

ABSTRACTS



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Where it all began: Herodotus, historical narrative, and the Near East

Herodotus was born in a city with mixed Hellenic and Carian population, and grew up in a region (south-west Asia Minor) which was in constant and close contact with the great states of the Near East, such as Lydia and Achaemenid Persia. He was thus in a privileged position in terms of communication and exchange with the cultures of the ancient Orient. In this paper I propose to explore Herodotus' authorial debt to the narrative and intellectual traditions of the East with regard to major, macroscopic compositional tendencies of his historical oeuvre. Three fundamental narrative structures, which condition the organization of Herodotus' material and the layout of his work, seem to have been inspired by characteristic techniques and thematic patterns of Near-Eastern texts or lore.

Firstly, Herodotus conceives and recounts world history according to the typical structure of West-Asiatic and Egyptian king lists and chronicles: these latter works enumerate a series of successive rulers and record basic biographical data, key historical incidents, and occasionally picturesque anecdotes about the reign of each one of them. Herodotus assimilates this pattern and uses it both on a small and on a grand scale in his narrative. The individual historical sections (*logoi*) concerning particular peoples (Lydians, Egyptians, Medians) are constructed in the manner of a chronicle; the narrator lists a sequence of kings and offers briefer or longer reports of historical events and anecdotal tales for every name of the list. The Herodotean oeuvre as a whole is built on the same chronographic principle; a succession of Achaemenid monarchs (Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, Xerxes) forms the framework, which is filled in with extensive accounts of each king's exploits, wars, and other ventures.

Secondly, Herodotus appears to have taken over from Near-Eastern storytelling the concept of the frame narrative, i.e. the tales emboxed inside other tales like “Russian dolls”. This technique first appears in ancient Egyptian novellas and story collections of the second and first millennium BCE, and subsequently spread all over the eastern world up to Iran and India, conditioning the layout of the great oriental narrative compilations, from the *Book of Sindbad* to the *Pañcatantra* and the *Thousand and One Nights*. Herodotus exploits this pattern already in the first and paradigmatic long novella of his work (the story of Solon and Croesus, 1.29-33) and then in various subsequent narrative sections (e.g. the account of the Spartans’ conference and Socles’ speech, 5.91-93). In all these cases one of the characters of the main narrative tells a series of didactic stories in close sequence, in the manner familiar from ancient Egyptian story collections (*Papyrus Westcar*, *Tales of Petese*) and from the *Book of Sindbad*.

Thirdly, Herodotus’ entire composition is punctuated by a long accumulation of failed military expeditions of Persian kings against various lands. The climax of this series is represented by the Persian wars, Darius’ and Xerxes’ unsuccessful campaigns against mainland Greece, which are recounted in the last books of the *History*. These accounts are obviously inspired by momentous historical events. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the theme of the failed expedition was also endemic in the mythology of ancient Iran: Kai Kaus, a king of the legendary Kayanian dynasty, is the archetype of the rash and vainglorious monarch who oversteps his limits and attempts a sequence of foolhardy campaigns against formidable opponents, invariably ending up in defeat and disaster. This serial pattern of ancient Persian myth, if known to Herodotus, may have influenced his decision to structure his work as a gradation of failed military ventures undertaken by the Persian kings, from Cyrus’ fatal war against the Massagetans and Cambyses’ disastrous march to Ethiopia to Darius’ defeats in Scythia and Marathon and Xerxes’ debacle before the Greeks.



Uri Gabbay

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Between the mind and the tablet: Memorization as part of scholarly training in first millennium BCE Mesopotamia. Philological and comparative perspectives.

Ancient Mesopotamian scholarly education in the first millennium BCE is usually understood as closely connected to writing. Although this is generally true, this perception is mostly based on the sources on which modern scholarship addresses the scholarly training, namely, cuneiform tablets. But Ancient Mesopotamian scholarly training was more complex than just copying tablets, and included other aspects beyond writing, especially memorization. While memorization is usually associated with orality and not with societies that emphasize the written aspect of knowledge, memorization still played a significant role in the making of the Mesopotamian scholar. In this lecture, I will survey some types of evidence we have for memorization in ancient Mesopotamia, and I will point at some parallels from other societies in the Mediterranean world and beyond.



Peter Zilberg

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When East meets West: Ionians and Carians in Babylonia in the 6-5th centuries BCE

The following talk will present primary sources relating to the appearance of groups and individuals from Ionian or Carian extraction in Babylonia during the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. The talk will present the background story of each group, the acculturation processes it underwent in Babylonia and the difference between the situation of Ionians and Carians in Babylonia and the socio-economic reality of the same groups in Persepolis and other imperial centers of the Achaemenid empire.

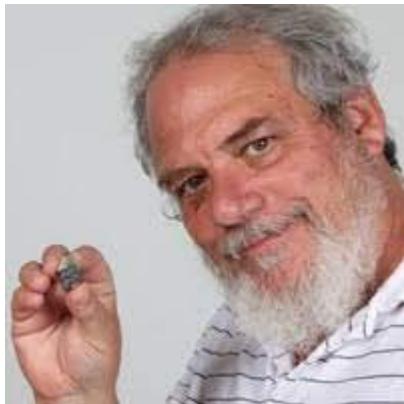


Asterios Kechagias

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Og, Gog and Magog: Early Indians in the Eastern Mediterranean?

The names Gog and Magog appear several times in the Bible (and in another form in the Qur'an). “Gog” seems to have been the name of an ancient king, while the name “Magog“ sometimes appears as the name of a nation and sometimes as the name of a place. Both of these names appear in apocalyptic texts, such as the Book of Ezekiel or the Book of Revelation, to denote the hostile armies that will appear in the end of days to punish Israel or humanity in general. Nevertheless, the exact meaning and true identity of the names Gog and Magog have puzzled both ancient writers and modern biblical scholars to a tremendous degree, and so far no final answer has been given. In the history of their interpretation they have been associated with the Lydians, the Macedonians, the Scythians, the Goths, the Arabs or even the Mongols. The present study will provide new evidence towards a completely new interpretation of these names which emerges from the reading of several ancient sources of different origins (ancient Greek, biblical, Mesopotamian and Sanskrit). All these sources seem to agree with each other on the actual content and identity of these enigmatic figures. According to this new perspective, the names Gog and Magog should be associated with specific peoples of ancient India, who seem to have travelled westwards, reaching the Mediterranean and perhaps forming part of the pre-Greek populations of the Mediterranean, such as the Pelasgians.



Wayne Horowitz

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The Astronomical Book of Enuma Elish

The title of my talk “The Astronomical Book of Enuma Elish” is borrowed from what has often been called “The Astronomical Book of Enoch” a set of astronomical observations which, in the words of the editors of the seminal work on that subject, the great Otto Neugebauer and Matthew Black’ stated: “It has long been recognized that the astronomical chapters of the Book of Enoch constitute a composition of their own without much direct contact with the other parts of the treatise. This does not mean, however, that the astronomical book is unrelated to the rest of the Book of Enoch. On the contrary its contents reflect faithfully, but in greater detail, the simple cosmologic concepts that prevailed in the communities which produced the Enochian literature”. I will show that the same holds true for Enuma Elish Tablet V: 1-46, where Marduk, the Babylonian Zeus, arranges the stars, the Moon-god and the Sun-god in the sky, thus setting in place time as we know and that the Ancient Babylonians knew it, with our sense of days, months, and years.



Yakir Paz
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***“According to the Number of the Sons of Israel”: Hellenistic Zodiacal Geography
and the Duodecimal Division of the World in Deut. 32:8-9***

In the Song of Moses, the verses of Deut. 32:8-9 point to an ancient division of the nations, which created a unique bond between God and Israel. In the Masoretic version, the nations were divided “according to the number of the Sons of Israel”. Yet this version is a result of an emendation, while the original version stated: “According to the number of the Sons of God”. This paper argues that this emendation reflects not only theological concerns but also a dramatic change in the underlying myth of the division of the world. Moreover, this supposedly minor emendation grants us a rare glimpse into the aftermath of a momentous revolution in the perception of the universe which took place around the 4th century BCE: The shift from Babylonian astrology and geography to Hellenistic zodiacal geography based on a duodecimal division of both the heaven and the earth.



Celine Debourse

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The undrawn women: considering female agency in the Esagil temple in Hellenistic Babylon

In the Hellenistic world at large, women are seen occupying a wider variety of roles and taking up more agency in the public sphere than previously. While the scholarly focus lies largely on royal women and female authors and scholars, much less attention has been paid to the role of women in the local temples. However, in the cultic space too women seem to have become more active. Case in point is the Esagil in Hellenistic Babylon, whence numerous texts survive in which women figure prominently. The attestations are highly suggestive of a larger degree of female agency and mobility within the traditional Babylonian temple household at this time, not only as cheap labor forces, but also in the cultic sphere. Especially the appearance of new titles that seem to refer to the initiation of women in the cult deserve more attention. My thesis is that these new roles for women should be seen against the background of the socio-political realities after 484 BCE, a time which witnessed crucial changes in the organization of the temple household. Furthermore, it is likely that parallels across the Hellenistic world can be explained in light of similar historical processes that challenged the survival of traditional temple communities.

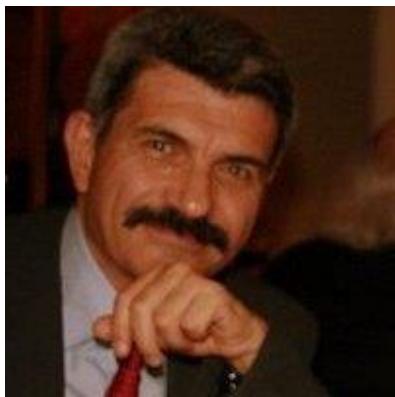


Arlette David

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Aegean Sources of Architectural and Iconographic Motifs in Akhenaten's New Visual Repertoire

Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten (ca. 1350 BC), the Dynasty 18 King who instigated a politico-religious reform in Egypt under the aegis of a unique solar God, Aten, is often considered the creator of unparalleled visuals that gave form and substance to his new pharaoh-centric and monotheist doctrine, Atenism. Nevertheless, neither his beliefs, nor their visual expression, emerged from an absolute conceptual void; they are the fruit of the combined forces of tradition, of developments that took place during Dynasty 18, and of foreign ideas and motifs that were skillfully incorporated in his own repertoire. The Egyptian cosmopolite court had benefited during the New Kingdom from powerful influences and undercurrents from various sources, the extent of which is partially revealed in the diplomatic correspondence found at Akhetaten (Amarna), the new Domain of Aten founded by the King. However, few studies have acknowledged the foreign origin of motifs depicted during Akhenaten's reign and the influence of foreign trends on Atenist iconography. After a brief review of the foreign motifs incorporated in Akhenaten's imagery as part of the intensive cross-cultural exchanges that marked the Late Bronze Age, I shall focus on the Aegean input in the mapping of cultural transfers to Egypt and their modalities before and during Akhenaten's reign.



Panayotis Pachis

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Tracking the “Other”: Approaches to Egypt according to the testimonies of Herodotus.

A fresco from the archeological site of Pompeii (65 AD) depicts the arrival of the Greek mythology heroine Io in Egypt as well as her meeting with Goddess Isis. Modern research considers this representation to be the most prominent iconographic example of the West (Io) meeting the East-Egypt (Isis). The above mythological narrative, mentioned in Herodotus' descriptions of Egypt, is related to ones that he had probably heard from the inhabitants of Naucratis during his visit in the country of the Nile in the 5th century BC. In the second book of his Histories, the Greek historian discusses the traditions of Egypt, giving details about the daily life, customs and religion. His description of the country's folklore involves a lot of inaccuracies and generalizations so it requires caution when used as evidence according to modern research data. He has accepted that his stories are mainly based on things he had heard himself or on popular perceptions. The overall approach of his work, however, allows for the understanding of the way the Greek faced, and at the same time perceived, this ancient civilization, which for them constituted the “Other”, the foreign and the mysterious. Nevertheless, this discussion of Egypt's customs contributes to Herodotus being considered not only the “father of history” but also the “father of anthropology and history of religions”. This characterization is justified if we take into account the richness of the information provided in his work regarding the daily as well as religious habits of the peoples he visited himself.



Panagiotis Kousoulis

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Inscribed Aegyptiaca from archaic Greece: modes of cultural reception and linguistic creolisation

In the absence of adequate written evidence in the early Iron Age, our knowledge of contacts in the Mediterranean usually stem from the study and evaluation of imports and their archaeologically visible influence in indigenous material horizons. Egyptian and Egyptianising votives, the so-called Aegyptiaca, distinctively reflect a rich and complex nexus of cross-cultural contacts between Egypt and the south eastern Mediterranean region via two main channels of communication: direct contact, mainly from the Asia Minor and East Greek areas with Egypt, and via the intermediary of Phoenician artifacts, that spread all over the Mediterranean during the orientalising and archaic periods. These imports are often examined alongside patterns of transmission, technology and craftsmanship, towards an understanding of the gradual orientalising awakening of the south-eastern Mediterranean region that reached its apogee in the 7th century BC. Only a few attempts have been made on the character and symbolical meaning of these objects and their role at the sacral environment of the eastern Mediterranean basin. This presentation focuses on certain inscribed Egyptian and Egyptianised votives from the archaic sanctuaries on Rhodes, Samos and Perachora, and analyses the Egyptian religious semantics, as well as the creative misreadings in the adaptation of hieroglyphic elements (semiophoric values, icons and identities) along the lines of cultural reception and linguistic creolisation.



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Sphinx thrones in burial chambers

The Greek term “Sphinx” refers to hybrid creatures, which appears in the literature of the Ancient Near East with different descriptions and names. In most of the iconographic examples they have the role of guarding a sacred object, usually the sacred tree. A special category is the sphinx thrones that appear in the cities of Canaan in Late Bronze Age and in the Phoenician cities and their colonies as thrones of kings and deities during the first millennium B.C. The question is how should be understood two examples of thrones decorated with sphinxes in Macedonian tombs.



Nathan Wasserman

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Seeing nature, remembering destruction: Mesopotamian view of creation and annihilation

Natural descriptions of nature, that is, depiction of natural scenes in non-ideological context, are rare in Mesopotamian literature. On the other hand, descriptions of destruction – of different kinds of destruction – characterize this literary body. In this paper, these two observations are confronted and discussed. The theological pendulum “Destruction-Reconstruction” is presented and its relevance to Mesopotamian religion and cult seals this paper.