam cetera quae tam multa nobis consulibus facta sunt ut haec quae nunc fiunt canere di immortales viderentur, hoc certe, Quirites, quod sum dicturus neque praetermittendum neque relinquendum est.*⁵ (Cic. Catil. 3.18)

won name and fame among the boys, so that their fathers used to visit the schools in order to see Cicero with their own eyes and observe the quickness and intelligence in his studies for which he was extolled, though the ruder ones among them were angry at their sons when they saw them walking with Cicero placed in their midst as a mark of honour.

⁵ Translation (by Yonge, 1856): For to say nothing of those things, namely, the firebrands seen in the west in the night time, and the heat of the atmosphere,—to pass over the falling of thunderbolts and the earthquakes,—to say nothing of all the other portents which have taken place in such number during my consulship, that the immortal gods themselves have been seeming to predict what is now taking place; yet, at all events, this which I am about to mention, O Romans, must be neither passed over nor omitted.

This passage is from one of Cicero's speeches denouncing Catiline, and in it, we can see how Cicero mentions several negative prodigies that had happened throughout the year and that, according to him, were omens of Catiline's nefarious conspiracy. This alleged association between the prodigies and Catiline's conspiracy is also made by later authors such as Pliny⁶, Plutarch⁷ or Julius Obsequens⁸, so we can conclude that such interpretation offered by Cicero was adopted by the Roman elite and crystalized in Roman literary memory.

But the gods did not limit themselves to the announcement of the looming threat over the Republic, they also showed their support for Cicero, the electee of the gods to stop Catiline and his conspiracy against the community:

ταῦτα τοῦ Κικέρωνος διαποροῦντος γίνεται τι ταῖς γυναῖξι σημεῖον θουούσαις, ὁ γὰρ βωμός, ἤδη τοῦ πυρὸς κατακεκοιμησθαι δοκοῦντος, ἐκ τῆς τέφρας καὶ τῶν κεκαυμένων φλοιῶν φλόγα πολλὴν ἀνήκε καὶ λαμπράν. ὑφ' ἧς αἱ μὲν ἄλλαι διεπτοήθησαν, αἱ δ' ἱεραὶ παρθένοι τὴν τοῦ Κικέρωνος γυναῖκα Τερεντίαν ἐκέλευσαν ἢ τάχος χωρεῖν πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ κελεύειν οἷς ἔγνωκεν ἐγχειρεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος, ὡς μέγα πρὸς τε σωτηρίαν καὶ δόξαν αὐτῶ τῆς θεοῦ φῶς διδούσης.⁹ (Plut. Cic. 20.1)

So, this omen, narrated both by Plutarch and Cassius Dio¹⁰, allegedly occurred during the Catiline conspiracy and deepened the idea of divine protection and divine support that Cicero enjoyed as a soon to be saviour of the Republic, with the fire of Vesta, the very sacred flame of Rome, shooting up and burning brightly and highly, a prodigy taken by the Vestal Virgins, the ones responsible for keeping the fire burning at all times, as a sign from Vesta's support and protection of Cicero.

In addition to the existence of omens not so innocently favourable of Cicero's actions against the Catiline conspirators, there are also reported omens that were deemed as divine messages of Cicero's speedy return to Rome after his exile. One of them is written by Cicero himself in one of his simulated philosophical conversations about divination in the *De Divinatione*:

⁶ Plin. Nat. 2.137.

⁷ Plut. Cic. 14.4.

⁸ Obseq. 61.

⁹ Translation (by Perrin, 1919): While Cicero was in this perplexity, a sign was given to the women who were sacrificing. The altar, it seems, although the fire was already thought to have gone out, sent forth from the ashes and burnt bark upon it a great bright blaze. The rest of the women were terrified at this, but the sacred virgins bade Terentia the wife of Cicero go with all speed to her husband and tell him to carry out his resolutions in behalf of the country, since the goddess was giving him a great light on this path to safety and glory.

¹⁰ D.C. 37.35.3-4.

*Venio nunc ad tuum. audivi equidem ex te ipso, sed mihi saepius noster Sallustius narravit, cum in illa fuga nobis gloriosa, patriae calamitosa, in villa quadam campi Atinatensis maneres magnam [...] cum autem experrectus esses hora secunda fere, te sibi somnium narravisse: visum tibi esse, cum in locis solis maestus errares, C. Marius cum fascibus laureatis quaerere ex te, quid tristis esses, cumque tu te patria vi pulsum esse dixisses,prehendisse eum dextram tuam et bono animo te iussisse esse lictorique proximo tradidisse, ut te in monumentum suum deduceret, et dixisse in eo tibi salutem fore. tum et se exclamasse Sallustius narrat reditum tibi celerem et gloriosum paratum, et te ipsum visum somnio delectari.*¹¹ (Cic. Div. 1.59)

So, we are told that Gaius Marius appeared to Cicero in a dream, supporting him and sharing that he would soon return to Rome. The dream is interesting in terms of its potential political use as propaganda because Marius was some decades before the leader of the faction of the *populares*, a faction to which Clodius belonged, and opposed to the Optimates of Cicero. So, one of the historical leaders of the faction that, in a way, drove Cicero out of the city appears to him in a dream and lends him his support, blessing his return to Rome.

Moving on, the occurrences narrated by Plutarch in the following excerpt also support Cicero's return from exile:

ἐφ' οἷς ἀθυμῆσας ὥρμησεν ἐπὶ Βρεντέσιον, κάκειθεν εἰς Δυρράχιον ἀνέμῳ φορῶν περαιούμενος, ἀντιπνεύσαντος πελαγίου μεθ' ἡμέραν ἐπαλινδρόμησεν, εἴτ' αὖθις ἀνήχθη. λέγεται δὲ καὶ καταπλεύσαντος εἰς Δυρράχιον αὐτοῦ καὶ μέλλοντος ἀποβαίνειν σεισμόν τε τῆς γῆς καὶ σπασμόν ἅμα γενέσθαι τῆς θαλάττης. ἀφ' ὧν συνέβαλον οἱ μαντικοὶ μὴ μόνιμον αὐτῷ τὴν φυγὴν ἔσεσθαι: μεταβολῆς γὰρ εἶναι ταῦτα σημεῖα.¹² (Plut. Cic. 32.3)

¹¹ Translation (by Falconer, 1923): I come now to your dream. I heard it, of course, from you, but more frequently from our Sallustius. In the course of your banishment, which was glorious for us but disastrous to the State, you stopped for the night at a certain country-house in the plain of Atina. [...] But you awoke about the second hour and related your dream to him. In it you seemed to be wandering sadly about in solitary places when Gaius Marius, with his fasces wreathed in laurel, asked you why you were sad, and you replied that you had been driven from your country by violence. He then bade you be of good cheer, took you by the right hand, and delivered you to the nearest lictor to be conducted to his memorial temple, saying that there you should find safety. Sallustius thereupon, as he relates, cried out, 'a speedy and a glorious return awaits you.' He further states that you too seemed delighted at the dream.

¹² Translation (by Perrin, 1919): Disheartened at this treatment, he set out for Brundisium, and from there tried to cross to Dyrrhachium with a fair breeze, but since he met a counter-wind at sea he came back the next day, and then set sail again. It is said, too, that after he had put in at Dyrrhachium and was about to land, there was an earthquake accompanied by a violent convulsion of the sea. Wherefore the soothsayers conjectured that his exile would not be lasting, since these were signs of change

Through the natural world, regularly present in Roman omens (de Castro, 2017, 59-83), the gods themselves show their support for Cicero and, thus, condemn his exile and the actions of Clodius.

So, when we look at Cicero's omens collectively, we start to discern the transversality of a constructed narrative, which was the predestination of Cicero to power, his enjoyment of divine support and protection, and even divine sanction for his execution without a trial of Catiline's fellow conspirators.

Cicero's omens aren't the only ones to express such constructed narrative and imagery. Two excerpts of Plutarch are interesting in this regard:

οἱ μὲν οὖν περὶ τὸν Μάριον ἐν παρασκευαῖς ἦσαν: ὁ δὲ Σύλλας ἄγων ἕξ τάγματα τέλεια μετὰ τοῦ συνάρχοντος ἀπὸ Νώλης ἐκίνει, τὸν μὲν στρατὸν ὄρων πρόθυμον ὄντα χωρεῖν εὐθὺς ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν, ἐνδοιάζων δὲ τῇ γνώμῃ παρ' ἑαυτῷ καὶ δεδουκῶς τὸν κίνδυνον. ὁ δὲ μάντις Ποστούμιος θύσαντος αὐτοῦ καταμαθὼν τὰ σημεῖα, καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἀμφοτέρως τῷ Σύλλᾳ προτείνας, ἠξίου δεθῆναι καὶ φυλάττεσθαι μέχρι τῆς μάχης, ὡς, εἰ μὴ πάντα ταχὺ καὶ καλῶς αὐτῷ συντελεσθεῖη, τὴν ἐσχάτην δίκην ὑποσχεῖν βουλόμενος. λέγεται δὲ καὶ κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους αὐτῷ Σύλλᾳ φανῆναι θεὸν ἦν τιμῶσι Ῥωμαῖοι παρὰ Καππαδοκῶν μαθόντες, εἴτε δὴ Σελήνην οὔσαν εἴτε Ἀθηνᾶν εἴτε Ἐνυώ. ταύτην ὁ Σύλλας ἔδοξεν ἐπιστάσαν ἐγχειρίσαι κεραυνὸν αὐτῷ, καὶ τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἕκαστον ὀνομάζουσαν τῶν ἐκείνου βάλλειν κελεῦσαι, τοὺς δὲ πίπτειν βαλλομένους καὶ ἀφανίζεσθαι. θαρσήσας δὲ τῇ ὄψει καὶ φράσας τῷ συνάρχοντι μεθ' ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὴν Ῥώμην ἠγεῖτο.¹³ (Plut. Sull. 9.3-4)

ἀεὶ μὲν οὖν λέγονται φιλοβασιλικοὶ Μακεδόνες, τότε δ' ὡς ἐρείσματι κεκλασμένῳ πάντων ἅμα συμπεσόντων ἐγχειρίζοντες αὐτοὺς τῷ Αἰμιλίῳ δύο ἡμέραις ὅλης κύριον αὐτὸν κατέστησαν Μακεδονίας, καὶ δοκεῖ τοῦτο μαρτυρεῖν τοῖς εὐτυχία τινὶ τὰς πράξεις ἐκεῖνας γεγονέναι φάσκουσιν. ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὴν θυσίαν σύμπτωμα δαμόνιον ἦν ἐν Ἀμφιπόλει θύοντος τοῦ Αἰμιλίου καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐνηργημένων

¹³ Translation (by Perrin, 1916): Marius and his partisans, then, busied themselves with preparations; while Sulla, at the head of six full legions, moved with his colleague from Nola, his army, as he saw, being eager to march at once against the city, although he himself wavered in his own mind, and feared the danger. But after he had offered a sacrifice, Postumius the soothsayer learned what the omens were, and stretching out both hands to Sulla, begged that he might be bound and kept a prisoner until the battle, assuring him that he was willing to undergo the extremest penalty if all things did not speedily come to a good issue for him. It is said, also, that to Sulla himself there appeared in his dreams a goddess whom the Romans learned to worship from the Cappadocians, whether she is Luna, or Minerva, or Bellona. This goddess, as Sulla fancied, stood by his side and put into his hand a thunderbolt, and naming his enemies one by one, bade him smite them with it; and they were all smitten, and fell, and vanished away. Encouraged by the vision, he told it to his colleague, and at break of day led on towards Rome.

κεραυνὸς ἐνσκήψας εἰς τὸν βωμὸν ἐπέφλεξε καὶ συγκαθήγησε τὴν ἱερουργίαν.¹⁴
(Plut. Aem. 24.1)

In those two passages, it is present the notion that an individual could benefit from a special link with the gods, a special kind of divine protection and favour, and divine support for his actions (for example, for Sulla's march on Rome of the first excerpt). This idea (as exemplified by the second excerpt) existed long before the civil wars of the Late Republic and had also been present, for example, regarding Scipio Africanus (Clauss, 1999, 42) Pliny (*Nat.* 2.23) tells us that the people interpreted the appearance of the *Sidus Iulium* as a portent of Caesar's rise to godhood and that while Octavianus endorsed that interpretation in public, he saw it as a portent of his upcoming rise to power. This passage perfectly showcases the propagandistic use of omens and religion in Late Republican politics, because it showcases both the existence of different and competing interpretations of the same omen by different people and the political exploitation of *prodigia* in an attempt to influence popular opinion.

We can thereby conclude that the narrative constructed by Cicero's analyzed omens is part of a wider trend in the Late Republic divination and politics, where omens came to be used for conveying specific propagandistic religious messages, not because Romans did not believe in their religion less than Christians or Muslims do, but because the omens should be seen, for ancient romans, as a bridge between the chaotic and dangerous "real" world, and that imagined community of gods and men, where the divine elements, as citizen gods and protective deities of the city, took sides, were tribal and, ultimately, had a guiding hand in the historical events through their electees, their chosen ones.

¹⁴ Translation (by Perrin, 1918): Now, the Macedonians are always said to have been lovers of their kings, but at this time, feeling that their prop was shattered and all had fallen with it, they put themselves into the hands of Aemilius, and in two days made him master of all Macedonia. And this would seem to bear witness in favour of those who declare that these achievements of his were due to a rare good fortune. And still further, that which befell him at his sacrifice was a token of divine favour. When, namely, Aemilius was sacrificing in Amphipolis, and the sacred rites were begun, a thunderbolt darted down upon the altar, set it on fire, and consumed the sacrifice with it.

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Chapter IV

The Reception of Antiquity

Reception of Antiquity

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The heritage of classical civilisations and the dawn of Reception studies

It was during the 1960s and 1970s that Reception Theory first appeared, especially by the hand of German academic Hans-Robert Jauss⁴. Deeply connected to Literary Studies, Reception Theory postulated that the *reader*, and not only the *writer*, was responsible for producing meaning and significance, being an active part in the process of comprehension of the literary work as a whole⁵. Regarding the study of Antiquity, this theory was first applied by Charles Martindale, for whom it was imperative to understand Classical Studies in the light of Reception Theory⁶. After him, many authors addressed this vital issue, ascertaining the importance of numerous myths, texts, artistic manifestations, and historical events of Antiquity had over the centuries in different political, cultural and social moments⁷. The events of the past were able to produce meaning in the present, conveying messages carried with socio-political significance⁸.

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⁴ Vd. the seminal work *Toward an aesthetic of reception* (1978).

⁵ About Reception Theory, vd. Thompson 1993: 248-272.

⁶ Martindale 1993.

⁷ Vd., for instance, Hardwick 2003.

⁸ For a detailed exposure on Reception of Antiquity, vd. Lopes, Almeida, and Rosa, 2020.

Little by little, Reception of Antiquity became an integrant part of Literary and Historical studies in some universities. However, it is, even to this day, practically applied to ancient Greece and Rome. The fact is not surprising. Contrary to what happened with the civilisations and cultures that preceded the Greco-Roman world, especially Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Classic cities and empires, their myths and their narratives, never completely disappeared. The monuments and the ancient texts were preserved, copied, and studied over the succeeding centuries, and their cities, for the most part, remained visible to the interested visitor. Thus, the rich legacy of ancient Greece and Rome was always the subject of a reception which we might call *direct*. On the contrary, over time, Egypt and Mesopotamia succumbed to dust and shadow, their languages became unknown, their writings were forgotten; most of their buildings were buried. Until the archaeological discovery of these civilisations, during the 18th and 19th centuries, their reception was always, in fact, a reception of a reception – that is, a legacy received not in first-hand but by a third party.

Therefore, Reception Studies of Near Eastern antiquity are relatively recent and are gradually developing. In this chapter, we thus present a review on the subject, highlighting the ancient Oriental cultures, often relegated to the background, and how their heritage was perceived over time, from Antiquity itself, through the classical authors' accounts and the Old Testament, until the advent of Archaeology, during the 19th century. With this analysis, we hope to contribute to its understanding and to alert to its importance.

Classics fascination with the ancient Near East

The ancient Near East and its civilisations have always fascinated the mind of the so-called West, something we can observe, for instance, in the early interest of historians, philosophers and geographers. Egypt and Mesopotamia, among other civilisations and cultures, started being studied shortly after their demise and are still today the target of research and the subject of reception in various academic and non-academic vehicles. The first travellers' accounts on Pharaonic Egypt, for instance, came to us through the Greeks. Naturally, this did not happen by chance. During the Late Period (664 BC – c. 332 BC), several Greek colonies settled in Egypt⁹, being protected by the Egyptian kings. During the 26th dynasty (664 – 525 B.C.), for example, pharaohs recruited mostly Greek mercenaries¹⁰ for their armies. And many traders settled in Naucratis, in the Delta region, or near military garrisons, as Elephantine. In this scenario of privileged contacts between the Egyptian and the Greek worlds, Herodotus¹¹, the “traveller” *par excellence* of this period, settled in Egypt between 450 BC and 440 BC¹². But before he did so and as a preparation for his journey, he read everything the Greeks had previously written about the land of the pharaohs. Among them were the descriptions of Egypt contained in *Iliad* (chant IX) and *Odyssey* (chant IV) by Homer (8th century B.C.), and the references to this ancient country in two tragedies by Aeschylus (525 – 456 BC), namely *Prometheus* (in which Io takes refuge in Egypt to escape the hero) and *Suppliants* (in which the daughters of Danae flee from Egypt and from the matrimonial rites to which they would have to submit and seek refuge in Greece). Thus, after ten years of intense journeys and careful observation, Herodotus recounted in his *opus Histories* (book II and part of book III) the conclusions of his research expedition.

The most relevant information in his account concerns daily life, religion and, above all, the country itself, its geography, which Herodotus was able to “read” and narrate in an exemplary way. Information about popular religious festivals¹³, about the cult of animals and the “rational repetition” of the laws of nature, were Herodotus' most remarkable contributions to the knowledge of the ancient pharaohs' civilisation. Nonetheless, Herodotus did not limit himself to exploring ancient Egypt, focusing on the cultural potential of the Nilotic country. The historian from Halicarnassus went further on, likewise describing in great detail the contemporary civilisation of Mesopotamia. *Histories* also include an exhaustive account of one of the most important capitals of the land between the Euphrates and the Tiger rivers: Babylon¹⁴. About this sumptuous city, the historian's account narrates its architecture and its foundation, thoroughly characterising its *national*

⁹ Agut-Labordère 2012: 293 – 306.

¹⁰ Lopes 2018: 69.

¹¹ Coulon, Giovannelli-Jouanna, Kimmel-Clauzet 2013.

¹² This dating is relative, given that we do not have precise information about it.

¹³ Coulon 2013: 167-190.

¹⁴ Montero Fenollós 2012: 63-64.

god and its strange rites. Herodotus' was the first classical account of ancient Babylon, although he may have never been there.

But the classical accounts on the cultures of the Near East do not end here. A few years later, Plato¹⁵ (428 – 347 BC), for whom Egypt was eventually a place for experimenting with his conceptions, bequeathed to us the image of a country of mythical wisdom, where a group of superior individuals – the priests – transmitted, over the centuries, a science and knowledge that granted stability to the country and that was capable of defying time. Plato's was followed by other accounts, namely the long work organised by Diodorus Siculus¹⁶, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, who must have visited Egypt between 60 and 56 B.C. In his *Bibliotheca Historica*, this author presents a chronology of Egypt in which Osiris, the mythical king-god of this civilisation, is the first to be mentioned. Diodorus describes Egypt very well both from the geographical and from the naturalist points of view. A few years later, Strabo (25-19 BC), a Roman citizen with a Greek mother (he ended up writing in Greek), travelled through Egypt when the country was already a province of the Roman Empire. He voyaged in the best conditions, thanks to his friend, governor Aelius Gallus, and narrated his trip in the work entitled *Geography*. Strabo was also particularly sensitive to the theme of festivals and the cult of animals, of which he gives precise details.

Both Diodorus Siculus and Strabo mention Mesopotamia as well on their works. But whereas Strabo only refers to the land between the rivers in passing, Diodorus' account of the kings and queens of ancient Mesopotamia is one of the richest ever produced, having inspired many tragedies and literary novels over time. The author was inspired by *Persica*, the lost work of Ctesias the Cnidian, a Greek historian from the time of Persian Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II. During the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., he served in this ruler's court as a physician and composed a detailed account on the ancient cultures of Persia, Assyria and Babylonia, amongst others¹⁷. Diodorus thus collected the historical details of his predecessor, presenting a detailed version of the history of Babylonia and Assyria. Although the author managed to capture very well the aura of magnificence and authority of their ancient capitals, such as Nineveh and Babylon, the truth is that his account has little historical accuracy. It focuses on mythical and legendary figures, such as King Ninus and his consort Semiramis, "the most renowned of all women of whom we have any record"¹⁸, or the perfidious Assyrian monarch Sardanapalus. None of these sovereigns has existed, as they are composite figures based on ancient episodes and rulers. Notwithstanding, they convey a clear idea of what Greek and Roman authors thought about their Eastern predecessors. Many centuries later, this vital account inspired authors as significant as

¹⁵ McEvoy 1993.

¹⁶ Haziza 2012, and Chamoux 1995: 37-50.

¹⁷ Montero Fenollós 2012: 64, Asher-Greve 2004: 8-9, and Nichols 2008.

¹⁸ Diod. Sic. 2.4.

Voltaire¹⁹ or Lord Byron²⁰, who left an indelible mark on the history of the reception of ancient Mesopotamia.

Concerning the classical accounts on the ancient cultures of the Near East, we must also mention that during the 1st century of the Christian era, Plutarch (46-125 AD), who was Apollo's priest in Delphi, travelled through Egypt, and wrote his memoirs. Among other contributions, he described the myth of Osiris, a founding myth of the Egyptian civilisation, which is narrated in the work *De Iside et Osiride*²¹. Meanwhile, in the 4th century A.D., Christianity became predominant within the Roman empire of Byzantium, and, in 391, emperor Theodosius I decreed the closure of all non-Christian temples of the empire. As a result of this decree, the knowledge of hieroglyphic writing, which was taught by priests in Egyptian temples, was lost. Hence, in the 5th century A.D., there was no one left who could read or understand the texts of ancient Egypt anymore. Pharaonic Egypt was thus condemned to a "death" of several centuries.

A similar process occurred regarding the ancient writing system and languages spoken during millennia in ancient Mesopotamia. Throughout the Neo-Assyrian empire (10th – 7th centuries B.C.), Akkadian was gradually replaced by Aramaic as a spoken language. The cuneiform script, which served as a support to this Mesopotamian language, was consequently replaced by the Aramaic alphabet, being this process boosted by the imposition of Aramaic as the official and functional language of the state administration, after Cyrus' Babylon takeover in c. 539 BC²². Thus, even though there was no prohibition on the teaching of this ancient script, as it occurred regarding hieroglyphic writing, the truth is that the syllabic cuneiform writing system used in ancient Mesopotamia lost its strength and, with the demise of ancient Mesopotamian powers, ended up falling into oblivion²³. Hieroglyphic and Cuneiform would only be deciphered centuries later, bringing to the light of day the history (told in the *first person*) of these ancient civilisations...

¹⁹ Vd. the *opus Sémiramis*, a tragedy composed by Voltaire and published in 1749.

²⁰ Vd. the Lord Byron's play entitled *Sardanapalus*, composed in 1821.

²¹ Sauneron 1951: 49-51.

²² About cuneiform writing, vd. Finkel and Taylor 2015: especially 70-71.

²³ We must, however, draw a distinction between the different systems of cuneiform writing. As we know, Old Persian was in use during the time of the Achaemenid kings, such as Darius I, who used it profusely in Persepolis or Behistun. Cuneiform would only disappear completely during the 1st century AD. Over time, it would fall into disuse and became an illegible script until the efforts of deciphering carried out in the 19th century. About this subject, vd. Larsen 1996: 177-188 and Fagan 2007: 79-93.

The expeditions to the east and the legacy of the past

The accounts and descriptions which we have after this period, and up to the 15th century, are by no means comparable to those written by the ancient Greeks and Romans. With the Muslim conquest in 642 and until the end of the 13th century, Egypt was virtually a forgotten and unknown land to Europeans. Regarding Mesopotamia, and above all its last significant capital, Babylon, the foundation of the city of Seleucia by Seleucus I Nicator, c. 300 BC, and the transfer of power from the old Mesopotamian site to this new city, conceived as a symbol of the newly found Greco-Macedonian power (in opposition the ancient Babylonian eastern aura) led to the former's obliterating²⁴. Centuries later, with the construction and establishment of Baghdad by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, in 762, with its election as a new capital, its flourishing and the importance it acquired, the ancient capital of Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II submerged, being henceforth mistaken for the modern Muslim city.

During this period, it was mainly through the Bible that more or less legendary episodes about Egypt or Mesopotamia reached us. From Egypt, Europeans recalled the crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrews pursued by the pharaoh's army; Joseph sold by his brothers; Joseph at the Pharaoh's court; Moses being saved from the waters of the Nile by the daughter of Pharaoh, and many others. All these legends served to keep the memory of Egypt alive in the Middle Ages and later, during the Renaissance. Meanwhile, the discovery, in 1422, of a small brochure, the *Hieroglyphica* by Horapollon de Nilopolis, a work probably dated to the 3rd century A.D., which offers a symbolic meaning for the interpretation of some hieroglyphic characters, stimulated a whole series of new attempts at understanding of this ancient writing system during the following centuries²⁵, reviving the interest in Egyptian hieroglyphics, its pyramids, mummies and antiquities, which became one of the greatest attractions of the 17th century.

The first European traveller to the Levant region, in the 17th century, was Parisian Jean de Thévenot, who wrote his voyage account in the work entitled *Voyage en Levant*²⁶, printed in 1664. He crossed Syria and Persia and, in 1652, stopped in Egypt. He visited the Delta area/region, Cairo and Giza. Meanwhile, the appetite for Egyptian artefacts increased, and the first "thieves" of antiquities appeared, some of them at the service of European kings. Among these, we must highlight the Consul General of France in Egypt during the reign of Louis XIV, Benoit de Maillet, who, in addition to sending a set of looted antiquities to his king, published, in 1735, a great work where he intended to describe Egypt as a whole: *Description de l'Égypte, contenant plusieurs remarques curieuses sur la Géographie ancienne et moderne de ce pays, sur ses Monuments anciens, sur les Moeurs, les*

²⁴ Montero Fenollós 2012: 257.

²⁵ Wildish 2018.

²⁶ De Thévenot 1976.

Costumes, la Religion des habitants, sur le Gouvernement et le Commerce, sur les Animaux, les Arbres, les Plants, etc.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the Superior of the French Jesuit Mission in Cairo, Claude Sicard (1677 – 1726), an excellent Latinist and Hellenist, who spoke and wrote Arabic correctly, travelled throughout the Egyptian territory, reaching Aswan and Philae. His voyage was initially intended to describe the Exodus itinerary and the crossing of the Red Sea, but in time, with the discovery of Egyptian monuments, it ended up becoming a demand on the geography of ancient Egypt. In the aftermath of this travel, the first map of Egypt, from the Mediterranean shores to Aswan was elaborated, designed by Sicard himself, who promptly sent it to the king. In his account entitled *Parallèle géographique de l'ancienne Égypte et de l'Égypte moderne*, Sicard described 20 pyramids, 24 temple precincts and more than 50 tombs. It accurately situated Memphis and Thebes and the most remarkable temples of Egypt, namely Elephantine, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Esna, Dendera.

At the same time, these travellers crossed the East and Egypt; the first attempts to decipher hieroglyphic writing also occurred²⁷. These efforts began with Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher (1602 – 1680), followed by scholars such as Englishman J. Wilkins (1614 – 1672), English bishop William Warbuton (1698 – 1779), French orientalist Charles Joseph de Guignes (1721 – 1800), German theologian and orientalist Paul-Ernst Jablonsky (1693 – 1757), German geographer Carsten Niebuhr (1733 – 1815) and Danish scholar Jorgen Zoega (1755 – 1809). But the first significant successes came from Frenchman J. J. Barthélemy (1716 – 1795), and, after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, from the French orientalist Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758 – 1838), from the Swedish diplomat Johan David Akerblad (1763 – 1819) and the English physicist Thomas Young (1773 – 1829). They were the precursors of renowned Champollion.

However, an aspect was truly decisive and vital for the birth of Egyptology – the French expedition to Egypt. When, on July 1, 1798, Napoleon disembarked with his troops in Alexandria, accompanied by 167 “learned men”²⁸, headed by Baron Dominique Vivant Denon, painter, engraver and writer, and by Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier, the great animator of the scientific expedition, founder of the Cairo Library and author of the historical preface to the work *Description de l'Égypte*, the old dream of Alexander the Great came, once again, to light. This commission of French wise men (naturalists, historians, botanists, cartographers, “antiquarians”, engineers, geologists, astronomers, technicians, artists, etc.), designated as “Commission des Sciences et des Arts” of the expedition to Egypt, aimed to provide a detailed description of the country and its monuments. This task was completed in a short period of two years, despite the enormous difficulties faced. Members included, among others, the mathematician and physicist Gaspard Monge, the

²⁷ Farout 2016.

²⁸ Vd. Solé 2006 and 2001.

chemist Claude Louis Berthollet (together, the two ran the Institute of Egypt), the zoologist Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, the doctor Desgenettes, the botanist Alire Raffeneau-Delile, the economist Jean-Baptiste Say, engineer Michel-Ange Lancret, the geographer Costas, the surgeon Larrey, the mineralogist Déodat de Dolomie, the architect Charles Louis Balzac, the orientalist Jaubert, the painter André Dutertre, the designer Redouté or the polyvalent genius, engineer Nicolas Conté, who invented the charcoal pencil.

During the campaigns, an officer of Napoleon, Lieutenant Pierre-François Bouchard found in Rosetta, in the year 1799, a block of black granodiorite, which was named the “Rosetta Stone”. This block had the same text written in demotic Egyptian, in Greek and Egyptian hieroglyphs. Due to the Capitulation Treaty, signed in 1801, it was eventually given to the British authorities (and to *The British Museum*), although several copies were distributed to scientists across Europe so they could study it and try to decipher hieroglyphic writing. Among these European scholars was Jean-François Champollion²⁹ (1790 – 1832), who, in 1822, was responsible for the birth of Egyptology with the *Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l’Alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques employé par les Egyptiens pour inscrire sur les monuments les titres, nom set surnoms des souverains grecs et romains*, where he finally presented the deciphering of hieroglyphic writing. Only two years later, Champollion presented a complete summary of his findings on the hieroglyphic writing system in his *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens Egyptiens*.

In the meantime, the results of the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt were published in Paris, between 1809 and 1822, under the title *Description de l’Egypte - recueil des Observations et des Recherches qui ont été faites en Egypte pendant l’expédition de l’armée française, publié par les ordres de S.M. L’Empereur Napoléon*. In total, the work had 9 volumes of text and 11 of illustrations in large format. This major scholarly effort, with its drawings and descriptions, must be considered the basis of Egyptology.

We should ask now, and what about Mesopotamia? As it is often the case with ancient civilisations, we may say that the process of its physical and linguistic discovery was similar to that of Egypt. If it is true that the deciphering of hieroglyphic writing resulted from the finding of the Rosetta Stone, it is also true that the understanding of cuneiform writing was due to the discovery of the so-called Behistun rock. But before this vital moment for the establishment of Assyriology occurred, a whole lot of recognition travels was undertaken. It all started during the 16th and 17th centuries, with Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Danish and English travellers, many of them simple curious, other missionaries or diplomats whose aim was to carry out missions on the ground, in the Near East. The travellers³⁰ thus

²⁹ Solé 2012.

³⁰ About this subject, vd. Invernizzi 2005.

comprised a group of different men³¹ who, in the course of their service, explored the antiquities of the past and reported them in writing.

Flooded with images from huge and sumptuous cities, where gold shone, and the impossible was possible, from powerful kings and despotic queens, travellers went in search of the romanticism of Antiquity. But above the dream of grandness bequeathed by the classics, was the *categorical* account of the Old Testament. Travellers looked for tangible vestiges of the biblical word *in situ* and observed at the landscape trying to identify the place where the Lions' Den of prophet Daniel was located, the dwellings of Samson, the palace of the perfidious Nebuchadnezzar II and, of course, the mythical tower of Babel. One of the first to describe it was German botanist Leonard Rauwolff, who travelled to the Tigris and the Euphrates during 1574. He wrote an account named *Aigentliche Beschreibung der Raiß inn die Morgenländerin*, published in 1582, where he recognised the importance of ancient Mesopotamian ruins, and described his walks on the Nebi Yunus mound in Nineveh, and around what he identified as the Tower of Babel, «which the children of Noah began to build up to heaven»³². Like so many others before³³ and after him, the author mistook the tower for another monument, in the case the ruins of the ancient ziggurat of Aqarquf.

A similar error was usually made regarding the location of the ancient city of Babylon. During Modern age, Baghdad's sumptuousness, importance and cosmopolitanism led to its common identification with ancient Babylon. John Eldred, for instance, an English merchant who travelled from Aleppo to Bagdad, during 1583, spoke about the «New Babylon», stating that many old ruins were still visible on site³⁴. Like Portuguese soldier Nicolau de Orta Rebelo³⁵, who, at the beginning of the 17th century, described in great detail the tower of Babel (which was actually Aqarquf) – and whose description is one of the first to detail the Mesopotamian architectural apparatus³⁶ – Eldred also made thorough comments on the sun-dried bricks used in the construction he observed (also Aqarquf) and its layers of matting.

³¹ Curiously, the first known traveller in the Near East to write his memoirs was actually a woman – the Galician nun Egeria, who, during the 4th century, looked for traces of some biblical patriarchs in Palestine (Montero Fenollós 2011: 31-32 and Carreira 1980: 38).

³² Fagan 2007: 26.

³³ We must also mention the rabbi Benjamin of Tudela from Saragossa, who identified it as the ruins of Birs Nimrud during the 12th century.

³⁴ His account (*The voyage of M. John Eldred to Tripolis in Syria by sea, and from thence by land and river to Babylon, and Balsara, Anno 1583*) is reproduced in English writer Richard Hakluyt's book entitled *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, from 1589.

³⁵ Nicolau de Orta Rebelo's account was only printed in 1972 by Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão. It is entitled *Un Voyageur portugais en Perse au début du XVIIe siècle*.

³⁶ Carreira 1985.

Years later, two European travellers presented their visions on the ancient ruins of Mesopotamia. The essential accounts of Italian nobleman Pietro della Valle and Spanish ambassador of Felipe II to the Shah of Persia, García de Silva y Figueroa³⁷, are among the most comprehensive and meticulous, due to their descriptions of the ancient monuments, the land's geography, and also of the ancient writing. Valle³⁸, who voyaged through the ancient Near East from 1614 to 1626, copied various cuneiform inscriptions from Nineveh bricks and Persepolis monumental inscriptions. He was the first to bring back to Europe a collection of antiquities, among which figured «square bricks inscribed with an unknown script»³⁹ which aroused great interest.

The legacy of these 16th and 17th travellers, which contained the first impressions and experiences *in situ*, was followed, during the 18th and 19th centuries, by true government expeditions of recognition and search for treasures. Therefore, having in mind his fame as a supporter of the arts and science, King Frederick V of Denmark sponsored one of the first team voyages to the East, from 1761 to 1767. The group was composed of five members, which had the mission of observing and describing their findings as well as of collecting «valuable oriental manuscripts»⁴⁰. The mission claimed the lives of many of them. Carsten Niehbur, a German-born in 1733, not only survived as he spent many months copying inscriptions in Persepolis and Behistun after he had visited Egypt and Arabia⁴¹. His contribute entitled *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und den umliegenden Ländern* (1774 – 1778) was fundamental for the later decipherment of Cuneiform. In fact, the Behistun rock, dated to the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius I (c. 550 – 486 BC), contains the same monumental inscription in three different languages (Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian Babylonian) all using a cuneiform script. Future studies would thus be based on his first conclusions.

Besides the expeditions, at the beginning of the 19th century, driven by the success of the previous Napoleon Bonaparte's excursion, the governments and museums sought to explore the *virgin* soil of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. Thus, while appointed as a British resident in Bagdad (1908) to defend the East India Company's interests, diplomat Claudius Rich spent much time collecting manuscripts, coins and different antiquities, from different historical periods. His collection would later form the nucleus of Mesopotamian antiquities of *The British Museum*. He also produced the first systematic map of Babylon, which he visited in 1811, and even an accurate map of the mounds of

³⁷ About this traveller, vd. Códoba 2005 and Caramelo 2011. Figueroa travelled through these regions from 1614 to 1624.

³⁸ Vd. Invernizzi 2010.

³⁹ Fagan 2007: 31.

⁴⁰ *Idem*: 34.

⁴¹ Caramelo 2007: 286.

Nineveh⁴², whose measurements he laid out in 1820⁴³. The results of his research time in the East were published in different *Memoirs* over the years⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, several advances were being made in deciphering cuneiform writing. The story of this process, which culminated in 1857, the year the deciphering was officially declared and the foundation of a new scientific discipline – Assyriology – occurred, was quite long and arduous. Several scholars contributed to it. It all started in 1611, with the publication of *Relaçam em que se tratam as Guerras e grandes victorias que alcançou o grãde Rey da Persia Xá Abbas do grão Turco Mahometo...*, the voyage account of Portuguese diplomat António de Gouveia. Years before Valle or Figueroa, he was the first European to mention and identify⁴⁵ a strangely shaped form of a script used in the walls that decorated Persepolis. After that, many would look into Cuneiform attempting to study it, but the real results would only come after the transcription of Behistun inscription.

Several names must be cited as involved in this long process of understanding, as the German philologist George Grotefend, the French-German scholar Julius Oppert, the English photographer William Henry Talbot, and the Irish clergy Edward Hincks⁴⁶. They all had a significant impact on the decipherment of Cuneiform. But the name which will forever remain connected with this genius achievement is that of an Englishman previously at the service of the Eastern India Company, Henry Rawlinson. Based on the writings of the Behistun inscription, after arriving at a decent translation of the Old Persian text and, recognising that, unlike this, the inscription in Akkadian was syllabic, Rawlinson went on to decipher it has achieved promising results. In the year of 1857, both Rawlinson, Hincks, Talbot and Oppert have proposed a challenge by the Royal Asiatic Society – to translate a piece of an inscription by Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I. Having accepted it, they all arrived at similar translations. Then and there, Cuneiform was declared deciphered.

⁴² Larsen 1996: 9.

⁴³ The first actual map of Nineveh was produced by Carsten Niehbur, although the information was scarce.

⁴⁴ In 1813, was released a *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon* in the Viennese journal *Fundgraben des Orients*; in 1818 appeared a *Second Memoir on Babylon*; after his death, in 1836, was released the *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the site of Ancient Nineveh*.

⁴⁵ Carreira 1980: 98.

⁴⁶ Caramelo 2007: 288.

In time, the first excavations on the ground would follow, and the era of Archaeology would begin. The history of the reception of Near Eastern antiquity is long, slow and full of exquisite episodes. This chapter presents some contributions to the study of this reception, which include, in addition to Egypt, the reception of the Palestine region, and Classical mythology. As we know, modern and contemporary art and literature were deeply inspired by all these accounts and discoveries. Classical and Near Eastern Antiquity thus served as a vehicle for numerous iconographic and poetic creations and contributions. A brief glimpse of these contributions is presented henceforth by the hand of several authors, from different academic spheres.

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Section 1. Ancient Egypt Reception Studies

Paper Two

The Café Oriental: Egypt in Portugal at the Beginning of the XX Century

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Abstract

In the 1920s, the discovery of the tomb of King *Tutankhamun* started a cultural phenomenon that gripped the world's imagination. Designs and motifs inspired in Ancient Egypt became popular worldwide and the city of *Guimarães*, in the North of Portugal, was not an exception.

In 1925 the *Café Oriental* opened its doors. Replicating in its interior a refined Egyptian ambience with furniture, murals, sculptures and architectural details from ancient Egyptian temples and palaces, the *Café Oriental* was in the centre of *Guimarães*'s cultural life until its destruction in the 1960s.

Using photographic glass plates dated from the 1920s as well as local newspapers and the remaining furniture, the aim of this paper is to introduce an initial discussion about the context, influences and meaning of few selected iconographic elements of the *Café Oriental*.

Keywords: Reception of Antiquity; Ancient Egypt; Café Oriental

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1. Introduction

Ancient Egypt has always inspired interest and caught the imagination of the public. It is, however, on the XIX century, after the publication of works such as the “Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt”, by *Vivant Denon* (1802) and as the “Description of Egypt” (1809-1829), by the scholars and scientists who accompanied *Napoleon Bonaparte’s* expedition to Egypt, that Egyptomania is characterised as a widespread artistic movement (Bastos and Santos 2004, 61). It assumes various forms of expression ranging from fashion to theatre, literature and architecture – and this just to name a few. Portugal was not excluded from the effects of this phenomenon, and during the XIX century, there were occasional expressions of influences in furniture, sculpture and theatre.³

It is, however, in the XX century, with the discovery of King *Tutankhamun’s* tomb in 1922, and later that of Queen *Hetepheres*, in early 1925, that the phenomenon takes on unprecedented proportions. In Portugal, highlighted Egypt in the local press⁴ and other forms of expression gain momentum. The topic of our research is perhaps one of the most significant examples.

2. The *Café Oriental*

In December of 1925, the *Café Oriental* opened its doors in *Guimarães*, a city located in the North of Portugal. This *Café* was inspired by Ancient Egypt, from its architecture to its decoration and furniture. Unfortunately, in 1968, the site was destroyed to make way for a bank (Teixeira, Fernando 2008, 129). Luckily for us, a small collection of photographic glass plates dated from 1925 to 1928, belonging to the *A Muralha – Guimarães’s Association for the Heritage Defense*⁵, allows us a glimpse of how this place looked. Equally important is an explanatory description possibly written by the head of the design and decoration of the *Café*, Captain *Pina Guimarães*, and all the newspaper articles of the time. In the architecture, columns and doors were inspired in those of the *Karnak* complex and the temple of *Medinet Habu*. For example, the columns were meant to be proportionally reduced copies of those found in the hypostyle hall of *Karnak*. The decoration consisted of two copies of statues, one supposedly of *Ramesses II* and another of Princess *Nofret*. The ceiling replicated elements that are found in tombs and temples and was painted in blue with stars, depicting other common symbols of Egyptian art. The decoration also featured

³ For a series of expressions of this phenomenon in Portugal, from the XIX century to the 1930’s, see Bastos, Celina, and Santos, Rui. 2004. “Egiptomania em Portugal: Das artes de cena à decoração de interiores.” *Margens e Confluências* 7/8: 61-71.

⁴ About the coverage of the discovery of the tomb of *Tutankhamun* by the Portuguese press, as well as the first Portuguese literary and academic works about Ancient Egypt, see Sales, José das Candeias and Mota, Susana. 2018. “Tutankhamon em Portugal (1923-1926): Da superstição ao ensaio académico ou os percursos que vão da «maldição da múmia» ao Hino a Aton.” *História* 8, no. 2: 221-252.

⁵

a profusion of small and large panels covering the entire walls of the *Café*, some of them we will discuss here later.⁶

The furniture created the rest of the atmosphere, also inspired by Ancient Egypt, and recreated by a local company specialised in revivals and historical styles, *Marcenaria Neves e C.^a Lda.* (Bastos 2005, 165-167). Today, only a table and a pair of chairs remain preserved at the *Alberto Sampaio Museum*.⁷

A few questions remain unanswered, as who was responsible for the copies of the statues or, even more important, what was the reason for choosing the theme of Ancient Egypt for the decoration of the *Café*. The most likely hypothesis is that the choice is due to the repercussion of the discovery of King *Tutankhamun*'s tomb in 1922.

It is known that the primary theoretical reference used by *Pina Guimarães* was the book "Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité: L'Égypte"⁸, published in 1882. Knowing this reference is particularly important because it allows us to compare the illustrations in the book with their reproductions at the *Café*, which we can access through the photographs.

One of our questions was how he would have had access to this book. Fortunately, a copy of the French first edition was identified in the library of the *Martins Sarmiento Society*. This institution was created in 1881 and at the time of the construction of the *Café* occupied a crucial cultural role in the life of *Guimarães* city, being a reference centre for researchers. There are reasons to believe that the volume in their library was the very same used by *Pina Guimarães*, not only because of the year of the edition but also because the pages containing the plates with the motifs corresponding to the *Café*'s three prominent murals have been meticulously removed and then reassembled again on the book.

⁶ *Café Oriental: Esboço Explicativo*. Guimarães: 1925.

⁷ Inventory numbers MAS M73, M74 and M75.

⁸ Perrot, Georges and Chipiez, Charles. 1884. *Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité: Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie Mineure, Grèce, Étrurie, Rome*, Volume 1: *L'Égypte*. Paris: Librairie Hachette et C^{ie}.

3. The Local Press and the Café

In 1925 and early 1926, the opening of the *Café Oriental* was celebrated by all the local press.

“O Commercio de Guimarães” praised the *Café* as an establishment that honoured and exalted the city of *Guimarães*, being described as a source of pride and a synonym for progress.⁹ The newspaper “A Razão”, in its turn, described the *Café* as an “enhancement”, that added a cosmopolitan air and a well-deserved meeting place for the city.¹⁰ “A Ortiga”, praised it as one of the best *Cafés* in the country and the first of its kind.¹¹ In this case, they were entirely accurate, considering that in 1937, inspired by the *Café Oriental*, another place would open in the city of *Braga*, with the same style, although with a much lower profusion of decorative variety.

All local publications extol the *Café Oriental’s* artistic conception in one way or another, associating it with the elegance of the establishment. “A Razão” comments “the perfect reproductions of our art, which still haunts us today, and which has lost its cultivators so many thousands of years ago.”¹² We highlight the fact that Ancient Egyptian art is considered as “ours” in this article. “A Ortiga”, on the other hand, emphasises the attention to “the smallest details, in rare and beautiful style, through which pass some thousands of centuries of Egyptian history”.¹³

Although it seems that it aims to make us mesmerised by the illusion of a recreated past in all its splendour, the *Café* brings two elements that break this illusion: A panel with the ruins of the *Karnak* temple and another with the Sphinx partially buried by the sands. These images depict how those monuments were found during the XIX century, and it’s almost as if the decoration is presented as a double recession of antiquity...

Before moving on to the analysis of the elements, we bring excerpts from a chronicle published in the newspaper “O Comércio do Porto”¹⁴. On it the decoration is described as “faithful to the characteristics of the Nile’s art, giving the figures the rigidity of frontality, the indigence of vital dynamism and the unpleasant absence of physiognomic expression.” At the same time, some of the scenes are described as containing “some huge and bizarre figures”. It presents a view that contrasts with the ode to the elegance and sophistication of the decoration, which appeared in the local press at the time of the inauguration of the *Café*.

⁹ “Inauguração do Café ‘Oriental’: Um Estabelecimento que Honra e Engrandece a Nossa Terra!”. *O Commercio de Guimarães*, 18 December, 1925.

¹⁰ “Um Melhoramento”. *A Razão*, 24 December, 1925.

¹¹ “Inauguração do Café Oriental”. *A Ortiga*, 25 December, 1925.

¹² “Um Melhoramento”. *A Razão*, 24 December, 1925. All news translations are the authors’.

¹³ “Inauguração do Café Oriental”. *A Ortiga*, 25 December, 1925.

¹⁴ Dionísio, José Sant’anna, 1926. “Cenários Egípcios”. *O Comércio do Porto*, 11 September, 1926.

However, despite the strangeness of the motifs, in its manner, the author complements the artistic execution by saying that he would “gladly suspect not be writing from a *Minho* hamlet tavern, but from a tourist bar in Cairo, or perhaps even better, from a room at the British Museum in London”.

4. The Murals

The iconographic element is key to any ancient Egyptian interior. Such can be seen both in tombs – KV 62 is a fine example¹⁵ – or any temple or palace that either still stands today or was surveyed by archaeological missions and then disappeared, as was the case of the magnificently decorated pavements of the Central Palace in *Amarna*.¹⁶ This said it is curious the grasp that the ones who conceived the *Café* had on the Egyptian mind. From floor to ceiling, the space was covered in its totality, as an Egyptian interior certainly might have been designed in the past.

The proposed analysis that follows intends to frame the murals in their context inside the *Café* and understand the source materials that inspired their recreation.

¹⁵ The tomb of king *Tutankhamun* in the Valley of the Kings.

¹⁶ Petrie 1894, 8.

4.1 The Front Mural

This mural (Figure 1) portrays the Giza *plateau* with the pyramids and the Sphinx.



Figure I – The Front Mural

© A Muralha

The first objective was to search for an image similar to this one on the *Perrot and Chipiez's* book. None could be stated as a perfect or even a close match to the entire mural, yet, one is found of the Sphinx and one of the pyramids in the distance, that might have sparked the idea for this wall.¹⁷

For the entire scene, however, other sources were positively viewed, for relative placements and dimensions of these mega-structures were not present in the referred book. Looking at it, and considering all the possible available sources around 1924-25, one would have an immense portfolio of possibilities. The most immediate association would have to be made with the captions and drawings made by David Roberts.¹⁸ The angle of the display is undoubtedly not a Roberts visual caption. After reviewing his known portfolio, none of the paintings is even a close match, they are either of monuments by themselves or with several individuals represented, and this mural had a single man on a camel, as visible on Figure II.

¹⁷ Perrot and Chipiez 1884, 243.

¹⁸ See Roberts, David, 1994.



Figure II – The Front Mural, close up
© A Muralha

The Sphinx has a gruesome appearance, and the pyramids present apparent damages, aspects that seem to portray a more real image as a basis, not tampered by the romance of a painting.

We advance here that the departure point for this mural must have been primarily a photograph or a simple black and white drawing, of unknown origin, which gave the overall scene, with a possible aid of paintings – a David Roberts or other, which can explain the colours that one can extrapolate existed, from intensity variations of the different shades of grey on the glass picture of the *Café*.

4.2 The Left Mural

On the left murals, we are transported to a completely different place, from the Giza *Plateau* to the Temple of *Seti I*, in *Abydos*, inside the Temple of Millions of Years, New Kingdom.

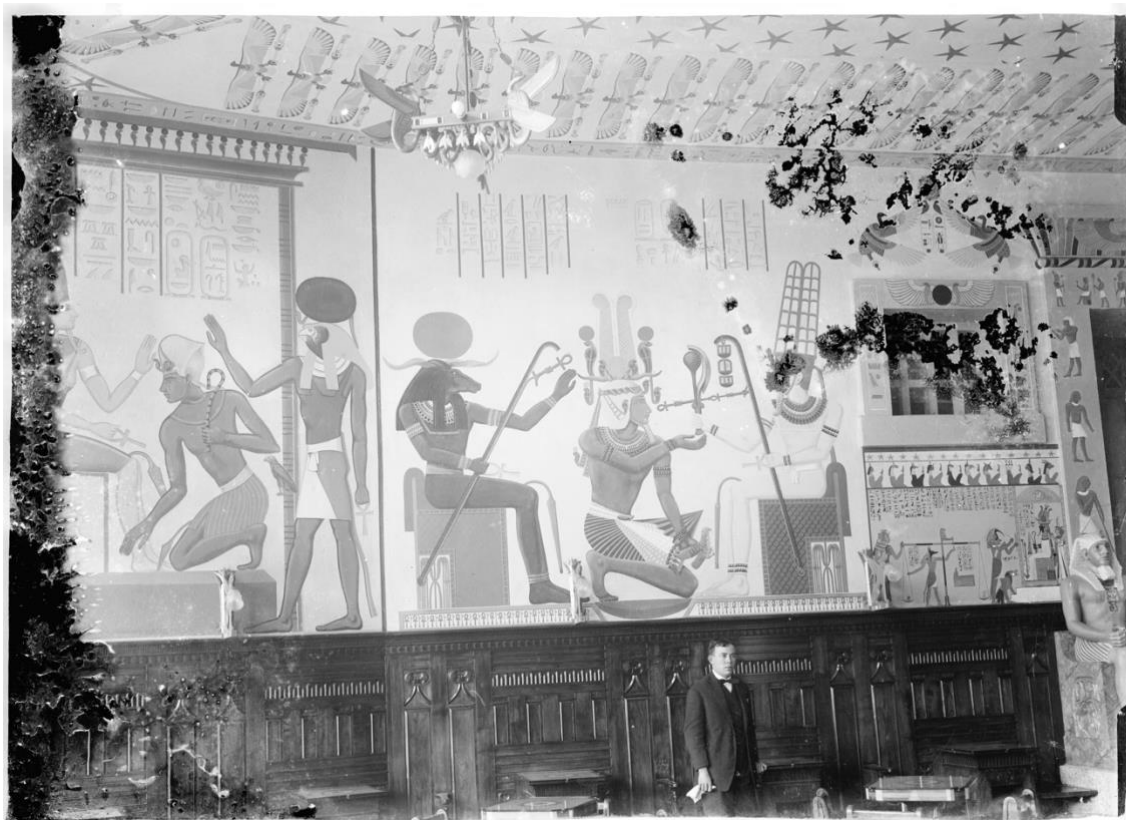


Figure III – The Left Murals

© A Muralha

We will focus on the middle scene, for it is complete.






Returning to the book “*Histoire de l’Art dans l’Antiquité: Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie Mineure, Grèce, Étrurie, Rome*”, a drawing of this scene, in black and white, is found.¹⁹

It is a representation of the wall between the sanctuaries of *Re-Horachty* and *Amun-Re*, on the Second Hypostyle Hall, upper scene, of *Seti I*’s Temple.²⁰

Regarding the hieroglyphic inscriptions and the rigour of the copy, we will compare the mural with the image the book of *Perrot* and *Chipiez* and the plate of Sir Alan Gardiner’s. It is notable that although the *Perrot* and *Chipiez* image is presented with much more written information than that of Gardiner’s – probably due to a difference of the time on each one was drawn – both appear to have the same inscriptions; the latter has a more

¹⁹ Perrot and Chipiez 1884, 395.

²⁰ Gardiner 1958, Plate 22.

extensive caption. The curious aspect is that in the mural several “new signs”, i. e. signs not belonging to the Egyptian grammar, appear, a reflex of creative freedom. Other hieroglyphs were substituted, as it is visible with the birds. On the first column from the left, a  was replaced for a , as a  had the same fate, , on the sixth column. But macroscopically, the impact of the writings, in general, and the image is consistent, of note, it is visible the same number of columns and the two cartouches of *Seti I* and the inscription below , exactly copied from the *Perrot* and *Chipiez* image.

Regarding the image itself, *Khnum*, *Seti* and *Amun*, some differences can be easily noted. Perhaps the most significant is the one between the crowns of *Amun*. The size is unequal, and the *Café* double feathers crown does not have 14 palettes each.

Seti is wearing a Swty crown (commonly referred to as two feathers or double feathers crown), very well represented on the mural of the *Café*. The most exciting aspect of the discrepancy of the king is the difference between the size of the bird rxyt that he is holding, and that of the book, being the latter significantly smaller.

Khnum is very well represented, if not for the strange detail of the sun-disk slightly dislocation to the right, which is a quite curious disregard for detail for a painter to make. Beautifully detailed are the thrones of both gods, the characteristics of the materials and the presence of cushions are visible. The section for the representation of the semA-tAwy is also very well drawn.

Lastly, the placement of the central image in relation to the inscriptions on top is out of place, which is probably a result of the resizing of the image, from paper to mural.

The mural is not a complete representation of the bas-relief of *Abydos*, but it is a reasonably good copy of the font used.

4.3 The Right Mural

The murals on the right have, as a central focus, a representation of a scene, also dated from the New Kingdom, with the original relief found at the *Ramesseum*, in *Luxor*. It shows *Ramesses II*, in his “victory over the *Cheta* people and the Siege of Dapur”, a military campaign with intents to clear a path and restore control over Syria.²¹

²¹ Kenneth Kitchen 1998, 56.



Figure IV – The Right Murals

© A Muralha

In “*Histoire de l’Art dans l’Antiquité: Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie Mineure, Grèce, Étrurie, Rome*” we can find a drawing of this scene, which indicates that the mural is, partially, based on it.²²We will return to this point *infra*.

Starting with the inscriptions, they were heavily ignored. Remains the one behind the king and the one above the horses.

Comparing the inscriptions is visible that the one behind *Ramesses II* was not copied from this image or were severely altered. The main differences are found on the second line, the omission of 𓆎 before 𓆑 and at the end, on the addition of 𓆎 . This last aspect is particularly interesting, for it suggests the use of another font, as other details also suggest. As for the relative position in the mural, both inscriptions are in the right place.

Iconographically, there is another exciting feature that does not belong on this mural but does on another one of *Ramesses II*. The lion on the wheel of the chariot does not exist either on the real bas-relief or on the figure from *Perrot and Chipiez*.

Also, the arrow of the king, in an unusual representation, has been launched from the bow on the *Café* mural, creating a visual feeling of movement, but it is not accurate. Neither on

²² Perrot and Chipiez 1884, 277.

the *Ramesseum* nor the book. Regarding the other elements of the *mural*, they follow almost to the dot the original image.

5. Some Considerations on Colours and Details

The simple existence of colours on these murals provides us with another exciting clue, as well as details such as the lion on the wheel of the chariot or the difference between inscriptions on the *Ramesseum* mural.

The book of *Perrot* and *Chipiez* was mainly in black and white with only eight coloured plates, none of them of the chosen murals and their details were, at best, crude.²³

So, it calls to reason that this was not the only book, or material, that served as the basis for the painter of this *Café*.

We suggest the hypothesis that there might have been works that would provide not only colours, but fine details, and two of them that seem particularly relevant and are cited by *Perrot* and *Chipiez*. Both are still masterpieces of ancient Egyptian art representations and heavily coloured and detailed: *Monuments de L’Egypte et de la Nubie* and *Histoire de l’art égyptien d’Après les Monuments*.²⁴ All the variations of colours we can extrapolate from the different intensities on the glass images of the *Café* could have come from either one of these books. Also, we found in the work of *Émile Prisse d’Avennes* one particular plate (Figure V) which captured our attention.

²³ Perrot and Chipiez 1884, vii.

²⁴ See Champollion, Jean-François. N.D. *Monuments de L’Egypte et de la Nubie*, Genève: Editions de Belles-Lettres.; d’Avennes, Émile Prisse, 1878, *Histoire de l’art égyptien d’Après les Monuments: Depuis les Temps les Plus Reculés Jusqu’à la Domination Romaine*, Volume 2, Paris: Arthus Bertrand.



Figure V – Combat de Ramsés-Meiamoun contre les Khétas sur les bords de L'Oronte

© Moulin, H. (Henri) (1802-1885), Lithographer Prisse d'Avennes (1807-1879), Artist Hangard-Maugé, E I., Printer of plates Ramesseum (Thebes, Egypt) Ramses II, King of Egypt
Public Domain

This drawing brings the said lion on the right mural to reality, as well as the details and the colours that are not observable on most of the *Perrot* and *Chipiez* book.

The only questions that would remain unanswered would be “Where these two books also used as an inspiration? If so, where did the painter get them?”. They are not on the library of the *Martins Sarmiento Society*, and there is no record that they have ever been there.

6. Final Remarks and Conclusions

There are two aspects to retain from the analysis of these murals.

One is the transversality of the reception interpretation of ancient Egyptian representations. It is indisputable that there is some familiarity with the humans represented on the *Ramesses* mural. Here was at work that the psychological aspect of using the known and familiar faces. Thus, we are presented with some occidentalizing of the overall faces present on the murals.

Second, there was a subtle level of personal interpretation, and some of the elements ignored or changed contrast with Egyptian canon. The *metu vacui* was not a concern of the copies, for example. And it might have been only for the aspect of aesthetics. Again, here, a very non-Egyptian way of thinking and understanding the reality or, perhaps, a superposition of aesthetics over cannon.

These murals could not have been created without an appropriate colour palette on disposal. This, the discrepancies on the images, the front mural, the extreme details of the paintings and eventually even the bottom right representation on the left mural of a scene on the *Court of Osiris*²⁵, force us to consider the hypothesis of other sources of inspiration and influence on this painter's work.

What made some elements superimpose themselves on others, becoming the ones elected to be placed on the murals, might have been a result of personal taste.

Known to us, for the moment, is the fact that the *Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité: Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie Mineure, Grèce, Étrurie, Rome* was used as a template for the central and far-left scenes of the left mural and part of the central and left scene of the right mural. This is proven by what was said *supra*.

What inspired the front mural is yet unknown, as well as the question of how other sources appeared to be consulted. However, it is not a stretch to consider that for such a meticulous and grand undertaking, as it was to create an Egyptian inspired *Café* in *Guimarães*, source material would have been procured to create the best possible result and illogical to assume that its designers would have been circumscribed to one library and one book.

The importance of this space and the cultural impact it had for decades on the city was announced in its opening days; the pressure to present an interior beyond reproach must have been tremendous. For all intents and proposes, this *Café*, and those who planed it, understood one essential thing: the splendour, charm and, most of all, the appeal of the Ancient Egyptian World. And they did want to capture it all... in one room.

²⁵ Perrot and Chipiez 1884, 292. The image found in their book does not correspond to the one that we can see in the mural.

7. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Rui Vitor Costa, president of *A Muralha*, for his help and for allowing us the use of the images.

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SECTION 3. BIBLICAL RECEPTION STUDY

Reception of the Biblical and Eastern Antiquity in Early
Modern records: travellers and pilgrims from Portugal to
the Holy Land
(16th-17th centuries)

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Abstract

It is well known that ever since ancient times there are records of pilgrimages between Portugal and the Holy Land – this was especially true during the Early Modern Age. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the adventurous spirit of the Early Modern agents and the expansion of the Portuguese power into some Eastern areas resulted in the increase of the journeys and pilgrimages' records written by Portuguese who travelled to Jerusalem. But how did the historical actors of the 16th and 17th centuries perceive the history of the Near East - namely the one of sacred places? And which were the perceptions they had on Biblical Antiquity?

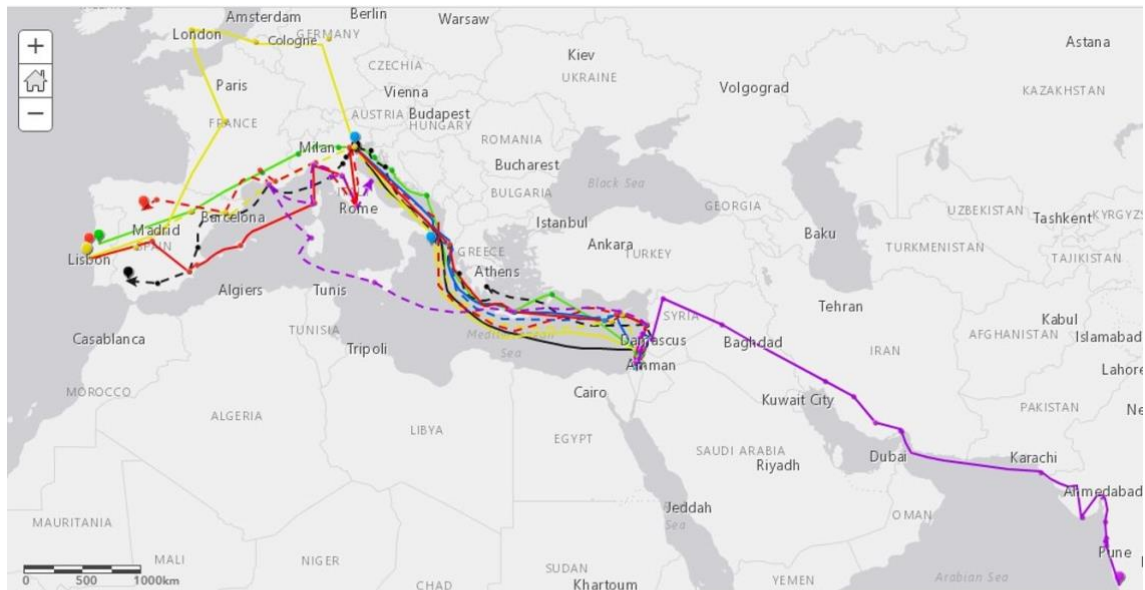
Travel literature regarding the pilgrimages to the Holy Land provides several perspectives concerning these issues. Taking the texts of Jerónimo Calvo, Francisco Guerreiro, António de Lisboa, Pantaleão de Aveiro, D. Álvaro da Costa and António Soares de Albergaria, I intend to analyse some references to the geography and to the biblical characters or episodes of the Old Testament, evaluating the interpretations that these travellers assigned them.

KeyWords: Portuguese travellers; 16th and 17th centuries; land routes; biblical history; reception of Antiquity

The Portuguese travellers in the East

This paper's content was developed alongside with my master's dissertation in Modern History. In both of them, I take as a basis the writings of six Portuguese travellers and pilgrims that, during the 16th and 17th centuries, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and left written records of their journey: Pantaleão de Aveiro (journey: 1563-1566), António Soares de Albergaria (journey: 1552-1558), Jerónimo Calvo (journey: 1614-1617), António de Lisboa (journey: 1507-1509/1510), Francisco Guerreiro (journey: 1588-1589) and Álvaro da Costa (journey: c.1608). I intend to analyse the perceptions and several visions that these men had from the Ancient Period, especially concerning the religious context. My focus are the religious expressions in the Syro-Palestinian coast, however this research led me to widen my study to other religious realities, as you shall see.

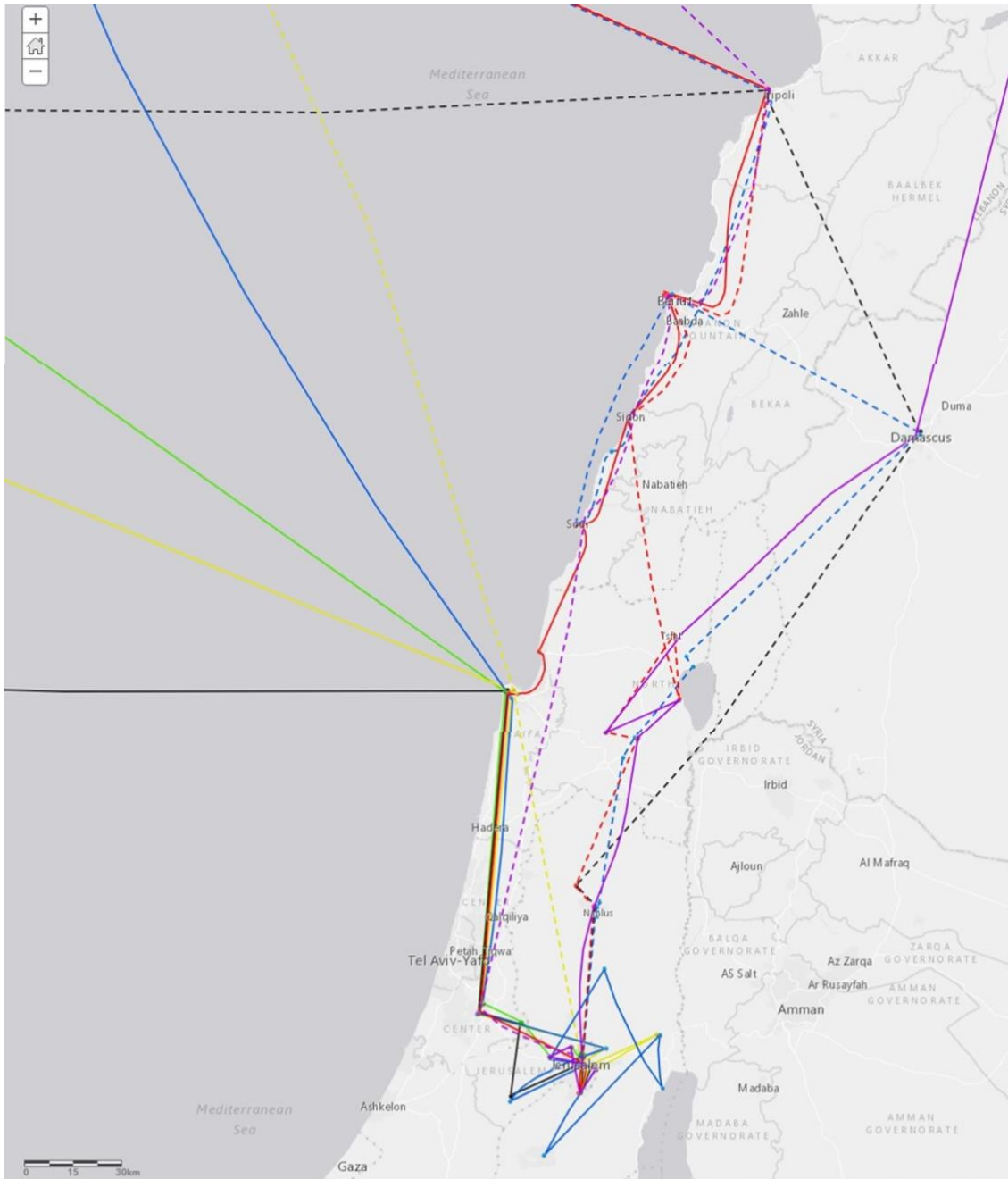
Map I | Itinerary of the Portuguese travellers, between Europe and Asia [author's map]



LEGENDA		
Francisco Guerreiro	Frei António de Lisboa	Jerónimo Calvo
— Viagem de ida	— Viagem de ida	— Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta		- - - Viagem de volta
Frei Pantaleão de Aveiro	Frei António Soares de Albergaria	Álvaro da Costa
— Viagem de ida	— Viagem de ida	— Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta	- - - Viagem de volta	- - - Viagem de volta

It should be noted that five of these travellers were part of the clergy and had a religious education; nevertheless, the only layman whose written record I analysed, D. Álvaro da Costa, was quite devoted. Therefore, all of these men had a great knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in which they firmly believed. The manuscript of D. Álvaro da Costa differs from the other five records also because he was the only man who travelled from the East to Jerusalem, since he served the Portuguese State in India and Persian Gulf (see Map I); the other authors departed from Portugal/Europe, aiming to reach Jerusalem.

Map II | Itinerary of the Portuguese travellers, between Europe and Asia (detail) [author's map]



LEGENDA

Francisco Guerreiro

- Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta

Frei Pantaleão de Aveiro

- Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta

Frei António de Lisboa

- Viagem de ida

Frei António Soares de Albergaria

- Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta

Jerónimo Calvo

- Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta

Álvaro da Costa

- Viagem de ida
- - - Viagem de volta

In the Syro-Palestinian coast there are clear similarities between the routes of these travellers (see Map II), once in this area all journeys were arranged and led by a guide. Even though the journeys were made decades apart, generally all of these men were shown the same places and told the same stories and local traditions, as evidenced by their texts.

The men and the places: references to Antiquity

The first references that should be highlighted are the ones associated with Adam and Eve and the creation of humanity by God. Pantaleão de Aveiro, António Soares de Albergaria and Jerónimo Calvo present significant information about this issue. By crossing the data prevailing in these three sources, we understand that these testimonials are quite similar and consistent with each other. Moreover, these authors found answers to a prominent question at the time: where did God create humankind?

In general, their writings state that in Hebron, near the place where the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are buried, is *Campo Damasceno*, a field where God took dust to create the first man, Adam, and where the earthly paradise was thought to be located.¹ Thus, this seems to be a widespread information among travellers passing near Hebron.² It should be noted that the only information conveyed by the Bible regarding this topic is quite vague: “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.” (Gn 2, 7-8).

This citation can also be analysed from the perspective of the connection between God and humans, and the similarity between this passage and some mythological accounts of pre-classical civilizations, which have an identical conception. It ought to be mentioned the *Epic of Gilgamesh* according to which the first man was created from clay: “Aruru washed her hands, pinched off a piece of clay, /cast it out into open country. /She created a [primitive man] (...)”³, and also *Enūma Eliš* or *Atrahasis*⁴ where the original elements to create humankind are clay and the blood of sacrificed gods. In Genesis, the *blood of the gods* is replaced with the “breath of life” – an idea that also appears in Egyptian representations, since the Old Kingdom period, usually associated with Khnum, the god of fertility, who was believed to have created humanity from clay. This comparison reflects the confluence of visions and notions transmitted among these ancient civilizations.

¹ Frei Pantaleão de Aveiro, *Itinerário da Terra Sancta e suas particularidades* (Lisbon: Casa de Simão Lopez, 1593), 170–71; Manuel Vilmaro Costa Pereira, «Itinerário à Casa Santa do padre frey António Soares da Albergaria» (Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2005), 135; Jerónimo Calvo, *Viagem de Terra Santa 1624* (Lisbon - Paris: Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997), 110.

² In fact, Hebron became a centre of interest due to the *Tomb of the Patriarchs*, the traditional site where the patriarchs and their wives are buried, that became a site of pilgrimage for Christians, Muslims and Jews. Since 2017 this city is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site list.

³ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia - Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and others*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 52–53.

⁴ Regarding these two texts see also Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia - Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and others*.

As we can see, the Bible refers nothing about an exact place, or even a region, where the creation of humankind took place; instead, it is used an unclear expression, “the East”. Therefore, it is possible that these notions conveyed by the Portuguese travellers were appropriations made from traditions of local people. Some authors even considered the possibility that these stories had the specific purpose of ennobling the characteristics of the land.⁵ It is important to remark that sometimes these travellers were unsure about the accuracy of some information that they provided in their writings, since it is not stated in the Bible, and they had no irrefutable proof that the events happened the way they described.

On the other hand, through these references, it can also be discussed the location of the earthly paradise – an important question during Ancient times that prompted several (re)searches throughout the Medieval and Early Modern Ages. Over the centuries, cartography depicted the earthly paradise in different places, generally locating it apart from the inhabited land. The European navigations allowed for a greater knowledge of the globe, which led to the transition between the demand for a terrestrial paradise, and the belief in an idyllic and spiritual paradise in heaven, from the 16th and 17th centuries onwards. Thus, it was claimed that paradise had once existed on earth until it was destroyed by the Flood. Thereby, the conjectures about the initial location of the terrestrial paradise did not disappear: some religious authorities believed that it could be located in Armenia, others in Mesopotamia, and others in Palestine.⁶

Michele Servet and Eugène Roger⁷ were the first to present the theory that paradise would have been located in the Holy Land, an idea quite similar to the ones of Portuguese travellers, since all of them admitted the possibility that paradise had been located in the Syro-Palestinian coast.

⁵ For a detailed discussion about this topic see Pedro Marques, «Tradições locais e recepção bíblica na Literatura Portuguesa de viagens do século XVI», *CADMO. Revista do Instituto Oriental da Universidade de Lisboa*, n. 23 (2013): 67.

⁶ About these issues see Jean Delumeau, *Uma história de paraíso: o jardim das delícias* (Lisbon: Terramar, 1994), 195–211; Umberto Eco, *História das Terras e dos Lugares Lendários* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2015), 159–60.

⁷ Michel Servet (1511 – 1553) was a Spanish theologian, physician, cartographer, and Renaissance humanist, who was versed in many sciences, including the scholarly study of the Bible in its original languages. Eugène Roger was a French Franciscan friar who travelled to Jerusalem and resided there in the first half of the 17th century, and wrote “La terre sainte, ou description topographique tres-particuliere des saints Lieux, & de la terre de Promission (...)”. “[Eugène Roger] cited the old Jewish tradition that Adam and Eve had lived in the Holy Land after their expulsion. The earthly paradise had been destroyed by the Flood, he said, but it was believed that Noah had given the Holy Land to Shem as the noblest part of the earth. It was the land promised to the patriarchs because it was the most desirable. (...) Christ had shed his blood on Calvary, “which is the place where our first parents disobeyed God, since it is said that the redemption should occur in the place where the sin had been committed.” “This makes me believe,” he concluded, “that Paradise was in the Holy Land” in Joseph Ellis Duncan, *Milton’s earthly paradise: a historical study of Eden* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 211.

Alongside Adam and Eve, Noah is another character of great relevance in the Christian imagery. According to the Holy Scriptures, he was responsible for the preservation of human and animal life on Earth during the Flood, with the construction of an Ark where, at God's command, he sheltered his family and the animal species (Gn 6-9).

Noah's character, as well as the diluvian episode, may raise some questions related to other traditions: the Mesopotamian region is particularly rich in narratives that resemble the biblical Flood. Ziusudra is the equivalent character of Noah in the Sumerian literary tradition; in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the survivor of the Flood is Utnapishtim; and the Akkadian epic *Atrahasis* is named after the hero who survived this catastrophe. Also, Berossus⁸ presented a narrative of the Flood, which certainly derives from the Sumerian version, since the hero of the episode is designated as Xisuthros. In the Mesopotamian region, as in the Nilotic region, floods were seen as a natural and recurring event, at certain times of the year. Although they did not reach a devastating scale, nor would they jeopardize the cultural continuity of civilization, it is plausible that this phenomenon gave rise to narratives about great destructive floods, that tried to explain why they occurred. There are yet other traditions that mention a flood: within Greek mythology, we find the story of Deucalion, son of Prometheus, who survived the flood in an ark and, after nine days and nine nights, landed on Mount Parnassus.⁹ And in the Indian world, the tale is associated with the figure of Manu, who survived the flood on a large ship sent to him by Vishnu, one of the leading Hindu gods.¹⁰

Some of these traditions understand the flood as a phenomenon used to limit the populational growth (as in *Atrahasis*), others understand it as a way to punish humanity for its malice and disobedience (as in the case of Genesis, and in the Greek mythology), others understand this tale as belonging to a series of cycles that formed the world (as in the Hindu conception). We agree with Stephanie Dalley that these diluvian stories can be derived from a tradition that arose in Mesopotamia, which was retold for more than two thousand years along the great Asian caravan routes, and along which it was also translated and adapted, according to the conditions and beliefs of each context.¹¹ This led to numerous versions (more or less) agreeable with each other, whose common features are a man, an ark/ship, and the divine will as a crucial element in his survival. Since the early times of Christianity, this episode has been interpreted by theologians and religious, namely Tertullian and St. Jerome (authors who were still widely quoted in Early Modern times), who typified Noah's Ark as the Church¹²: just like the Ark was the only form of salvation of humankind during the Flood, the Church is the only form for the salvation of the human soul,

⁸ Priest and Chaldean writer (4th-3rd century BC), who wrote, in Greek language, "History of Babylon" comprised in three volumes. Though this work was lost, it survived until present days through secondary sources and quotes from other Classical authors.

⁹ Maria Lamas, *Mitologia Geral. O mundo dos deuses e dos heróis.*, vol. III (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1972), 122–26.

¹⁰ Maria Lamas, *Mitologia Geral. O mundo dos deuses e dos heróis.*, vol. VI (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1973), 84–86.

¹¹ Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia - Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and others*, 7.

¹² F. L. Cross e Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., «Ark», em *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

that is for it to achieve full eternity. This was a point of view shared by the Portuguese travellers still in the 16th and 17th centuries: António Soares de Albergaria admits that “in Noah's sacrifice, the lamb was meant to take away the sins of the world”¹³, an interpretation that recognises God's mercy as the saviour force of the humankind, as well as the salvific character of the Christian religion.

The last character that I want to analyse is Jonah, who experiences a curious episode. God commanded Jonah to go preach to Nineveh, so that he would warn the inhabitants of this city that God had knowledge of their wickedness. However, Jonah left by boat for Tarshish, fleeing from God's orders. Immediately, God sent a storm to stop him. “And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (Jn 1,17). When Jonah repented, the fish threw him up on dry land and he finally went to preach to Nineveh, which was apparently converted quickly and easily.

At first sight, this episode seems to have fabulous or legendary outlines. Firstly, because Jonah is swallowed by a fish, and vomited after three days, with no apparent physical consequences. Secondly, Jonah, a single man and a foreigner, managed to bring a city to regret without much effort.

Already in the 19th century, some authors questioned this episode, contesting its veracity.¹⁴ Others, like H. Clay Trumbull, believed in the historicity of this book and sought to demonstrate it. Nowadays, several authors consider this book as a satire, taking into account the dynamics between Jonah, a disobedient prophet, and a merciful God who apparently uses humorous artifices in his relationship with Jonah.¹⁵ The truth is that the Book of Jonah, though placed in the category of the Prophetic Books of the Bible, is quite different from the other texts in this group. The rest of the prophetic books usually express a prophecy about something that will happen in the future, whereas the Book of Jonah is an account/narrative of what had happened to the prophet. Moreover, this Book seems to conflict with Isaiah's account: according to Isaiah, God would destroy Assyria (Is 30,30-33) and in Jonah's book, with the repentance of Nineveh, God adopts a merciful attitude and forgives the Ninevites, rejecting the destruction of the city (Jn 3,10).

¹³ Free translation: “no sacrificio de Noe foi ho cordeiro significado que avia d'tirar os peccados do mundo”, in Pereira, «Itinerário à Casa Santa do padre frey António Soares da Albergaria», 113.

¹⁴ See, for example: E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets: With a Commentary Explanatory and Practical and Introductions to the Several Books* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), 371–427; C.E. Stowe, «The Prophet Jonah», *Bibliotheca Sacra* 10, n. 39 (1853): 739–64; C. H. H. Wright, *Biblical Essays: or, exegetical studies on the books of Job and Jonah, Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog and Magog, St. Peter's «Spirits in prison,» and the key to the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), 34–98.

¹⁵ «Jonah, Book of», em *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 1560–61; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, «Jonah Read Intertextually», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, n. 3 (2007); John A. Miles, «Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody», *The Jewish Quarterly Review New Series* 65, n. 3 (January, 1975).

The region of Assyria and the Syro-Palestinian coast had deep commercial and political contacts, throughout time. Moreover, their inhabitants shared a cultural matrix, the Semitic one, which can explain the allusions to both regions (Nineveh and Japha) in this narrative.

Considering now the figure of the “great fish” that swallowed Jonah, in the Old Testament, the fish does not have the inherent meaning attributed to it in Christianity, where it is considered, both in literary and artistic representations, as a symbol of Christ.¹⁶ So, what was the primary significance of the fish, and why its prominence in this episode? In 1892, H. Clay Trumbull wrongly stated that in Assyria there was a highly worshiped god-fish, Dagan, whose representations were found on several cylinder seals at the entrance of the Palace and Temple of Nineveh.¹⁷ The author based himself on the writings of Berossus about Oannes, a half-man/half-fish character who, from time to time, coming from the sea, would appear to humans, in order to give instructions to humankind, and who have been responsible for the beginning of civilization in Chaldea and Babylon.¹⁸ Trumbull then argued that there was a reason why Jonah was swallowed and vomited by a fish: it was a device supposedly used by God to easily carry his message to Nineveh, by using the religious beliefs of that region.¹⁹ Today, this interpretation is outdated. It is interesting, however, the perspective the author follows, which combine the two religious systems.

We tend to see this episode from a different perspective: given the confluence between the two religions and cultures mentioned above, it is plausible to interpret this episode as a narrative that was created on the Syro-Palestinian coast (hence the identification of Japha), and which aimed to justify the influence that the image of the “fish-man” (an *apkallu*) had in the Mesopotamian context. Consequently, we can also consider the chronologies: the figure of the *apkallu* represented with a fish garb is known from the Kassite Period onwards (1595 BC-1155 BC), and was maintained during the first millennium BC, within the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian iconography, until the Seleucid period (312 BC-63 BC). On the other hand, it is thought that the Book of Jonah, which was likely written in 5th-4th centuries BC, in the post-exile period²⁰, precedes the narrative of Berossus who recounted this narrative in the 4th-3rd centuries BC. This fact is interesting, given it makes it possible for Berossus to have known the story of Jonah, thus suggesting a crossing of the two traditions in the same narrative.

¹⁶ See F. L. Cross e Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., «Fish», em *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Currently, it is known that the representations found in Nineveh, and to which Trumbull referred, were not representations of the god Dagan, the god of fertility. They are, in fact, representations of *apkallu* sages, associated to the god of wisdom, Enki. These creatures appear depicted anthropomorphically wearing a fish garb. See Jeremy A. Black, Anthony Green, and Tessa Rickards, "Dagan" in *Gods, demons, and symbols of ancient Mesopotamia: an illustrated dictionary* (London: Published by British Museum Press for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1992).

¹⁸ H. Clay Trumbull, «Jonah in Nineveh», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 1, n. 11 (1892): 55–56.

¹⁹ Trumbull, 57.

²⁰ George M. Landes, «Linguistic criteria and the date of the Book of Jonah», *Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 16 (1982): 147–70.

Finally, it should be noted that in modern Iraq, namely in Mosul (where the archaeological site of Nineveh is located), there is a mosque, built in the 13th century and dedicated to the prophet Jonah, because is believed to be his burial place²¹, and thus suggesting a certain degree of agreement between the local and the biblical tradition.

²¹ The mosque dedicated to Jonah was looted, bombed and destroyed in 2014 by the self-proclaimed Islamic State, and is currently in ruins.

Conclusion

The first question to consider when making an analytical approach such as the one presented in this paper, is that the majority of Early Modern authors interpreted the Bible as the most important document, since it had been written by God's will. Hence, the authority of those texts was not questioned or contested. Accordingly, everything that went against the contents and teachings of the Bible was false, and what is not expressed in it was comprehended according to one's sensitivity.

On the other hand, there is a clear association between the references to characters, cities and/or places frequently linked with Biblical Antiquity, which may point to a direction of an extra-biblical Eastern Antiquity. Naturally, Portuguese travellers did not have a vast knowledge of other religious traditions as they did of the biblical ones. The connections that these travellers established between different religious systems were limited to the allusions and references made in the Sacred Texts about those regions where these "foreigner" faiths were practiced. Furthermore, the historical agents of the 16th and 17th centuries were so imbued with their Christian spirit that to perceive those nuances and similarities between religions was by no means their priority.

Above all, it is clear that the links between the religions of the Near Eastern area, whether monotheistic or polytheistic, have in common characters, heroes and even ideas. It is well known how these civilizations were in confluence through commercial, political and cultural exchanges, plus population movements and, therefore, their beliefs were not crystalized, but would evolve as new ideas, insights or perspectives which were, at same point conveyed and transformed in order to adapt to other mental realities.

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