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Chances and Problems of Cultural Anthropological Perspectives in Ancient Studies

Theories – Methods – Case Studies

DWJ_vol. 4

2020

Impressum

© Distant Worlds Journal (http://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/dwj)

Hosted by Propylaeum, Fachinformationsdienst Altertumswissenschaften
by the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München

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VORWORT
Altertumswissenschaften und Kulturanthropologie. Chancen und Probleme

Daniel Fallmann, Fabian Heil, Gioele Zisa

The *Distant Worlds Journal* (DWJ) is an online peer-reviewed journal established especially for presenting the research of early-career scholars on the ancient world. Each edition of the DWJ centres on a specific question or topic pertinent to the diverse disciplines engaged in the study of ancient cultures. In our fourth edition, we explore cultural anthropological theories and methods in the ancient studies, both in terms of the opportunities they offer for the study of ancient cultures and the problems they pose when applied.

Was genau die Kulturanthropologie eigentlich ist und womit sie sich beschäftigt, ist kaum in wenigen Worten gesagt. Als Wissenschaft von der Kultur des Menschen scheint sie geradezu alle Geisteswissenschaften zu umfassen. Die Grenzen zu anderen Fachdisziplinen wie der Geschichte, der Linguistik, der Soziologie, der Psychologie, der Philosophie und der Ethnologie sind fließend. Und dies kommt nicht von ungefähr, liegen die Ursprünge der Kulturanthropologie doch im Austausch all dieser Fachrichtungen begründet. Dabei haben sich verschiedene nationale kulturanthropologische Wissenschaftstraditionen herausgebildet, die unterschiedliche Schwerpunkte und Herangehensweisen haben und die sich mitunter auch in ihren Bezeichnungen unterscheiden. In dieser unscharfen Abgrenzung liegt jedoch nur scheinbar eine Schwäche, sie stellt vielmehr eine der großen Stärken der Kulturanthropologie dar. Denn die Kulturanthropologen und Kulturanthropologinnen überschreiten die Grenzen zwischen einzelnen Disziplinen, die sich auf bestimmte Quellengattungen oder Fragestellungen beschränken, und behandeln so das, was die Kultur des Menschen ausmacht, in ihrer Gesamtheit. Wie der Mensch Kultur erschafft und wie diese Kultur wiederum den Menschen als kulturelles Wesen prägt, wie der Menschen dem, was er tut und gestaltet, vielfältige und immer wieder neue Bedeutungen gibt, das sind die zentralen Fragen der Kulturanthropologie.

Unter Altertumswissenschaftlerinnen und Altertumswissenschaftlern bestand schon im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert ein großes Interesse an den Theorien und Fragen anderer Disziplinen, so z.B. der Psychologie, der Soziologie oder der Ethnologie. Die damaligen Wissenschaftler und Wissenschaftlerinnen waren Kulturanthropologinnen und Kulturanthropologen *avant la lettre*, lange bevor sich für ihre interdisziplinäre und ganzheitliche Herangehensweise in der Wissenschaft überhaupt konkrete Bezeichnungen etabliert hatten. Besonders widmeten sich die Forscher und Forscherinnen dabei der Religionsgeschichte sowie der Mythen- und Ritualforschung, wie z.B. Jane E. Harrison (1850–1928) und andere sog. *Cambridge Ritualists*. Diese Autoren bereiteten den Weg für kulturanthropologische Ideen und Methoden in den Altertumswissenschaften, die in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts ihre Blüte

erlebten. Hierzu gehören die Werke der Mythenforschung, wie z.B. von Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914–2007) und anderen Forschern der sog. *École de Paris*, oder die Arbeiten zu Religion und Ritual von Walter Burkert (1931–2015). Zu dem Themenkomplex Religion, Mythos und Ritual traten weitere Themen hinzu, wie z.B. antike Wirtschaftssysteme, u.a. behandelt von Moses I. Finley (1912–1986), antike Geschlechterrollen, mit denen sich z.B. John J. Winkler (1943–1990) beschäftigte, oder aber die Rolle von Emotionen in antiken Gesellschaften, für die sich Eric R. Dodds (1893–1879) interessierte. Mit vielen Werken dieser Grenzgänger, die Brücken schlugen zwischen den einzelnen Disziplinen, sind die meisten Altertumswissenschaftlerinnen und Altertumswissenschaftler heute sehr vertraut. Einige gelten sogar als Standardwerke und gehören zum theoretischen und methodischen Rüstzeug vieler altertumswissenschaftlicher Disziplinen. Doch nicht zuletzt wohl auch wegen dieser Selbstverständlichkeit – so erfreulich sie auch sein mag – schien das Interesse an kulturanthropologischen Theorien und Methoden in den Altertumswissenschaften zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts abzuflauen.

Es ist kein Zufall, dass gerade im Journal der Münchner Graduiertenschule *Distant Worlds* (GSDW) nun wieder kulturanthropologische Fragen in den Fokus rücken. Denn die Graduiertenschule und das Münchner Zentrum für Antike Welten (MZAW) sind Orte, an denen ein reger und lebendiger Austausch zwischen Vertretern der einzelnen altertumswissenschaftlichen Disziplinen stattfindet. Hinzu kommt, dass in der Zeit, als die Planung der vorliegenden Ausgabe des DW-Journals anstand, mit Renate Schlesier eine renommierte Kulturanthropologin als Gastprofessorin an das MZAW nach München kam, die sehr an dem Austausch mit den Altertumswissenschaften interessiert ist und uns in unserem Vorhaben bestärkte. Im Geiste dieses Austausches nahm das Thema dieser vierten Ausgabe Gestalt an. Nichts schien passender, als im Journal der

Münchner Graduiertenschule für Altertumswissenschaften kulturanthropologische Theorien und Methoden wieder aufleben zu lassen.

Viele der großen Werke der kulturanthropologisch geprägten Altertumswissenschaften waren auf die griechisch-römische Antike beschränkt. Daher freut es uns umso mehr, dass in den Aufsätzen dieser Ausgabe auch ganz andere Räume behandelt werden. Die Beiträge erstrecken sich weit über Zeit und Raum, über verschiedene Kontinente und Zeitalter. Hierin liegt ein großes Potenzial der Beiträge und eine große Chance für die Altertumswissenschaften. Darüber hinaus werden – ganz im Geist kulturanthropologischer Forschung – neue Ideen und Fragestellungen aus anderen Disziplinen aufgegriffen und weitergedacht. Doch bei allem Potenzial, dass diese Blicke über den Tellerrand bieten, zeigen sich auch immer wieder Probleme und damit die Grenzen solcher Forschungsansätze. Aus der Sicht manches Kulturanthropologen oder mancher Kulturanthropologin mag die Beschäftigung mit bestimmten Methoden und Theorien nicht umfassend genug sein. Auch zwingt das kurze Format zu einer starken Fokussierung des Themas und zur Beschränkung auf eine einzige Fallstudie, die nur einzelne Aspekte menschlicher Kultur genauer beleuchten kann. Nichtsdestoweniger sind die Beiträge der Autorinnen und Autoren wichtige erste Schritte, die hoffentlich auch andere inspirieren und dazu ermutigen, die Grenzen ihrer Fächer zu überschreiten. Denn die Aufsätze zeigen, dass es sich auch heute noch lohnt, einen Blick auf kulturanthropologische Methoden und Theorien und auf Theorien und Methoden anderer Fächer zu werfen, auch wenn manche kulturanthropologischen Ansätze längst in den Altertumswissenschaften angekommen sind und quasi zum Mainstream gehören. Sie können einen nützlichen Rahmen zur Erforschung der Kulturen des Altertums bieten und zu einem besseren Verständnis derselben beitragen.

Dass die Begeisterung für kulturanthropologische Fragen in den Altertumswissenschaften

keineswegs verschwunden ist, hat die überwältigende Resonanz auf unseren *Call for Papers* gezeigt. Das große Interesse so vieler junger, aber auch erfahrener Altertumswissenschaftler und Altertumswissenschaftlerinnen an der Kulturanthropologie hat uns sehr gefreut. Die Betreuung einer so großen Zahl von sehr unterschiedlichen Artikeln gestaltete sich nicht immer einfach und nahm viel Zeit in Anspruch. Umso stolzer sind wir, nun neun Artikel von Forscherinnen und Forschern aus allen Ecken der Welt, aus verschiedenen Fachbereichen und mit ganz unterschiedlichen Herangehensweisen präsentieren zu können:

In ihrem Aufsatz über die mesopotamische *Mīs-Pî*-Zeremonie („Waschung des Mundes") wendet Amy Balogh die Methode der *dichten Beschreibung* (*thick description*) von Clifford Geertz in der Erforschung der mesopotamischen Gesellschaft an. Sie zeigt, dass die *thick description* auch im Fall der fernen Vergangenheit, wo die Erzählungen der Menschen als wichtige ethnographische Quelle fehlen, zu einem besseren Verständnis der Zeremonie beitragen kann, da die Objekte und Texte zusammen in ihrem größeren kulturellen Kontext betrachtet werden.

Valeria Bellomia beschäftigt sich in ihrem Aufsatz mit der Frage, wie die Klänge antiker Musikinstrumente heutigen Museumsbesuchern näher gebracht werden können – in dem Wissen, dass eine Rekonstruktion des ursprünglichen Klangs kaum zu erreichen ist. Sie veranschaulicht dies anhand von zwei *Omichicahuaztli*, aztekischen Klangraspeln aus menschlichen Knochen, die einst eine wichtige Rolle bei Gedenkfeiern für Krieger spielten und heute nach langer Reise im *Museo delle Civiltà* in Rom zu sehen und – dank verschiedener Analysen – bald auch zu hören sind.

Anhand der Fallbeispiele des St. Joseph-Festes und der Karwoche untersucht Ignazio E. Buttitta in seinem Aufsatz die kulturelle Kontinuität traditioneller religiöser Feste auf Sizilien. Der Vergleich aktueller ethnographischer Daten mit materiellen und immateriellen Hinterlassenschaften der Vergangenheit bringt deutlich die vorchristlichen und agrarischen Wurzeln der kulturellen Symbolik dieser Feste zum Vorschein, wie sie z.B. in Liedern, Tänzen und Prozessionen zum Ausdruck kommt. Ein solcher Vergleich kann helfen, die gegenwärtige Gestalt der Feste besser zu verstehen.

Sophus Helle untersucht in seinem Aufsatz „Marduk's Penis" die Geschlechtervorstellungen im babylonischen Epos *Enūma Eliš* aus der Perspektive der *Queer-Theorie*, wobei gerade die große Diskrepanz zwischen Theorie und Untersuchungsgegenstand einen neuen Blick auf das Epos ermöglicht. Helle konzentriert sich dabei darauf, wie ein binäres Geschlechtersystem konstruiert wird. Die Vorstellung des weiblichen Körpers als unruhig und niemals zu bändigen, erscheint als Teil eines männlichen Diskurses, in dem die Frauen mittels der Kontrolle über den Körper unterdrückt werden.

In ihrem Aufsatz beschäftigt sich Esmeralda Lundius mit der Rolle von Opfertischen in altägyptischen Totenritualen und der mit diesen verbundenen magischen Praxis. Diese Objekte verweisen durch die architektonischen und topographischen Elemente ihrer Gestaltung auf die lebensspendenden Kräfte des Wassers, wie z.B. von Kanälen oder Flüssen. Auf diese Weise wurden die Opfertische als rituelle Landschaften in die Totenrituale integriert, die zum Ziel hatten, den *Ka*, einen unsterblichen Teil der menschlichen Seele, zu aktivieren.

Stefan Metz bespricht in seinem Aufsatz „Die Begegnung von Hahn und Schildkröte" das besondere Motiv des Bodenmosaiks in der Basilika von Aquileia. Er zeigt, dass in der Zeit des Übergangs von der paganen zur christlichen Religion scheinbar widersprüchliche Motive und die diesen zugrunde liegenden kulturellen Konzepte nicht nur nebeneinandergestellt, sondern ineinander verwoben wurden. Diese Berücksichtigung des kulturellen Kontextes eröffnet neue Deutungsmöglichkeiten, die über die

bisherigen kunsthistorischen Deutungen des Mosaiks hinausgehen.

Mithilfe des Persönlichkeitskonzepts des sog. *neuen Animismus*, inspiriert von Hallowell, Descola und Harvey, zeigt Anna Perdibon anhand sumerischer und akkadischer Textquellen auf, wie Berge in Mesopotamien nicht nur als Wohnorte der Götter und kosmische Orte am Rande der Welt, sondern auch als lebende Wesen vorgestellt wurden, die in der Welt der Menschen wirkten. Als Fallstudie dient ihr der Berg *Ebiḫ*, der von den Bewohnern Mesopotamiens als eine Gottheit und als eine Person „other-than-human" betrachtet wurde.

Danielle O. Phelps beschäftigt sich mit der Handlungsmacht der Verstorbenen, der sog. *postmortem agency*. Sie führt aus, dass die bewusst vollzogene Umwandlung des mumifizierten Körpers des Pharao *Tutankhamun* in die chthonische Gottheit Osiris nicht nur von ritueller, sondern sogar von realpolitischer Bedeutung war. Denn so konnte die Rückkehr zu den Verhältnissen vor der Armana-Zeit gewährleistet und die Herrschaft des Nachfolgers des *Tutankhamun* legitimiert werden. Der tote, zum Objekt gewordene Körper des Pharao entfaltet so, ohne selbst zu handeln, große Wirkmächtigkeit.

In seinem Aufsatz „Sacred Landscape in Early Rome" zeichnet Vincenzo Timpano die frühsten Urbanisationsprozesse in Rom nach. Neben den archäologischen Quellen zieht er auch frühe Textquellen und zahlreiche vergleichbare Städte in und außerhalb der italischen Halbinsel zu Rate. Er verdeutlicht, wie eng im römischen Stadtgebiet verschiedene sakrale und öffentliche politische Räume auf unterschiedlichste Art

und Weise miteinander verbunden wurden und wie komplex die Beziehungen zwischen den religiösen Vorstellungen und der Landschaft waren.

Wir hoffen, dass die Aufsätze der vierten Ausgabe unseres Journals auch die eine oder andere junge Wissenschaftlerin und den einen oder anderen jungen Wissenschaftler dazu anregen, ebenfalls die Grenzen des eigenen Faches zu überschreiten.

München, Januar 2020

The Mesopotamian *Mīs Pî* Ceremony
& Clifford Geertz's *Thick Description*.
Principles for Studying the Cultural Webs of the Deceased

Amy Balogh

Abstract: The work of ethnographer and cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz is characterized by "Thick Description," the practice of developing rich understandings of culture via narrowly defined phenomenon rather than surveys. Thick Description bridges the gap between the culture under investigation and the ethnographer's audience by tracing the "symbolic web of meaning" that a culture spins in order to understand and express its experience. But can ethnographic method be applied ethically and effectively in the study of the deceased?

This article argues that Thick Description is appropriate for working with ancient cultures because it connects objects and texts to their larger cultural environment in the absence of living members. Here, I present a case study of the ancient Mesopotamian *Mīs Pî* (Washing, Purification of the Mouth) ceremony, using Thick Description to unpack elements of the ritual in a way that speaks to the inner-lives of the community for whom the ritual was essential.

The life's work of ethnographer and cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) is characterized by a mode of analysis called *Thick Description*, which presents complex, contextualized descriptions of narrowly defined objects of empirical study that are written in such a way as to evoke deep insight into the lived realities of the culture at hand.[1] First and perhaps most effectively put forth in his seminal essay "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (1973), Geertz's understanding of the analytic process is one that continues to pique the interest and intellect of scholars worldwide and across disciplines, as evidenced by the numerous books and countless articles dedicated to clarifying, debating, furthering, and otherwise honoring his contributions to the study of humankind.[2] Yet, the flexibility that makes *Thick Description* an attractive and applicable interpretive approach is also what makes it difficult to define. The specific analogies that Geertz uses to present *Thick Description*, however, serve as helpful guides for understanding both the task and the result of interpreting culture; the question remains whether such an interpretive approach, conceived during Geertz's ethnographic fieldwork in Indonesia, may be applied effectively and ethically to cultures long deceased.

This article argues that Geertz's concept of *Thick Description* is particularly well suited for those working with ancient cultures because it enables one to analyze objects, including texts, in a way that speaks to the dispositions and worldviews of the individuals and cultures that produced those objects, even in the absence of living members of that culture. The example I use to illustrate my argument is the ancient Mesopotamian ceremony referred to by modern scholars as the *Mīs Pî*, "Washing of the Mouth" or "Purification of the Mouth," a 2-day ritual for the induction of idols, for which there is little

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[1] Geertz borrows the term *thick description* from philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who discusses the notion in two essays, "Thinking and Reflecting" and "The Thinking of Thoughts–What is 'Le Pensuer' Doing?," both available in Ryle 2016.

[2] E.g., Inglis 2000; Shweder – Good (eds.) 2005.

extant information outside of a few ritual and incantation texts dating to the 8th-5th centuries BCE.[3] The framework provided by *Thick Description* not only allows me to make informed suggestions as to the nature, meaning, and public function of this ritual as expressed through the available texts, it also enables me do so in way that furthers scholarly discussion of topics beyond the ritual, such as the values, paradoxes, inner-lives, and daily workings of the community for whom the ritual was an effective part of their identity – and all within the limitations of the available historical resources. Here, I focus specifically on the relationship between ritual and nature as expressed through the use of reeds and reed implements in the *Mīs Pî*, a case study that may at first seem too obscure to tell us anything substantial about ancient Mesopotamian religion, but through the lens of *Thick Description* is able to suggest much about the 'grand realities' of the Mesopotamian experience.

The task of this article, then, is to present the basic principles that yield *Thick Description*, and to use the extended example of the *Mīs Pî* as an illustration as to how those principles shape the analytic process. To perform a complete *Thick Description* of any object of study would take several volumes and still only scratch the surface of what is possible to say, which is precisely one of Geertz's major claims.[4] With that in mind, I discuss the *Mīs Pî* with an eye for how the principles of *Thick Description* might inform my areas of research and approach to the object of study, as well as how I understand what precisely that object may be. This approach allows me to go into more depth on the analytic process, while also anchoring the discussion in a concrete example. In order to fulfill this task, I first define and illustrate the nuanced relationship between culture, humankind, *Thick Description*, and the object of study, as Geertz presents it, then I describe the kind of analysis that

Thick Description yields: an analysis of the relationship between culture, action, disposition, and worldview, and it is here where I most fully develop my example of the *Mīs Pî*. Taken together, these two sections demonstrate and underscore that *Thick Description* is not a *method* of interpretation, but the end result of the hermeneutical task performed well. This implies that *Thick Description* may be applied to any number of interpretive situations and is therefore not limited to anthropological or ethnographic fieldwork.

Since almost every scholar to engage Geertz's work has a slightly different understanding of how he defines terms relevant to the discussion at hand, definitions which Geertz expands, contracts, and otherwise alters throughout the course of his fifty-year career, I focus instead on the most illustrative analogy of Geertz's original essay – the spider web. It is through this analogy that Geertz most clearly and succinctly states both his definition of culture and his understanding of what *really* constitutes one's object of study. Yet, Geertz does not elaborate on the analogy of the spider web. As with much of his writing, he leaves the interpretation to his reader.

Relating *Thick Description* & Objects of Study

At the end of his introduction to "Thick Description," Geertz launches his discussion of the analytic enterprise using the analogy of a spider web. This single sentence encapsulates Geertz's project in its entirety, and so it is here that I anchor my analysis. 'Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.'[5] With this statement, Geertz puts forth three definitions – of culture, of humankind's relationship to culture, and the goal of analyzing culture – that are essential to understanding how he per-

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[3] All of these extant materials are collected, transliterated, and translated in Walker – Dick 2001.
[4] Geertz 1973, 22.

[5] Geertz 1973, 5.

ceives both the act of interpretation and its intended result.

Geertz's definition of culture as 'webs of significance' spun by humankind is often quoted, but rarely expounded to its full implications. If we separate the definition and the analogy, Geertz is stating that culture is an observable and organic whole, which one immediately recognizes as being comprised of related and varying public elements that intersect in specific and most often intentional ways, and that have their origin in a common source – humankind. On Geertz's definition, the relationship between humankind and culture is akin to the proverbial dilemma (or cycle, depending on perspective) of the chicken and the egg, with humankind acting simultaneously as both the producer and the product of culture. Like a spider, individuals and collectives are in a constant rhythm of designing, building, acting upon, manipulating, damaging, maintaining, and reconstructing the cultures within which they find themselves. Like a web, culture is complex and in constant flux, in part because of the spider's choices and in part because of its own fragile nature, which often prompts the spider to respond to a troubled area.

Thick Description, then, requires tolerance toward ambiguity and incompleteness because it works with the assumption that culture is endless in its complexity, flexible enough to move with the breeze of history, defined enough to break or collapse under the strain on environmental shifts, and an altogether sticky business for everyone but the web's grand architect.[6] Hence, we find ourselves suspended in it, whether or not that is our intention. In this way, culture is a primary force, driving individuals and collectives to act and respond in ways specific to and influenced by the cultural environment in which they live.[7] Paradoxically, humankind is also responsible for the culture(s) it creates. When humans act or respond, they either reify the *status quo* or challenge it, fortifying culture as it is or modifying it, even if slightly.

In discussing the relationship between the spider and the web, between humankind and culture, the distinction between spider and web is key. Geertz is not interested in humans *per se* but in their cultures, i.e., he seeks to further understand the mechanisms by which individuals and communities construct meaning; he does *not* seek to excavate the private thoughts that inspire or result from those mechanisms. This is an important distinction in Geertz's framework because culture as a 'web of significance' is inherently public, while the contours of the individual psyche are most often out of view (even to the individual).[8] Therefore, success is not gauged by the scholar's ability to get into someone else's head – which is impossible, even with the privilege of fieldwork – but is gauged by the scholar's ability to comprehend and communicate public significance.[9] Coming back to the analogy of the web, Geertz's aim in analyzing webs of culture is to examine their tendrils as they both converge and diverge, looking in both directions of the bilateral stretch from center to periphery and back again, thus providing the reader with "bodied stuff on which to feed" as it sits upon its own cultural web.[10]

Applied to the study of the ancient world, the metaphor of the spider and its web is another way of stating that, while time and space prohibit face-to-face encounters with ancient persons, what we *can* study through the texts and artifacts that remain are the public, symbolic networks to which those texts and artifacts testify, if only through our act of interpretation. Such symbolic webs are comprised of various threads, such as geography, environment, power, hierarchy, belief, politics, religion, morality, gender, and domestic life, threads that we may analyze to the extent allowed by the archaeological and written

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[6] Abolafia et al. 2014, 351; cf. Silverman 1990, 133.
[7] Silverman 1990, 126.
[8] Geertz 1973, 12.
[9] Silverman 1990, 126–127.
[10] Geertz 1973, 23.

records. Following Geertz, it is important to emphasize that *Thick Description* is not a form of system or concept mapping that aims to distill an entire culture into a single, densely configured snapshot.[11] Quite the opposite. Instead, *Thick Description* focuses on just a single node in a complex web, yet is written in such a way that the reader is fully aware that the author is writing about what Geertz calls 'grand realities,' not just the minutiae of another place.[12] That is, studying the use of reeds in the *Mīs Pî* is not an end in itself, but is an entry point into learning about topics of greater consequence, in this case, the relationship between ritual and nature in Mesopotamian culture.

Applied to the study of the *Mīs Pî* in particular, *Thick Description* may take any number of forms based on the interests of the scholar and the parameters of the ritual. For example, in *Moses among the Idols: Mediators of the Divine in the Ancient Near East*, I analyze the *Mīs Pî* as a specific point on the web of ancient Mesopotamian culture where theology, religion, and ritual intersect with status and various forms of power, both earthly and divine.[13] For the sake of illustration, here I perform my analysis of the *Mīs Pî* with a different, less complex, convergence in mind, and that is the relationship between ancient Mesopotamian ritual and the natural environment. While the *Mīs Pî* is best known for what it illuminates about the induction of idols and their associated theology, it also has much to suggest about the relation between ritual and nature because the enactment of the *Mīs Pî* is largely dependent on the availability of a sizeable list of natural or naturally derived resources, including specific animal products, plant species, precious metals, gemstones, and fermented drink.[14]

The *Mīs Pî* requires dozens of different ingredients, such as syrup, ghee, and wine, for the constant purification of the idol because, at its core, the *Mīs Pî* is a purification rite. Its officiant is concerned with not only the purity of the materials and workshop in which the idol is crafted, but also with maintaining that purity as he moves the idol from place to place, acts upon it, and eventually transports it into its cella. In both the ritual and incantation texts, one local ingredient stands above the rest as most praiseworthy and efficacious: as discussed in more detail in the next section, reeds and structures made of reed have great symbolic import for the *Mīs Pî* as they tie together cultural concepts of creation, purity, birth, protection, and the primordial waters known as the *Apsû*. However, the modern reader of the *Mīs Pî* is most likely to pass by this symbolism because modern cultural webs generally do not connect complex religious meaning and marshy plants, and so we are not attuned to see the intersection of those two threads. Yet, *Thick Description* encourages the scholar to pay close attention to what is pertinent to the object of study, not only to what is pertinent to the scholar, and so our purview expands into new and unexpected areas, taking our research along with it.

The fact that the relationship between ancient Mesopotamian religion and nature is one of many objects of study that one may investigate via the *Mīs Pî* highlights another aspect of *Thick Description*: the choice of both the object of study and the means of studying that object is up to the discretion of the scholar. Because the goal of *Thick Description* is to move conversations and understandings forward, with no single prize of ultimate Truth waiting at the finish line, the scholar is free to construct their analysis with their own interests in mind – provided that they select both the object of study and the specific hermeneutic approach in dialogue with the realities offered by the data. For example, one cannot study the intersection of American hip-hop music and ancient Mesopotamian ritual because

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[11] Micheelsen 2002, 9. Geertz 1973, 11–12.
[12] Geertz 1973, 12. 23. Abolafia et al. 2014, 350–351.
[13] Balogh 2018.
[14] E.g., Walker - Dick 2001, 77–82.

those two strands of culture reside in completely separate webs, but one can study the intersection of liturgical incantation and ritual, as both of those strands are woven throughout the culture under investigation. That is to say, even though *Thick Description* is performed and written by an outsider, it is always rooted in the language, actions, and ways of knowing evidenced by the locals, an aspect I discuss in more depth below.[15]

The relativism of this interpretive approach leads many to criticize Geertz's work as being overly narrow in scope, but for those working to reconstruct the cultures of civilizations past, such a targeted approach is perhaps ideal.[16] For example, my work on the *Mīs Pî* does not offer any universal lessons about the inner-workings of the species *homo sapiens*, nor is it intended to do so. What *Thick Description* does assist with is the quest to 'uncover metaphors, produce conceptual linkages, and describe other tools that may be applicable in other [cultural] contexts, even if not fully transferrable,' and in so doing to illuminate a portion of the web of significance that the ancient Mesopotamians spun.[17] To this, I would add that the intellectual influence of *Thick Description* does not end with the exposition of a particular culture, but also furthers the readers' capacity to understand and gain applicable insight into 'the consultable record of what mankind has said' about the big questions of life, and thus challenges the reader to think outside of one's own cultural context, if only for a time.[18]

Whether or not the scholars' findings also imply something about our species at large or even the readers' own situation is dependent upon the extent to which the dispositions, worldviews, circumstances, and cultural environment of the reader compare and contrast with that of the cul-

ture under investigation.[19] Because Geertz's writing holds the tension between the particulars of a culture and what those particulars have to suggest about the grand themes that many cultures share, his thick descriptions force the reader to think cross-culturally, as though peering through a hole only to find a mirror on the other side. This is one of the major reasons why Geertz is often credited with challenging ethnocentrism and racism within the academy and beyond.[20]

Counter to those who find him too relativistic, Geertz expresses unease at the potential for an interpreter to sway too far into either relativism or universalism, and encourages a moderate approach marked by balance between the two extremes. In "Thick Description" and other essays, Geertz cautions against what he calls the Jonesville-is-America (or America-is-Jonesville) fallacy wherein one '[finds] the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in the so-called 'typical' small towns and villages.'[21] That is to say, a case study alone cannot give an apt picture of the object of study in its entirety, let alone anything beyond the object of study. As Geertz famously states, '[that] is an idea which only someone too long in the bush could possibly entertain,' and besides that, 'anthropologists don't study villages; they study *in* villages.'[22] This leads us to the second portion of the discussion, and that is the kind of analysis that *Thick Description* yields. Using *Thick Description*, the scholar must negotiate between the approach's resistance to Universalist claims, and its need to speak to the 'grand realities' of human experience. In order to do so, we return to and further

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[15] Abolafia et al. 2014, 350–51.
[16] Abolafia et al. 2014, 350–51.
[17] Abolafia et al., 351.
[18] Geertz 1973, 30.

[19] There is much to be said about *Thick Description* and comparison, but that is beyond the scope of this article. Comparative religion scholars influenced by Geertz include Wendy Doniger and Jonathan Z. Smith, just to name a few.
[20] Silverman 1990, 148.
[21] Geertz 1973, 22. cf. Geertz 2002, 42–67.
[22] Geertz 1973, 22.

both the analogy of the spider and the example of the role of reeds in the *Mīs Pî*.

Relating Culture, Action, Disposition & Worldview

While the true object of analysis is not the spider but the web, *Thick Description* holds the potential to illuminate the inner-workings of the spider's interior and exterior worlds. In *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, Wendy Doniger furthers the spider and web analogy in a way that contributes to our understanding of the relationship between studying a specific culture and studying the humans that both comprise and construct that culture: where the web is present yet the spider is out of view, the spider may still be known – but only through its work.[23] On Doniger's interpretation, the spider weaves its web from the thread of its own experience, implying that culture is a meaning-laden expression of all things known, undergone, thought, and believed by the humans that establish, maintain, and transform it.[24] Along with Geertz, Doniger and others hold that meaning is not tacked onto or lain over human action and response, but is instead an integral part of the fabric that the spider creates and then spins accordingly.[25] Yes, the goal of *Thick Description* is to analyze culture, but culture is neither impersonal nor uninhabited. A spider lurks nearby, just out of view (although those performing fieldwork may perhaps have a better chance of catching a glimpse).

This nuance to Geertz's analogy recognizes the paradox of separation and inseparability in the human-culture relationship, and encourages us to think deeply about the spider, as we are prompted by its web. In conversation with Geertz's work, Jason Springs argues that, for Geertz, neither thought, nor intention, nor belief are primarily mental or private acts, but are in

fact social and therefore public.[26] Individual subjectivity and emotion are certainly rooted in these aspects of life, but appear later.[27] Whether through fieldwork, close text study, or archaeology, studying a person's or society's actions and responses to the surrounding cultural environment (i.e., how the spider responds to the web) using Geertz's mode of analysis reveals the dispositions of the spiders involved.[28] As Springs so aptly expounds:

> *Dispositions are not subjective feelings ... but rather "tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronesses" which prompt various actions and responses with the surrounding environment and circumstances. Of course, such dispositions do not form out of nothing, nor are they static and impervious to change and critical reflection. Yet they presuppose (however tacitly) some sense of what the world is like and how things around the actor "simply are" – a sense of the world into which one finds oneself thrown, socialized, and which one finds oneself trusting.*[29]

Working backward through the implications of Springs' analysis for practicing *Thick Description*, people's actions and responses within their surrounding environment reveal the dispositions that prompt their actions and responses in the first place. These dispositions – which are not emotions, mental traits, or psychological forces – do not emerge *ex nihilo*, but are rooted in a worldview that includes a particular understanding of one's place in the world.[30] For Geertz and his followers, all of these facets of the human experience are publicly available for study. The task of the scholar is to design studies in such a way as to bring actions, dispositions, and worldviews to light and into conversation, always connecting back to the actions that

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[23] Doniger 2011, 67–71.
[24] Doniger 2011, 67–71.
[25] Geertz 1973, 20. cf. Micheelsen 2002, 6. Doniger 2011, 67-71. Biersack 1989, 74. Springs 2008, 957.

[26] Springs 2008, 959–960.
[27] Springs 2008, 959.
[28] Springs 2008, 960.
[29] Springs 2008, 960. Quoting Geertz 1973a, 95–96.
[30] Springs 2008, 960.

prompted the scholar's line of inquiry in the first place.

To give a practical example of how this framework looks when applied to an ancient culture, I now arrive at my analysis of the Mesopotamian *Mīs Pî* ritual and the role of reeds therein. In line with the principles of *Thick Description* discussed thus far, the goal of this particular analysis of the *Mīs Pî*, "Washing of the Mouth" or "Purification of the Mouth," is to examine the actions and responses dictated by the *Mīs Pî* in a way that illuminates the dispositions of the religious officiants who constructed and enacted the ritual, and in so doing to prompt insight into their sense of what the world is like and how they and their compatriots fit into the grand scheme of things. With the end goal of producing insight into the relationship between nature and ritual in ancient Mesopotamian thought, I draw upon passages from the *Mīs Pî* that prescribe certain actions (ritual) and responses (incantations) relating to reeds, then analyze the dispositions – 'tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronesses' – that inform these prescriptions and, by extension, the resulting actions and responses. This process begins with interdisciplinary research in areas such as theology, history, natural history, geography, idol studies, literature, and mythology, as all of these threads of ancient Mesopotamian culture bear on the use of reeds in the *Mīs Pî*. Moving through my research, I observe (among other things) that the officiant's use of the symbolically charged reed results in his recreation of the primordial scene in which the gods were born, and this scene then elicits a positive divine decision concerning the idol being inducted into the divine community. Taking all of these matters into consideration, I then offer an interpretation as to what these actions, responses, and dispositions have to suggest about how ancient Mesopotamian religious officiants understood the relationship between humankind, nature, ritual, their own office, and the divine.

At their most practical level of cultural significance, reeds were the primary building material along the rivers of Mesopotamia from deep antiquity until the mid-20th century CE, and were commonly used for residential and ship building due to their water-tight properties, strength, and availability.[31] They grow in the damp ground or standing waters along riverbanks and can reach anywhere from 2–6 meters in height, visually connecting water, land, and sky on a vertical axis. On a horizontal axis, they act as a distinctive boundary between rivers and arable land. Geographically, the *Apsû* is synonymous with the Euphrates; symbolically and mythologically, it is synonymous with the abode of the Creator deity, Ea, and the place from which all life – including divine life – emerged long ago.[32] It is, perhaps, because of these physical, symbolic, and mythological properties that the *Mīs Pî* portrays reeds as playing a dual symbolic role: as an *axis mundi*, uniting heaven, earth, and the primordial waters called the *Apsû*, on one hand, and, on the other hand, as a "cosmic threshold" dividing the sacred *Apsû* from all that is common.[33]

On the vertical plane, reeds unite heaven, earth, and *Apsû*. The incantation "Reed Which Comes from the Pure *Apsû*" poetically describes reeds as "carefully tended in the pure house of the *Apsû*" and also "reed of the gods . . . whose destiny Enki [Ea] fixed" (Nineveh Recension [NR] 15; Incantation Text [IT] 1/2 A: 21–25). In addition to their direct relation to the *Apsû*, reeds are the means by which the generative waters of the *Apsû* are accessed by the other gods, acting as a sort of drinking straw connecting the *Apsû* and the heavens (IT 1/2 A:26). Since they are rooted in a "pure pool" or "pure place" and act as conduits of the primordial, creative, freshwater, the

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[31] Finkel 2014, 133–155; Collon 2005, fig. 807.

[32] This mythology is drawn from the opening section of the ancient Mesopotamian creation story, *Enuma Elish*, and is reflected in many Mesopotamian texts and artifacts.

[33] Berlejung 1997, 50–51; Walker and Dick 2001, 52n36.

Mīs Pî describes reeds as especially pure and particularly potent for purifying both gods and humans (IT 1/2 B: 27–49).[34] In fact, their power to purify is so great that an idol whose mouth has been washed using reeds is said to be "pure like heaven" and even visibly "bright like the center of heaven" (IT 1/2 B: 27–49). The idea that reeds are rooted in the *Apsû*, have the power to affect the purity of earthly beings and materials, and quench the gods in the heavenly realm, speaks to their role as an *axis mundi*, a point at which heaven, earth, and the subterranean come together in power.

On the horizontal plane, reeds grow in the space between the "pure *Apsû*" and civilized life, acting symbolically as a cosmic threshold between two realms. Unlike the idol seated in its cella in the midst of the city, reeds dwell on the periphery. One cannot draw near the abode of Ea without first making one's way through their thicket, a major challenge which divides the most sacred *Apsû* and whoever approaches. This ability to literally and symbolically divide between sacred and common also characterizes reed items made for ritual use. Throughout the *Mīs Pî*, the priest is required to build and use various items made of reed (*qanû*), namely, reed-bundles (*uri(g)gallu*), reed-huts (*šutukku*), and reed-mats (*burû*). In the incantation "Reed Which Comes from the *Apsû*," the plant itself is called "little *buginnu*" a small water-tight vessel or trough used to carry liquid (IT 1/2 A: 22).[35] In the *Mīs Pî*, reeds carry the pure, life-giving water of the *Apsû* and these primordial waters cannot escape due to the exterior's water-tight properties. Therefore, when reeds are bundled together, they have the power to enclose and insulate sacred space.[36] No sacredness can escape and nothing common or impure may enter. The officiant assembles many reed-bundles (*uri(g)gallu*) to make reed-huts, one for each deity he sum-

mons to the *Mīs Pî*.[37] He does this once in the countryside, after which he recites two incantations, "Reed Which Comes from the *Apsû*" and "Reed Whose Heart Is Pure and Good," and once again in the orchard at the riverbank (NR 5–16, 71; cf. Babylonian Recension [BR] 6–7, 12). It is the sacredness of the spaces he creates that enables these gods to reside therein, in close proximity to the priest and the idol whom he presents for induction.

As for the idol undergoing the *Mīs Pî*, it, too, receives the benefit of the "pure and good" reed. Not only are various types of reed listed among the ingredients applied to the idol for its purification, but it is also set upon a reed-mat among the reed-huts of the other gods (NR 71, 95–96; BR 6–7, 12; IT 1/2 B: 27–38). This mat insulates the idol from the ground, thus protecting it from any impurities it may contract.[38] The journey from the house of the craftsmen, to the orchard, to the river, to the cella, is a hazardous journey, fraught with danger of contamination and any ill-will a god or person might bear against that deity.[39] The reed mat offers protection from the elements and powers, which could gravely affect the idol's pure status and the efficacy of its induction from one mode of being into the next. This protective aspect and the connection between reed vessels and safe passage are highlighted in Mesopotamian birth incantations, which draw a parallel between troubled fetuses in amniotic fluid and reed-vessels filled with precious goods that the gods steer in a turbulent sea.[40] In fact, some of these incantations appeal to Ea [Enki], the Creator, for the safe passage of the child, a motif that is also present in the *Mīs Pî* in relation to the induction of the idol.[41]

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[34] Berlejung 1997, 52.

[35] Chicago Assyrian Dictionary volume B, 306–307.

[36] Chicago Assyrian Dictionary volume U/W, 223–225; Walker and Dick 2001, 53n41.

[37] Collon 2005, fig. 803.

[38] Berlejung 1997, 55n46; Walker and Dick 2000, 58n74.

[39] Berlejung 1997, 67–68.

[40] Finkel 2014, 135; Böck 2009, 272-274; Stol 2000, 10–11, 62–63; Cunningham 1997, 107–108.

[41] Farber 1984, 311–316.

Whether the transition is a human birth or an idol's induction, the source of safe passage is the same. It is the Creator deity who has the power to render that life's destiny as favorable and it is the officiant who has the ability to entreat that deity toward a favorable decision. In the case of the *Mīs Pî*, the use of reeds to create protective, sacred spaces, and to connect heaven, earth, and *Apsû* empowers and enables the officiant to ritually recreate the ancient moment in which the gods were born out of the primordial waters, thus prompting the gods to accept the idol as part of the divine community. By bringing the past into the present and enabling the gods to dwell in the midst of the ceremony, the priest enacts the successful transition of the idol from the house of the craftsmen into the community of the gods.

To take a step back from the minutiae of analysis and reflect on the expressed goal of this particular *Thick Description*, my analysis of the use of reeds in the *Mīs Pî* suggests that ancient Mesopotamian religious officiants understood the relationship between humankind, nature, ritual, and the divine as one of cooperation across space, time, and realm, a cooperation that is built into the very fabric of creation and extends into the primordial past, yet on its own this cooperation is inert. It is the responsibility of the officiant to activate that cooperation and to bring it into the present moment through the actions and responses dictated by the *Mīs Pî*. In engaging properly with reeds (and many other items provided by nature) and with the correct web of symbolism in operation, the officiant is able to perform the ritual in a way that prompts a specific series of divine actions, all of which have serious implications for the functioning of the idol and, by extension, all of society. This analysis suggests that these particular officiants viewed themselves as mediators between cosmic order and civilized life, as it was their literal job to draw these two worlds – divine and human – into proper, positive relation through the ordained use of the natural materials that the gods

both provided and imbued with meaning. This insight into the ancient Mesopotamian sense of what the world is like is the end goal of *Thick Description*, although it may continue to prompt the reader to additional insight depending on their own personal and cultural webs.

As demonstrated in my analysis of the role reeds in the *Mīs Pî*, *Thick Description* requires the scholar to be in constant dialogue with the available primary sources, and to ensure that all suggestions and conclusions are grounded in what the spiders and their webs say about themselves.[42] Since meaning is never an after-thought of action but is an essential component of its fabrication, no action is meaningless.[43] In *Thick Description*, nothing is taken as a meaningless reflex, but everything is taken as a consciously employed communicative device inherently laden with meaning, from how an ancient Mesopotamian officiant is instructed to use a specific plant product to the theological incantations he is prompted to recite.[44] Therefore, the scholar is *not* free to import meaning from one's own context, but is tasked with comprehending and communicating the meaning expressed by the culture under investigation, albeit in one's own language.[45] In this way, the scholar serves as a mediator between the reader of *Thick Description* and the process of meaning-making as it happens in another place and time.

This brings me to a topic that has been an undercurrent of this discussion up to this point, and that is the relationship between scholar, reader, and native. One of Geertz's most quoted insights speaks directly to this triangular relationship: 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.'[46] In its broader context, Geertz uses this phrasing to

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[42] Geertz 1973, 25. Doniger 2011, 66–67.
[43] Geertz 1973, 20. cf. Micheelsen 2002, 6. Doniger 2011, 67–71. Biersack 1989, 74. Springs 2008, 957.
[44] Biersack 1989, 74.
[45] Micheelsen 2002, 10.
[46] Geertz 1973, 9.

make a point about how much energy, research, and analysis goes into even the most elemental descriptions of other cultures. What most scholars pick up on, and rightly so, is the distinction Geertz makes between the two perspectives operative in his writing. Geertz could have stated that 'our data' is comprised of 'people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' but instead offers a helpful complication. At best, a scholar's descriptions are second-hand – re-descriptions of a native's descriptions – and sometimes they are third- or even fourth-hand.[47] This connects back to my earlier statement that the success of *Thick Description* is not gauged by the scholar's ability to get into someone's head, but by the ability to comprehend and communicate public significance. That is, the goal of *Thick Description* is not to describe as the native would describe, but to describe as the scholar would describe, holding both the native and the reader in mind.

The trick is to be mindful – which is not the same as skeptical – of the fact that the interpreter is now working from a redescription of the event rather than the event itself, a redescription that mediates between the scholar and irretrievable time, and without which neither the scholar nor their audience have knowledge of the occasion at all. In this scenario, many scholars are akin to one of Geertz's informants, who in 1968 tells him about an event that happened in 1912, and which Geertz then writes down in his notebook and shares verbatim in the article "Thick Description." [48] In researching past cultures, scholars must often rely on other scholars' presentations of ancient texts, artifacts, and civilizations – 1968 versions of 1912 events – and from there present and interpret what are considered to be the facts by scholarly consensus. A native's point of view would certainly sound different than my own, but since the ancient Mesopotamians left behind no extant treatises or ex-

planatory works relating to the *Mīs Pî*, reeds, or the status of nature, my own inherited, educated, and moderated view is all that I have.[49] Even if I did have access to native thoughts, I would have to translate and interpret them for myself and for my modern audience. What we then might offer is not the native's view – for that is beyond the bounds of the possible – or even a constructed native's view, but rather our own educated view, one that considers as much as may be considered about the object of study at hand, as well as the physical or textual object through which we study that greater cultural object.

Geertz's notion of re-description honors the particularity of the native view by deeply acknowledging a person's inability to accurately represent another, and seeking to do so only to the extent that the other is available for public study. Geertz is interested in public significance, and leaves the interpretation of private emotions, mental traits, and psychological forces to the empathetic reader or perhaps a scholar from another field. Furthermore, Geertz questions the assumption that a "native view" is even possible to achieve, let alone the most desirable outcome of a scholarly enterprise. When asked if an ethnographer should show their analysis to the natives, he is quoted with an enthusiastic 'In general, no!' and goes on to explain why using his work on the Balinese cockfight as a reference point: '. . . the cockfight is based on an illusion, so they do not want to understand it. If they did, it would not work. Sometimes people have a natural resistance to understand what they are doing."[50] Geertz learned this when he went back to the community to talk about what they were doing and found that they are interested neither in social science, nor in alternative interpretations, nor in exercises in hermeneutics because, 'They already know what it means to them. What I want to do is tell somebody, who does not already know what the cockfight means,

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[47] Geertz 1973, 9. 15.
[48] Geertz 1973, 7–9.

[49] Geertz 1973, 15–16, Biersack 1989, 76.
[50] Micheelsen 2002, 10.

what it means.'[51] This practical position in relation to the native is liberating for the scholar of ancient cultures because it honors and describes the role of the scholar as one who translates and interprets culture, rather than one who records or transmits. To return to the analogy of the spider and its web, both the spider and the scholar are equally interested in the web, but their interests are different based on their positions vis-à-vis the web. In general, spiders are not aware of the chemical composition of their web, yet because of the work of scientists, this knowledge is now part of the consultable record of the natural sciences and is accessible to interested parties. On the other hand, spiders have an entirely different body of knowledge about their webs, a knowledge that only a spider and its fellow-citizens may fully access in their own terms.

Thick Description begins with observing action, interprets action in a way that speaks to disposition, and then analyzes both action and disposition in a way that speaks to the actors' sense of the world – all with the goal of expanding the audience's purview of what it is to be human. For Geertz, this takes the form of educating the audience about other cultures' processes of meaning-making. The force of *Thick Description* is not in the raw data, but in the prose version of that data.[52] What we describe is not raw social discourse, but a small part that leads to understanding.[53] The goal is not to present the raw data or the native's view, but to present a mediated view, the scholar's view, in a way that brings into conversation the 'grand realities' of both the native's web and the reader's web. The payoff for the reader is not only in exposure to the data, but in the established fact that examining the patterns of others often works to highlight our own.

For example, I could come up with a chart of natural resources involved in the *Mīs Pî* that shows which actions are prescribed for those resources, but instead I actively choose to leave it to the reader to suspect whether I have indeed constructed such a chart. If I am performing *Thick Description* well, you will not even notice that such a chart is missing, let alone care, because focusing narrowly on a particular facet of the ritual, such as the use of reeds, produces more insight, both in quantity and in quality, than any large-scale survey. In the framework of *Thick Description*, such a chart would actually be counterproductive, even harmful, to the interpretive enterprise because it reduces the complexity of the nature-ritual relationship and constrains it to fit into the literal straight and narrow. After all, "It is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go 'round the world to count the cats of Zanzibar."[54] It is not enough to observe or research. One must also interpret and present in a way that is meaningful to all involved, which means that we must also avoid getting tangled in a web or thicket of our own scholarly making.[55]

Thick Description as Challenge & Possibility

It is suitable to think of *Thick Description* as a set of principles, a conceptual framework, an interpretive approach, the result of a hermeneutical task performed well, a loosely defined genre of academic writing that reads more like an essay than a report, or a combination of the above.[56] One thing that Geertz *is* clear about: *Thick Description* is neither a theory, nor a method, nor is it based on one.[57] In an interview with Arun Micheelsen, Geertz states, 'I do not think that a particular interpretation has to be based on a general theory of meaning – whatever that may be. . . I do not think meanings are out there to theorize about. One tries to look at

[51] Micheelsen 2002, 10.
[52] Silverman 1990, 138. One of the implied aspects of *Thick Description* is its emphasis on skilled writing. When Geertz's writings first began to garner attention, he was heavily critiqued for choice of the essay genre.
[53] Geertz 1973, 20.

[54] Geertz 1973, 16.
[55] Geertz 1973, 9.
[56] E.g., Freeman 2014. Tilley 1990, 57. 61. Silverman 1990.
[57] Abolafia et al. 2014, 348. cf. Trencher 2002, 223. Freeman 2014, 829.

behavior, what people say, and to make sense of it – that is my theoretical approach to meaning.'[58] Geertz further explains that the reason he resists overarching theories is because his work is entirely dependent on empirical study, and thus deeply connected to an actual community. With this, Geertz hints at a danger that Micheelsen summarizes well when he states, 'one should be careful in formulating any theory at all … [as] theory in itself can spawn its own imaginary systems.'[59] In other words, if the scholar begins with a theory or method and only then engages the actual data (i.e., reads culture-*x* through the lens of theory-*y* or method-*z*), the scholar limits their own ability to see the object of study as it actually exists in its own cultural context, and is likely to skew their interpretation to fit their preconceived notions rather than let their notions be shaped by the object of study and its native culture.

Because our mode of analysis needs to be able to go where the object of study leads, rather than the other way around, each occasion calls for a different mode of analysis.[60] Analyses, like cultures, are context-specific and most often require an interdisciplinary, toolbox approach.[61] This is why Geertz's work often takes the form of a 'blurred genre,' and *Thick Description* remains an elusive term. For Geertz, as for the spider, the 'web of significance' that is culture is the primary force that dictates his scholarly actions, responses, and ways of making meaning; as culture shifts, so too must our mode of analytic thinking. For Geertz, there is no possible way to know anything about a web, let alone a spider, without examining the web itself. Webs are not theoretical but real, as are the communities that

construct and inhabit them, and scholarly ethics ought to reflect that reality.[62]

Although this flexibility makes *Thick Description* difficult to define, it also makes it applicable to a wide variety of interpretive situations across any number of academic fields. From a literary studies perspective, Stephen Greenblatt adds that *Thick Description* does not only everything mentioned thus far, but also enables us to bring into conversation the obscure and the popular over subjects more grand than our redescriptions of either combined.[63] As a scholar of ancient Near Eastern religion, with a current focus on the relationship between nature and humankind, I analyze the *Mīs Pî* – an obscure and rarely studied ritual – in a way that brings it into dialogue with some of the more popular texts one might consider when studying the theme of nature and humankind, such as *Enuma Elish* and *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In so doing, I not only give significance to the *Mīs Pî* as a ritual worthy of modern study on its own accord, but also force my reader, academic or otherwise, to pan back ever so slightly and to make way for the answers that this and other rituals contribute 'the consultable record of what [humankind] has said' about life's big questions.[64]

In order to affect this kind of expansion of thought, scholars must reconstruct their objects of study based on what their sources dictate, working in concert with the challenges inherent in navigating the ever-changing web of both the other culture and one's own. Only then we are able to move into the terrain of the 'so-what?,' to move past the raw data and reconstruction stage, and venture into the 'grand realities' that manifest across space and time. Of course, those studying ancient civilizations cannot follow up with the communities involved in our study, but as Geertz reminds us, the ability to do so is nei-

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[58] Micheelsen 2002, 6.
[59] Micheelsen 2002, 14.
[60] Abolafia et al. 2014, 348. cf. Silverman 123–129.
[61] E.g., Balogh - Mangum 2017, 15–18.

[62] Geertz's resistance to imposing overarching theory is another way in which his work challenges ethnocentrism and racism. cf. Silverman 1990, 148.
[63] Greenblatt 1997, 20.
[64] Geertz 1973, 30.

ther necessary nor useful. In our task to perform social discourse across space and time, the most pertinent conversation we must have, if we are to understand what we and our compatriots are up to, is with ourselves – as scholars, as humans, and as spiders suspended in webs of significance we ourselves have spun.[65]

Conclusion

The value of Clifford Geertz's *Thick Description* for working with ancient cultures lies in its propensity to expand the possibilities of what interpreters can accomplish in the face of limited material. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Geertz to the study of ancient worlds is his perspective on the native's view, which liberates scholars from questions of legitimacy when confronted with the impossibility of direct access to that native. This shift away from the aim of representing natives as natives might represent themselves, to the aim of communicating one culture's mode of meaning-making as it might be understood by another, brings with it a new set of questions, responsibilities, and required skill sets. Because *Thick Description* is malleable and widely applicable, each scholar who adopts it must then think through their object of study with Geertz's principles in mind and develop their own set of criteria and approaches for the project at hand, knowing that these are likely to change over time as the data directs. However, the approach must always stem from and return to the language, actions, and knowledge of the culture under investigation, because it is through that web of significance alone that we may speak to the 'grand realities' of the lives of spiders. As mediators between past webs and present webs, far webs and near webs, scholars have great privilege and responsibility that can be used for good or for ill – or simply to further understanding.

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[65] Geertz 1973, 5. Silverman 1990, 136.

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Putting Ancient Sounds on Exhibit.
The Case of two Mesoamerican Bone Rasps
at the Pigorini Museum, Rome

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Abstract: Two scraped idiophones made of human bones from ancient Mesoamerica (omichicahuaztli) are currently on exhibit at the Museo delle Civiltà – museo preistorico etnografico "Luigi Pigorini" in Rome. An interdisciplinary project was carried out to detect the properties of the bones and the sound characteristics of the instruments. The cultural biographies of the instruments were reconstructed beginning with the social role of these artefacts in the American indigenous cultural context, to the paths that brought them to Italy. This case study allows us to make some considerations about the materiality of ancient sound artefacts within the western museum context, specifically highlighting how visitors can perceive sound coming from distant cultural backgrounds and the ways instruments can be studied and mediated to the contemporary Italian public. This case study is a clear example of the benefits of incorporating an anthropological perspective on archaeological heritage.

Introduction

In this paper we focus on a Mesoamerican musical instrument category referred to as *omichicahuaztli*, which is an indigenous term from the Nahuatl, composed of the word *omitl* (bone) and *chicahua* (fortify, produce strength). It translates into "bone that gives strength".[1]

According to Western organology, the omichicahuaztli is classified as a scraped idiophone, which is an instrument that produces sound by the vibration of its own body, without the need for strings, membranes, or columns of air.[2] It is composed of a main sonorous vibrating object with a notched surface and the scraper component, usually classified as "non-sonorous object".[3] The sound is produced when the player uses a scraping movement, hitting directly or indirectly the sonorous object that composes the instrument. During the performance, the scraper moves along the teeth of the notched surface of the sonorous object (direct movement), to be alternately lifted off the teeth and quickly and rhythmically snapped against them (indirect hit).[4]

During Pre-Hispanic times, the omichicahuaztli was usually made of human long bones; mostly femur, tibia, and humerus. Among the Aztecs, human bones were considered the containers of life energy and were the privileged raw material to manufacture bone rasps, as the

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[1] Karttunen 1992; Molina 1970 [1571]; Siméon 2007 [1885]; Bellomia 2017, 15.
[2] Sachs – Hornbostel 1914, 553–590.
[3] Sadie 1984, 279. 816; see also MIMO (Musical Instruments Museums Online), *Revision of Hornbostel-Sachs classification*, 2011, 6 (http://network.icom.museum/cimcim/resources/classification-of-musical-instruments/L/1/ last seen:

22/8/2018). As we are going to show, the emitted sound is actually affected by the material morphology and characteristics of the object used to scrape the notches, so that it is directly involved in the vibration of the body of the instrument, so that we consider both the components as sonorous, and from now on prefer to call it "scraper".
[4] Ibid.

above mentioned Nahuatl etymology of their name suggests. Such bones were chosen especially if they once pertained to the body of sacrificed victims because of the high status of these individuals.[5]

The notches of these instruments used to produce sound, were manufactured by carving a variable number of transverse incisions, parallel and equally spaced from each other, on one side of the bone. To produce sound these notches were scraped with a hard object, such as a shell or a smaller bone. The pre-Hispanic Mixtec Codex *Vindobonensis* is the only source that visually refers to the way that these instruments would have been played.[6] On page 24 (**Fig. 1**) we can see the deity 9 Wind scraping a notched femur with another bone (possibly a scapula) on top of a human skull used as sound box or resonating chamber.[7] The emitted sound is comparable to that of the modern *guiro*; this is made of wood or dry gourd and is in use widely today in Latin America. Nevertheless, this comparison cannot go beyond the organological features of the instruments since the güiro's origins are African.[8]

Most of the archaeologically-known omichicahuaztli instruments come from burials and many are intentionally broken as if they had been ritually "killed" before being deposited beside the body of the deceased.[9] This state of preservation makes organological or acoustic analysis difficult.

Two late 16th century colonial chronicles referring to the Mexicas, written by Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc and by Diego Durán, discuss the use of the omichicahuaztli instruments exclusively in the context of the commemorative ceremonies of warriors who had died in the battlefield or who had been sacrificed to the gods.

Fig. 1: Codex Vindobonensis (facsimile), page 24, detail of 9 Wind playing an omichicahuaztli with a human skull used as resonating sound box.

According to Tezozomoc,[10] the commemorative ceremony for the fallen warriors was ritually marked with the rhythmic sound of the omichicahuaztli by younger family members of the deceased. In this case these rhythms were made scraping a notched deer bone with a shell. The omichicahuaztli was an instrumental accompaniment to other percussion and wind instruments that were played together during the ritual mourning of the families of the dead. Elders surrounded the richly dressed and adorned bundles containing the remains of the warriors and danced to the sounds made by the omichicahuaztli in the ceremonial plaza in front of the temple of Huitzilopochtli, the warrior

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[5] López Áustin 1984, 149; Bellomia 2017, 181–185.

[6] The Vindobonensis Codex, sent by Cortés to Charles V on 10 July 1519, is one of the very first American documents arriving in Europe and also one of the few pre-Hispanic Mixtec manuscripts that we possess today. It narrates historical-mythical, calendaric, and genealogical accounts about the Mixtec ruling dynasties. Since 1677, it has been stored in the National Library of Vienna (Jansen 1982).

[7] Beyer 1916.

[8] Facchin 2014, 305.

[9] McVicker 2005; Pereira 2005.

[10] Tezozomoc in particular describes a historical event, which is the funeral of the warriors who died during the Battle of Chalco that took place during the reign of Moctezuma I (1440 – 1469). See Alvarado Tezozomoc 1943[1598], 301.

Fig. 2: Omichicahuaztli MPE 4209 (reproduced with permission of Museo delle Civiltà – Museo Pigorini, Rome)

god. The ceremony lasted for four days, after which the priests cremated the bodies of the dead and scattered their ashes over the heads of the relatives of the deceased.[11] A similar account of this ritual is given in chapter 18 of Diego Durán's *Historia.*[12]

According to the Mexica worldview, the souls of those who died in battle made an eighty-day journey to *Tonatiuh Ilhuicac,* the Sky of the Sun, with the mission of accompanying the Sun to the zenith for four years,[13] and the function of the described ceremony was to facilitate them on their journey, ritually marking its beginning.

Materials and their cultural biographies
Today, hundreds of omichicahuaztli are preserved in various museums in Mexico and the United States, as well as in Europe.[14] From the late 19th century onwards, only those bone rasps showing some figurative decoration were studied in detail[15] and were evaluated on the basis of the artistic and cultural value of the instrument's decorative components. These instruments are now on display in museums, even when the sound producing device - the notched surface – is incomplete or not well preserved. In most of the cases, the object used to scrape the notches is not recovered or presented with

these instruments on display, which complicates their archaeomusicological study.

The omichicahuaztli (inventory numbers MPE 4209 and MPE 15395/G) discussed in this article are integrated in the Museo delle Civiltà exhibiting space labeled "Americhe", in the showcase dedicated to human sacrifice. Also, on display with them are the two objects used as scrapers which are a shell (MPE 4209), and a human fibula (MPE 15395/G). This state of conservation of the sonorous object together with its scraper is an exception among the known pre-Hispanic bone rasps from Mesoamerica.

Specimen MPE 4209 (**Fig. 2**) is composed of a left human femur with 19 transverse incisions, four of them perforated at regular intervals, and a shell of a sea snail *Oliva julieta* that was rubbed against the notches of the omichicahuaztli to produce sound.[16] The head and the neck of the femur were originally decorated with shell (*Spondylus princeps*) and an obsidian mosaic pattern, which was glued to the bone with a vegetal resinous material obtained from *Pinaceae* trees.[17] The mosaic decoration makes it unique among the other known omichicahuaztli, though unfortunately the tesserae are now almost completely lost.

[11] Ibid.
[12] Durán 1967[1581], 154.
[13] López Luján, Leonardo 2015, 138; López Austin 1980, 361–370; Durán 1967[1581], 155–187.
[14] Bellomia et al. 2016.

[15] Gutierrez Solana 1983; Lumholz – Hrdlicka 1898, 61-79; Seler 1898, 62-73; Starr 1899; Trejo Mojica 2008, 17–18; von Winning 1959.
[16] Bellomia 2017; Velázquez Castro *et al.* 2014.
[17] Pecci – Mileto 2017.

This specimen arrived at the Pigorini Museum as part of an exchange of objects between Luigi Pigorini[18] and the Archaeological Museum of the University of Bologna. It had joined the collection of the *Istituto delle Scienze* of Bologna through a donation made in 1745 by pope Benedict XIV.[19] The discovery made by Davide Domenici, as member of our research team, of an Italian mid-16th century booklet that contains a list of objects arriving from the newly discovered continent, made it possible to trace back the history of this omichicahuaztli. The instrument arrived in Europe during the second half of the 16th century from the Post-Classic Mixtec kingdom of Tututepec, Oaxaca. The booklet describes the instrument as the "leg of a king", accompanied by a mosaic covered human skull, likely its resonating chamber, that is now lost. Both the omichicahuaztli and the human skull are said to have been manufactured from the bones of a "king that was made prisoner in a war by another enemy king" who was eventually sacrificed.[20]

Specimen MPE 15395/G (**Fig. 3**) is composed of a complete right human femur with 19 transverse incisions, four of them perforated at regular intervals (similar to the last specimen discussed), accompanied by a complete right human fibula used to scrape over the notches to produce sound. This instrument has not any kind of decoration. It was brought by an anonymous priest to Paris in 1878, where Enrico H. Giglioli bought it.[21] In 1913, Pigorini purchased Giglioli´s entire collection and as a result, the notched femur, together with the fibula, merged into the American collection of his museum.[22] Giglioli attached a label to it, where

it is described as coming from a tomb in Quiché, Guatemala, where it had been excavated alongside two small steatite amulets (inventory number 6763 and 6772), and one "singular symbolic axe" with a handle made of schist (6725).

Fig. 3: Omichicahuaztli MPE 15395/G (reproduced with permission of Museo delle Civiltà – Museo Pigorini, Rome).

The two omichicahuaztli specimens have demonstrated to have two unique biographies, consisting of two different stories to tell,

[18] Luigi Pigorini (1842–1925) was an Italian archaeologist and founder of the museum that now bears his name. For more information see http://www.pigorini.beniculturali.it/personaggi.html (19/07/2018).
[19] Nobili 1993.
[20] Domenici 2016, 53.
[21] Bellomia 2017, 222. Enrico Hillyer Giglioli (1845-1909), was an Italian anthropologist, but also explorer and collector of *exotica*. He took part in a

circumnavigation of the world occurred between 1865 and 1868 for scientific purpose, as assistant of the zoologist Filippo De Filippi (1814–1867). After his death, his collection of more than seventeen thousand objects from all continents became part of the Pigorini Museum. See http://www.pigorini.beniculturali.it/personaggi.html (20/07/2018).
[22] Bellomia 2013, 126–128; Giglioli 1901, 185–186; Nobili 2010, 14–15.

although today, they share space in the same museum showcase.

Methods involved in this research

A multidisciplinary research approach was applied to both two instruments to reconstruct their cultural biographies as artefacts, including the analysis of their biological properties as bones and of their organology and acoustic characteristics as sound producing devices, and results provided these instruments with a story to tell and then a new role in the museum space.[23] The first method for analyzing these instruments was an osteological study that determined biological sex by measuring the femoral head diameter. In addition to determining biological sex, the living stature was obtained measuring the femoral length (using direct measurement and regression formula) and the age of death was estimated by observing the stages of fusion and the degenerative changes of the epiphyses. A detailed material analysis of the bone surfaces provided information that allowed for a reconstruction of the taphonomic processes that transformed these artefacts from human remains into musical instruments. The markings on the instruments were organized into probable steps of an operational stratigraphy or *chaine operatoire*, following the work of Pereira,[24] to reconstruct the sequence of stages involved in production and use: raw material procurement, cleaning, shaping, decoration and finally, use-wear patterns. Markings on the surface relating to the use-wear, were useful in determining the probable performing pattern of musicians playing these instruments. Once this data was obtained, it was possible to reconstruct the playing pattern of the instruments using their original scraping tools and digitally record their sound (**Fig. 4**). Since it was not possible to take the specimens out of

the museum, the recording was made using a portable Tascam DR-70 recorder and two microphones AKG C1000S.[25] All the files were recorded at 96 Hz, 24-bit resolution.

Fig. 4: The recording setting. A: the positioning of the microphones. B: the executive technique and the position of the player (photo by Amedeo Abate).

The recordings allowed us to analyze the acoustic characteristics of the instruments and to integrate a replication of their sound in the exhibition space, giving museum visitors the opportunity to not only "look at" but also "listen to", both of the omichicahuaztli instruments, although behind a museum glass.

Results

The anthropometric analysis revealed that MPE 4209 was a young/adult male individual, with a stature of 159 cm, while MPE 15395/G was a young/adult female, 155 cm tall. The taphonomic evidence – including the specific cut

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[23] Some other results of this research are discussed in Velázquez Castro *et al.* 2014; Domenici 2016, Bellomia – Fiore, in press, Bellomia *et al*. in preparation.
[24] Pereira 2005.
[25] The equipment used for the recording session has been purchased by the Department of History,

Cultures and Religions of Sapienza, Università di Roma, while the software is iZotope RX, property of Antonio Maria Buonomo, the sound engineer that collaborated with this project. For the detailed acoustic analysis see Bellomia and Buonomo (in preparation).

marks that appeared at the ends of each of the remains – suggests that both the bones were disarticulated from the body of a recently deceased individual. Both of the specimens were made into musical instruments using several manufacturing techniques. The bone material was first cleaned using an irregular lithic tool as testified by the scraping *striae* left on the surface of the remains. After the remains were cleaned, sound-related modifications were made to the front surface of the femur. These modifications included the production of notches, which were manufactured by the *sciage* technique. This consisted of sawing the bone until the desired depth of the notch was reached. In the case of MPE 4209, the femoral inner cavity was opened by sectioning the distal epiphysis from the rest of the instrument body. A circular hole was manufactured close to the distal edge by manually rotating a conical sharp tool. After the desired sonic modifications were made to the instrument, the mosaic decoration was applied on the head and the neck of the femur MPE 4209.[26]

Interestingly, use-wear marks were visible along the edges of the central notches, which suggests that the repeated movement made by the scrapers to produce sound had been made in both directions, away from and then back towards the musician. The use-wear was taken into great consideration during the recording of the instruments, as an important performative data. The degree of use-wear on the notches of MPE4209 is quite extensive and almost completely degrades the notches, while that of MPE15395/G is lower, so that left the notches visible and well-preserved (**Fig. 5**). The measurements of the depth of the notches confirm a visual rhythmic patterning that is inscribed on the body of the instrument. The depth demonstrated an intentional positioning of the perforated notches at regular intervals. This is clearly

shown in the histogram in **fig. 6** that refers to the MPE 4209 instrument.

Fig. 5: Comparison between the different degrees of wear on the notches of the two instruments: front view (top), section (below). the consumption of the bone surface of MPE 4209 (left) is visibly greater than that of MPE 15395 / G (right). Optical microscope photo by Ivana Fiore.
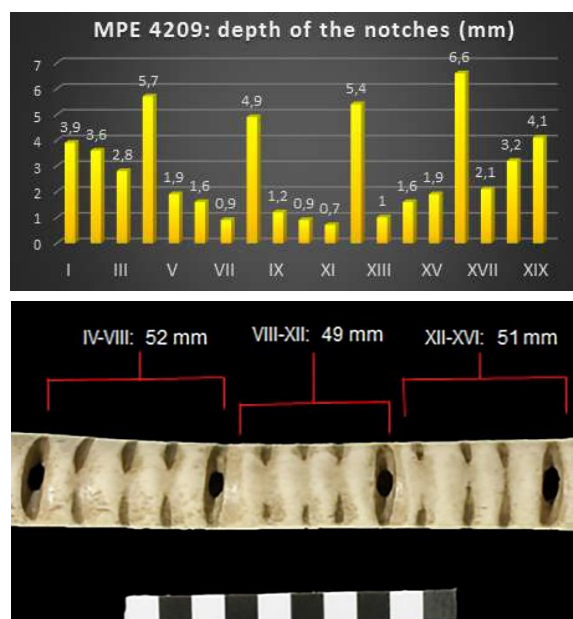
Fig. 6 A: MPE 4209: gradual variation of the depth of the notches, with evident four peaks of depth in correspondence of the four perforated notches. B: Measure of the regular distances between the perforated notches (histogram and image by Author).

The main goal of the acoustic analysis was to quantify to what extent the intentionally increased depth of the four perforated notches affected the production of the corresponding sound pulses, thus experimentally verifying the presence or absence of any acoustic effect

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[26] For a detailed reconstruction of the *chaine operatoire*, see Bellomia – Fiore, in press.

deriving from the positioning of the holes at regular intervals.

The recording session made us able to get as close as possible to the timbre of the instruments, which had been still little investigated. The analysis of the spectrograms and of the corresponding waveforms visually demonstrated different frequencies emitted by the two instruments as well as sound variations when different "scrapers" were used. An analysis of the recordings confirmed that there was a certain degree of audio-visual rhythmic intentionality in the manufacture of the instrument and in the placement of the perforated notches at regular intervals. The recordings revealed thus the *intention behind the action*, that is the conscious choices that guided the manufacture of both the artefacts.

Another important goal of the recording session was to investigate the possibility of returning the multisensory dimension of these instruments so that museum visitors could have the opportunity to experience them in a more complete way.

Discussion

The analysis of the bone rasps presented in this article is an example of the scientific processes involved in the attainment of sound from artifacts. Our goal was not only to deepen the knowledge of specific artefacts, but also to suggest one way to exhibit these instruments and their associated sounds to the public. From the beginning of our analysis we faced a problem with regards to their definition as we struggled to emancipate them from a Eurocentric organological classification, which could have resulted sterile if not accompanied by an analysis of the Mesoamerican cultural context of use.

We considered the bone not only from the anatomical point of view, but also considering the *emic* definition as a chicahuaztli made of bones, "a bone container of vital energy". The

etymological analysis is necessary for understanding the indigenous cultural perception of human body and the use of it as raw material for the manufacture of the omichicahuaztli. Osteological and taphonomic analyses let us reconstruct the material identikit of the bones and the manufacturing stages. The recording and analysis of the sound tracks gave us further information and another perspective of the organological structure of this idiophone classification. Additionally, the acoustic analysis experimentally confirmed the supposed intentionality in the positioning of the notches and holes that characterize this type of instrument and make it a sound producing device.

Ancient musical instruments often present as a very stimulating case study, forcing us to question our own analytical categories, as these artefacts represent a combination of material and immaterial culture.[27] As already mentioned, the Mesoamerican bone rasps currently on display in several museums' collections, were traditionally examined and displayed due to their iconographic meaningful surface and their sound function was ignored. This traditional "iconographic" approach has remained unchanged throughout the last century, and this has resulted in objects becoming subjected to a purely visual contemplation in the exhibiting space of Western museums. In some recent works there is actually an attempt to study the organology of some other bone rasps from Oaxaca, but these scholars still focused on the taphonomic traces of these instruments and less space was given to recording and analyzing the sound produced by the instrument.[28] Moreover, musical instruments now on display in Western museums give us the chance to investigate the different exhibiting techniques used to convey contents of immaterial nature. The presence of musical instruments behind the glass case should be not only visual but also acoustic. Thus, an acoustic analysis of the instrument's

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[27] Stockmann 1984, 4.

[28] Higelin, 2012; Sanchez – Higelin 2014.

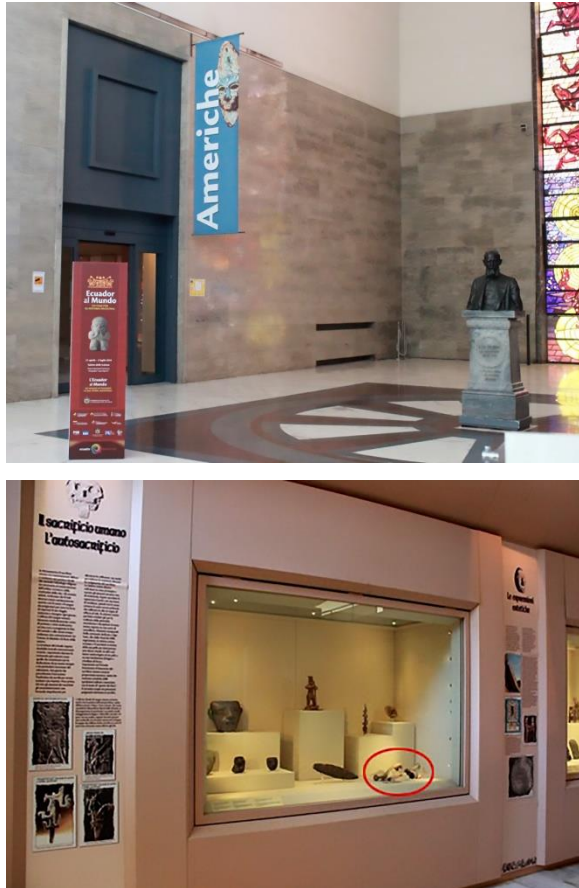capacity to produce sound has become essential.

Fig. 7 A: The entrance of the exhibiting room "Americhe". B: the showcase dedicated to human sacrifice (courtesy of the Museo delle Civiltà – Museo Pigorini, Roma).

Emphasis on the importance of Mesoamerican archaeomusicology has grown consistently in recent years. The discipline is moving away from the classificatory tendency of the 20th century[29] to question the materiality of musical instruments and to investigate their historical trajectories and meaning.[30] The progression of archaeomusicology as a discipline was influenced from the beginning by the progressive approach of ethnomusicology to cultural anthropology that took place during the second half of the 20th century, looking at sound related material artefacts as precious sources for a better understanding of ancient music as a culturally marked behavior.[31]

The theoretical framework of this research has also been greatly influenced by the concepts of materiality and material culture in archaeology and anthropology, which focus on the infinite ways human beings and things *entangle* in a dynamic social network.[32]

Integrating theoretical approaches between archaeology and cultural anthropology offers a strong position from which we can address the issue of materiality of archaeological objects. In this light, we can consider archaeological objects to be more than indicators of cultural traits that can be studied from a "materialist" point of view. As such, in a museum context, artifacts as materials have a way of conveying meanings, stories, knowledge.

Of course, scientific analysis of material objects, according to the laws of natural sciences, can and often does give important results, but may be pushed too far. It should always be remembered that an artefact, regarded as a cultural element, can be considered the result of a complex of ideas in the minds of the human beings by whom it is made and used.[33] An artefact is generally aimed at responding to the wishes or desires of those who make it and then use it or even abandon it, to fulfill certain tasks. The way that the artifact takes shape is often directly determined by the technical capabilities, experiences and cultural purposes of its manufacturer or user but its materiality can also contribute to determining them, making the relationship between human beings and material objects circular.

In the case of archaeological artefacts, detecting the intentionality in the manufacturing

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[29] Castañeda – Mendoza 1933; Martí 1968; 1978; Sachs 2013[1940].

[30] Schaeffner 1996 [1936].

[31] Blacking 1973; Both 2010; Giannattasio 1998; Kaufman 1992; 1990a; 1990b; Kolinski 1967; McAllester 1971; Merriam 1964; Nettl 1975;

2005[1983].

[32] Appadurai 1986; Gosden 2003; Gosden – Marshall 1999; Hodder 2014; 2012; Meskell 2005; Meskell – Preucel 2004; Miller 2005; Myers 2001; Thomas 1991. Hodder 2014; 2012.

[33] Izikowitz 1935, 2.

process begins with an analysis of their material aspects, which is then contextualized in a specific cultural framework. Materiality and its relationship with human beings is well represented in the case of the omichicahuaztli, an "exotic" musical instrument "trapped" in a museum glass case (**Fig. 7**).

Indeed, this research began with the identification of enduring properties of materiality considering artifacts as tangible vehicles to express specific cultural needs, as a typical positivist scientific approach may suggest. But as the study progressed, our roles as social actors demonstrated an "entanglement" in the circuit of human and non-human relations,[34] and we experienced what does it means to make and to perceive sound today using an archaeological musical instrument.

We had the opportunity to carry the study of the sound properties of these two bone rasps, analyzing them critically to detect the best way to give their ancient sounds a new location within the museum context. But some other questions raised during this research: what kind of sound can we produce today, playing musical instruments whose sound performance was originally experienced in a geo-historical circumstance that could not be re-enacted? What kind of experience can an exhibition of such sounds offer to visitors? Can we talk about an "authentic" acoustic experience? Finally, what does authenticity consist of, in listening to sounds ideally coming from a material past, but inexorably far from it?

The American conservator Barbara Appelbaum subdivides the life cycle of a museum artefact into five stages: original use, discard, collection, and institutional acquisition. Each one involves "a change of location, change of ownership, and change in use, with accompanying changes in attitudes toward many of its aspects.

[…]. All these changes in the lives of objects are accompanied by changes in values".[35] Panagiotis Poulopoulos, curator at the Deutsches Museum in Munich, applied this multi-stage biographical model to musical instruments, in a paper dedicated to the practice of "recycling" musical instruments preserved in museums, using a historical and socio-cultural perspective.[36] His primary focus are Western historical musical instruments, but some of his considerations are also valid for instruments coming from Non-European archaeological or ethnographic contexts. Moreover, a curator who works on ethnographic collections, is led to broaden his conception of artefacts to include intangible contents for the purpose of conservation. By virtue of this inclusion, he or she manages to overcome the ethical contradiction that arises deciding to "put objects at physical risk in order to facilitate the preservation of cultural significance".[37] Musical instruments are invented, modified, and eventually abandoned, in response to the expressive needs of specific times, places, and cultures. In our case, we considered the omichicahuaztli, not only as tangible archaeological specimens, but also as material testimonies of a cultural practice of the past, capable of producing intangible effects.

We argue that the five-stage model of Appelbaum can be successfully used to describe the life cycle of non-Western musical instruments, because it highlights their transition as sound objects to exotic museum artefacts.[38] During the 19th century, many private collectors and professional performers, driven by the scientific interest in acoustics from the perspective of Darwinian evolutionism, collected historical Western musical instruments as well as musical *exotica*, (i.e. extravagant sound devices acquired through frequent contacts with colonial areas outside Europe). They were fascinated by the exotic and went in search of unusual

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[34] Hodder 2012, 88–112.
[35] Appelbaum 2007, 124.
[36] Poulopoulos 2016.

[37] Clavir 1996, 101.
[38] Bellomia 2017, 311.

artefacts that guaranteed them a privileged status in possessing them.[39]

Until the second half of the 20th century, the tendency was to maintain the material quality of musical instruments to assure a high degree of performative "authenticity". After which, the interest of musicians, researchers, and museum curators shifted more towards the preservation of the object itself, rather than the authenticity of the performance, due in part to contemporaneous developments in museum conservation at that time.[40] Since then, playing ancient instruments that belonged to museum collections became increasingly difficult, because the risks for their material conservation had been recognized.

Today, things are changing again. The general desire to "return to the senses" is expressed in museums through the application of "sensescapes", which further motivates the archaeological recovery of sensorial heritage.[41] Rather than looking for authenticity in the acoustic performance of an ancient instrument, which is definitely unachievable, scholars focus now on a better understanding of an instrument's sound properties through the use of senses. Scholars started applying a scientific approach for studying the "sound-ability" of the instrument. Sound-ability differs from "playability" in the sense that there is no pretense behind how an instrument was originally played, producing what we would call music. The concept of playability is based on an arbitrary judgment of the quality of sound; this cannot be considered a valid scientific method to analyze ancient sound related artefacts, especially when referring to instruments from non-Western cultural contexts. On the other hand, sound-ability recognizes a value to the study of

the sound skills of the materiality of instruments, considering their original state of preservation and organological characteristics.[42] Furthermore, sound-ability can be investigated with modern technological reproductions of sound that can vary from basic recordings to more complex virtual acoustic patterns. Moreover, this data can be collected with a minimal stimulation of the instrument, without having to worry too much about the preservation of the instrument.[43]

The theoretical principles mentioned above guided our study of the acoustic properties of the Mesoamerican omichicahuaztli housed at the Pigorini Museum. The purpose of recording the sound of these instruments was not to verify the playability of the instrument (claiming to play them "authentically"), but to experiment their sound-abilities. We intended this concept as representing all the sound qualities inscribed in the physical body of the instrument, transformed by the hand of its producer, as they are experienced today by contemporaries.

At times, the body of musical instruments have at least two "voices", one musical and the other historical,[44] that are both worthy of being preserved for future generations. This forces scholars to choose between the preservation of one quality over another or put at risk the material integrity of these artefacts, to gather knowledge about their immaterial function. The authenticity of the "voices" of the omichicahuaztli do not lie in the adherence to their native sound phenomenon of the past, which is irremediably lost and impossible to reconstruct. Rather, the reliability of the result of an acoustic analysis of past instruments must be sought in the scientific study of the sound phenomenon

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[39] Poulopoulos 2016, 92. 106. At the beginning of the 19th century, at the same time as the inauguration of the first modern museums, an intellectual movement called "Early Music Revival" spread among collectors and performers, aimed at an authentic experience of ancient music, for which it was essential to play the

original musical instruments (Haskell 1996, 175).
[40] Poulopoulos 2016, 118.
[41] Classen – Howes 2006.
[42] Odell – Karp 1997, 6–7.
[43] Bellomia – Buonomo, in preparation.
[44] Watson 1991.

that they are able to produce today, respecting the material of which they are made.

Conclusions

The central aim of this case study was to demonstrate the benefits of taking an anthropological perspective at ancient archaeological heritage. We started with the question: can archaeology and anthropology collaborate to investigate the historical appropriation and display of the non-Western artefacts integrated in Western museum collections, and in a sense redefine their social role in contemporaneous ethnographic museums? In North American academic context, the approach to archaeology has always been characterized by its theoretical dependence with anthropology. This is due to the presence of many indigenous communities owning nowadays several autochthonous cultural traits. These communities are ideally considered heirs of the native material culture studied by archaeologists.[45]

In 19th century Italy, the reasons for the collaboration between archaeological and anthropological approaches were of a different nature than what we see in North America. The historical events of the 16th century, when Europe experienced scientific-philosophical upheavals as well as drastic changes to aesthetic trends (even different fashions and habits) would have subjected the Other to continuous redefinitions.[46]

The flow of exotic luxury goods from the Americas to Europe is testified by the rich ethnographic collections exhibited today in European museums. This is well demonstrated in 16th century Rome, the seat of the Papal State, which was the final destination of many ships charged with *exotica* sent as gifts and destined to enrich the Renaissance *Wunderkammern*,[47] from the beginning of the

European adventure in the New World onwards. This is what happened to MPE 4209, which was taken away during the mid-16th century by a religious man, as a trophy of the victorious catholic evangelization against the indigenous violent practices. But then it started its European pilgrimage, and merged in different private collections as a weird exotic item. Finally, through the last exchange, it reached its modern location, becoming an example of the Mesoamerican use of mosaic decoration in 19th century and a material evidence of ancient pre-Hispanic human sacrifice today.

After being opened to the public and under the pressure of 18th century illuminist theories about science, museums have gradually incorporated as their heritage these exotic artefacts collected during Renaissance. A moment of great fervor for exoticism in Italy is the second half of the 19th century, when figures such as Enrico H. Giglioli, Paolo Mantegazza, and Luigi Pigorini gathered great amounts of ethnographic objects from each part of the world to exhibit them to the Italian public alongside Italian prehistoric objects. The use of interpretative analogy was a common custom among the positivists evolutionists scholars of that time.[48] The bone rasp MPE 15395/G arrived to the Pigorini Museum exactly during this epoch, as an example of the elaborated ancient Mesoamerican bone craft production, which according to those positivists scholars was comparable to that of European bone artefacts dating back to prehistoric times.[49] The Pigorini museum, still labeled Prehistoric *and* Ethnographic, is a very fruitful research field, by virtue of its special status of "double soul institute". Within its walls one can find a floor entirely dedicated to archaeological collections, mostly Italian artefacts dating back

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[45] Willey – Phillips 1958, 1; Domenici unpubl.
[46] De Benedictis 1998, Domenici 2017.
[47] One of these *Wunderkammmern* was the *Museo Kircheriano*, founded in Rome by the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (Geisa 1602 – Rome 1680) in

1651, then merged into the Royal Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum founded by Luigi Pigorini in 1876.
[48] Nobili 1990; Caldarelli – Pulini 1988.
[49] Giglioli 1901, 185–186.

to prehistoric times, and another floor occupied by ethnographic Non-European heritage.[50] This double-faced nature of the institute makes it a historical document through which it is possible to test the complex relationship of interdependence of the two disciplines through time, in the study of the indigenous civilizations of the Americas. Other academic disciplines, such as art history, have also played an important role in defining Non-European collections now on display in Europe. For a long time, the exotic objects that have arrived in European museums have been defined according to their aesthetic value, as works of art *sui generis*; consequently, their values as historical and cultural elements have been obliterated by their nature as objects capable of arousing aesthetic interest. Barbara Plankensteiner, ethnologist and director of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, reconstructed the academic trajectory that led ethnographic artefacts to be considered primarily by their quality as "art objects", simplifying their hybrid nature that includes art, history, anthropology:

> *Artefact is related etymologically and by its practical connotation to a narrative about the object's history of production and is in essence an aesthetic concept. [...] Ethnographic objects, which by their immanent character would have to be classified as artefacts, have been studied and collected by a discipline, that is, nascent anthropology, which in its early years adopted the methodologies of positivist natural history. Therefore, spatial distribution and taxonomic classifications dominated the research of the time and finally determined the classification of these objects within the museums and shaped their character until today.*[51]

Throughout this long journey through different epochs, no one has ever considered the sound properties of these bone rasps as a possible area of any scientific study. Instead scholars were distracted by how these artefacts, as material elements of an abstract discourse on the Otherness, served to the West to define itself in opposition to something.

We here investigated the kind of information that can be obtained by studying the materiality of archaeological musical instruments and trying to reproduce their sound. We examined how the characteristics of sound may have differed from the "original" sound that these instruments once emitted when they were played by indigenous hands, within their own indigenous context. Finally, we discussed the problem of the great cultural barrier that exists between our present acoustic perception and a sound coming from such a distant time and space.

The previous pages have demonstrated how much a multi-disciplinary approach in analyzing ancient instruments can tell us about the individuals who may have manipulated them in the past. Not only does analyzing these instruments shed light on ancient indigenous sound production practices, but it also offers information about the people who brought these instruments to Europe; with precise religious, scientific or cultural intentions, or simply, with the desire to acquire the instrument based on its aesthetic properties. These intentions ultimately determined its acquisition into our museum collection and then its preservation.

The main goal of the last part of this article is to address the current social role of two Mesoamerican musical instruments in a European museum context and to what extent their narrative can be expressed through their showcase. Thanks to their material quality of being *perpetually coeval* to every time period when they were physically experienced by such multiple

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[50] The latter corresponds to the first floor and it is organized in different exhibiting spaces, dedicated respectively to Africa, America, Asia and Oceania.

While the second floor is dedicated to prehistory.
[51] Plankensteiner 2013, 159–160.

"humanities", these two omichicahuaztli have gone through different historical-cultural epochs, from the original funerary use in pre-Hispanic context, to the racks of Renaissance *Wunderkammern*, to the positivist displays of modern museums, up to the 21st century ethno-graphic museum context.[52]

A museum artefact has a contradictory nature. While it must be protected from natural physical degradation due to the passage of time, it is also paradoxically crystallized in a material form that places it in a temporal elsewhere that denies its *coevalness* with its observer-user.[53] The static condition of museums restricts the sensory experience of objects on display to an interpretation that is primarily visual. This is especially true for a museum exhibiting arte-facts that were once meant to be listened to and can no longer remain silent. Indeed, the very nature of sound producing artefacts, such as the omichicahuaztli, encourages a methodological approach that involves the use of the senses. Archaeomusicology enriches our knowledge of the human sensorial experience in the past and projects it into the present in the museum con-text.

A museum exhibition centered on an ancient civilization's music creates a very different ex-perience to an audience than what may have been originally experienced in the past. This variable experience forces scholars to recog-nize the fluidity of the sound produced from an-cient instruments, situating the sonic perception into the present rather than trying to obtain the past. It is important to maintain the integrity of the sound from the ancient instrument so that the public is not deceived by claims of past sounds *as they were meant to be heard.* To rep-resent the present perception of sound in

Fig. 8: Detail of the showcase showing the omich-icahuaztli on display (courtesy of the Museo delle Civiltà - Museo Pigorini, Roma).

museum exhibits, we can begin by studying the material properties and the corresponding sound-ability of the archaeological musical in-struments as objects par excellence related to the ancient sound production.

The feeling after the conclusion of this study is that something intangible continues to escape us, the ancient sound phenomenon yet remains in many ways unreachable, elusive, difficult to frame with the scientific tools at our disposal, because of its ephemeral nature. However, the new data presented in this study has built upon our knowledge of this category of instruments. What needs to be done now is to use all the gathered information to enrich the exhibition languages and techniques offered to visitors.

These objects were pulled from a museum showcase and to the same showcase they will have to go back. But together with their mate-riality, we have now also their sound. Thus, the results of this study are destined to enrich the current "sacrificial" interpretation of the bone rasps, which does not exhaust their complexity (**Fig. 8**). As an outcome of this research, a pos-sible future direction will be to integrate the au-dio tracks into the exhibition, accompanying the instruments on display, to allow visitors to listen to, as well as to observe, such ancient sound producing devices.

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[52] Bellomia 2017; Domenici 2016.

[53] Fabian 1983.

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The Past 'Interpreter'.
Historical Stratifications in the Ritual Symbolism
of Saint Joseph Festivals and Holy Week in Sicily

Ignazio Emanuele Buttitta

Abstract: The themes of cultural continuity and 'survival' of ritual symbolism have been at the centre of debate in the anthropological and historical religious fields. They became topical again in relation to the issue of the patrimonialization of 'traditional' religious festivals such as Saint Joseph and Holy Week, festivals whose ritual symbolism (sacred banquet, procession, evergreen branches, ritual breads, songs and dances) shows an evident pre-Christian and agrarian root. A number of questions emerge about both the usefulness of historical sources (archaeological and documentary) with regard to the understanding of contemporary ritual reality, and about the issue of the chronological continuity of practices and beliefs; these deserve to be reconsidered on the basis of renewed research and observations, considering the dissolution of what has been defined as 'rural civilization' and the renewed interests towards immaterial patrimony by communities searching for their identity matrices. We can and must go back to asking ourselves: can material and immaterial tokens of the past, even the remotest ones, help us understand what we observe in current festive contexts?

'Archaic' contexts

Fig. 1: Sacrificial ox in Roccavaldina (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

Roccavaldina (the Nebrodi mountains, Province of Messina), first week of August. A young, white, immaculate ox is slowly advancing through the crowd. It is blindfolded and bound with red ribbons, and follows docilely the procession of the sacred simulacrum of St. Nicholas, the patron and protective saint of the community, toward the sacrificial spot, an ancient millstone (**fig. 1**).

Upon arrival it is blessed by the priest and then slaughtered in an expert manner with a knife to the jugular.[1] The carcass will be butchered and its meat, after having been cooked in large pots, will be brought in procession by officiants to the Piazza del Duomo, where, in front of and *with* the saint, after the distribution of blessed sandwiches the faithful will collectively consume this sacred meal, *u cummitu* (the banquet) (**fig. 3**).

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[1] This practice was abandoned about twenty years ago due to the intervention of animal rights associations. Today the ox is slaughtered directly in the abattoir according to standard procedures.

Fig. 2: Two girls representing St. Agatha and Catherine in Alì Superiore (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

Fig. 3: Procession with ox's meat in Roccavaldina (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

Alì Superiore (the Nebrodi mountains, Province of Messina), third week of August. Through the steep and narrow streets of this mountainous locale the *cilii* – the traditional processional carriages – are advancing, followed by a multitude of the praying faithful. The first carriage is transporting a parallelepiped structure in purple cloth, at whose centre a picture of St. Agatha is shown. She is lined with unleavened breads in the shapes of nails, hammers, hands, palms, crowns, and other shapes referring to her life and martyrdom, and also

with numerous bells (*cciancianeddi*) and red and white ribbons. The second carriage is covered with a canvas canopy on which several pieces of gold jewellery are attached as votive offerings. It is transporting two girls, representing St. Agatha and Catherine, who are weaving on a traditional wooden loom (**fig. 2**).

Ventimiglia di Sicilia (the Madonie mountains, Province of Palermo), second week of August. On the occasion of the feast of Our Lady of Graces or of the Rock, which traditionally concludes the harvest period, a pilgrimage takes place. The faithful go to a sanctuary located near two massive boulders that together form a kind of small cave. Inside this cave the worshippers deposit candles and flower bouquets *ex-voto*, thereby recalling a cultic context that is foreign to Christian liturgy.

Troina (the Nebrodi mountains, Province of Messina), last week of May. Sounds of gunfire and indistinct shouts emerge from a dense forest of oak and holly. Suddenly pilgrims appear out of the curtain of trees, exiting the forest in an orderly procession. They appear to be trees themselves, laden as they are with intensely green leafy branches (**figs. 4–5**).

These are laurels, *Laurus nobilis*, or *u ddauru* in local parlance. They are the branches of the sacred plant of St. Silvester, patron saint of Troina, which the faithful gathered on the previous day in a dark valley of the more distant Caronia forest and which are now being brought to the saint, at his grave in the city temple, for the purpose of fulfilling a vow or requesting his favour.

We are in Sicily in the 21st century, but in light of such ritual performances and symbolism as these, one may believe us to be in remote places and times: in a sacred procession through the streets of Greece or Rome behind a sacrificial

victim;[2] in Athens, in a peplum-filled procession to the Panathenaea;[3] on the top of a hill by a megalith sacred to the *Meteres*;[4]or in the forests of Parnassus on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi.[5] Yes, it would really seem as if we were in distant places and times, were it not for the diverse scenery, the dress of the faithful and of the pilgrims, the sunglasses, the smartphones…

Figs. 4–5: Laurels in procession in Regalbuto and Troina (ph. I. Buttitta, A. Russo – G. Muccio)

St. Nicholas is neither Jupiter nor Mars, St. Agatha is not Athena, Our Lady of Graces is neither Tanit nor Demeter nor any of the other life cycle goddesses, St. Silvester is not Apollo, nor is the forest of Caronia the Vale of Tempe, and the *ramara* ('branch-carriers', as the

pilgrims are called) are most certainly not the *daphnephori*. On close examination, ancient and contemporary ceremonies and their ritual symbols have their distinct characteristics and do not appear to be entirely comparable, not even morphologically, and so it does not seem possible – at least not at first glance – to assign similar functions to the rites of the past and those of the present, or analogous motives to the various cult actors of differing eras. On the other hand, it is undeniable that the beliefs, cultic expressions, festive rituals, and pilgrimages that involve many Sicilian communities even today display strong resemblances with those of even quite remote times and places, and this not only on a superficial level[6]– so much so, in many instances, that if we arbitrarily extrapolate a single ritual from its socio-historical context, namely that of the popular religious festival, that ritual may appear to us timeless, or to be an instance of 'eternal return', as Eliade described it.[7]

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[2] See Burkert 1981; Grottanelli – Parise 1993; Scheid 2011; Detienne – Vernant 2014. Esp. on "sacrifice" in modern and contemporary peasant ritual and in ancient cult practices: Georgoudi 2014. On bovine sacrifice in Greece: Paus., *Perieg.* I, 24, 4 and I, 28, 10 (*Bouphonia*); *Od.* III, 6–7 (sacrifice of black oxen to Poseidon); *Od.* III, 430 (sacrifice of a white heifer to Athena). For the whiteness of the bovine pelt: *Il.* XXIII, 12–34: "and many white bulls (πολλοὶ μὲν βόες ἀργοὶ) were slaughtered" (v. 30). See McInerney 2010, esp. ch. 6–9. Literary and iconographic testimonies in ThesCRA 2004, I, 59 ff.

[3] Gulh 1860, 199 ff.; Deubner 1932, 22 ff.; Simon 1983, 38 ff.

[4] Angelini 1992; Corradini 1997; India 2014. There is a vast literature aiming to demonstrate the relation between popular Marian cults and those of pre-Christian female deities (James 1959; Warner 1980; Neumann 1981; Baring, Cashford 1991; Pestalozza 1996 and 2001; Gimbutas 1990 and 2005). This hermeneutic standpoint has been criticized by various scholars (e.g. Georgoudi 1994; Chirassi Colombo 2008; Greco 2016), both regarding the supposed presence of a

shared prehistoric religiosity centred on the Great Goddess, and also regarding the continuity between prehistoric female deities and the divine figures of the ancient Pantheon and Christianity.

[5] Plut., *Quaest. Graec.* ,XII; Elian., *Var. Hist.*,III, 1. The ritual in Thebes mentioned by Pausanias and Proclus is similar: Paus., *Perieg.,* IX, 10; Procl., *apud Photii Biblioth.,* 321. See Jeanmaire 1939, 388 ff.; Brelich 1969, 387 ff. 413 ff.; Calame 1977, 117 ff. 191 ff.; Buttitta I. E. 1992; 2013.

[6] Wittgenstein 1974, 46–47; 1975; Needham 1975; Perissinotto 1997, 88–95. There are many other symbols and ritual practices in Sicily's religious festivals that recall those of classical and Near Eastern antiquity: the processional use of evergreen branches, the lighting of bonfires and torches, alms for children, ritually formalized food consumption, dances and races of giant puppets and of carriages transporting sacred simulacra, ceremonial dances and ritual games, and demonic and theriomorphic costumes (Buttitta I. E. 1999; 2002b; 2006; 2013; Bonanzinga 2013; Giallombardo 2003).

[7] Eliade 1999.

First considerations

If we hypothesize – albeit one that cannot be philologically proven[8] – that at least in some cases ritual behaviour and symbols of an archaic flavour are seamlessly derived from the past and without being cultural events that have been separately and/or independently caused by various events (social upheavals, ethnic or cultural changes, political exigencies, etc.), then we must ask ourselves what the main factors were that allowed for such a long duration.

There are very specific reasons for the continuation of archaic symbols and behaviour in contemporary festivals, even if these have been transformed and invested with new meaning, and for their presence through the millennia in a fundamentally agricultural and pastoral society. First, the deep relationship between Christianity and the popular, especially farming, world,[9] and the reiteration of cultural and behavioural patterns whose persistence could be connected, at least to some extent, to maintain – in the European countryside until fairly recent times – some essential elements of the lifestyle and the existential framework which had characterized pre-existing rural societies.[10] We find no valid reasons for assuming that in the peasant and pastoral societies of the post-pagan world there had to be any radical change in the mythopoeic mechanisms, the 'expectations' of hierophanies, the elective places of the manifestations of the holy.[11] Rather, both historians of religion and anthropologists are aware of how the continued renewal of analogous practices suggests to the *homo religiosus* a consolidation of worship and therefore sustains the persistence over time of its ritual forms.[12]

Christological and hagiographical reinterpretation has certainly contributed to the conservation – and not merely survival[13]– of ancient symbolic heritage (especially to its iconic and performative aspects) in its historic concentration to evangelize the Italian farming and urban common people.[14] It thus happened that an original valorisation of the Christian message that could be defined as "cosmic Christianity" developed in the rural sphere.[15] Within this framework, the Christological story of incarnation, death, and resurrection is rejected, and its linearity subverted, in narratives and ritual expressions, in favour of a circularity that views nature – that is, life and fertility – and humanity as cyclically redeemed and renewed.[16]

Other important factors have also facilitated the long morphological – if not functional – duration of ritual symbolism. At least since the early Middle Ages these surely include the continuous manipulations – sometimes secret,

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[8] Some rare exceptions are those contexts where it is possible to reconstruct through archaeological and textual evidence, even if only imperfectly, the development of cults in Carthaginian and Greek Sicily up to the present. Among these we have for example the cult of the Madonna of Bitalemi in Gela (Buttitta I. E. 2018).

[9] See Niola 2009, 101. The attitudes of local churches to the expressions of so-called popular piety have not been homogenous or consistent: Colombo *et alii* 1979; De Rosa 1981, 75–114; Tagliaferri 2014; Berzano, Castegnaro, Pace 2014. See also Gurevič 1986; Schmitt 2000.

[10] See Seppilli 2008, 545

[11] *Ibidem*.

[12] Pagliaro 1972; Miceli 1989.

[13] The phenomena of magic and popular religiosity have been explored starting with studies in evolutionary anthropology and then in the research on

"survival" or religious remnants: Tylor 1871; Saintyves 1932; Cocchiara 1978; Belmont 1988; Lauwers 1988–1989; Lanternari 2006.

[14] See Niola 2009, 101. Cirese, commenting on the letters of St. Gregory the Great regarding the evangelization of Sardinia and England, observes that, given the obvious strength of the resistance and the need for compromise (*duris mentibus simul omnia abscindere impossibile esse non dubium est*), it is no wonder that, in spite of hundreds of prohibitions and disapprovals of the *consuetudines non laudabiles* declared by ecclesiastical Councils or Synods in two thousand years, 'popular' religiosity is still largely permeated with 'magical' and 'superstitious' elements. He underlines that there are many examples of mixing and confusion of pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and observances (1997, 100–101). On this issue, see also Lelli 2014.

[15] Eliade 1997, 144.

[16] Auf der Maur 1990; Cullmann 2005.

sometimes overt – of historical and political[17] identity and, in more recent times, reinvention and development in the tourist-patrimonial arena. The heterodox practices and beliefs that characterize Sicilian ritual contexts, far from being mere remnants, rather turn out to be functional mechanisms for affirming and negotiating individual, familial, and communal identities.[18]

If, then, we are faced with a heterodox symbolism that is mostly connected to the themes of vegetal and human fecundity and of the return of life and abundance, and with the specific agrarian temporality of certain para-liturgical rites, "non è certo il caso di ipotizzare fantasiose filiazioni dagli antichi culti […], appare ancor meno sensato chiudere gli occhi di fronte a certe analogie. Che non sono mai una risposta ma una domanda" [it is certainly not the case to hypothesize imaginative parentages from the ancient cults [...], it seems even less sensible to close the eyes in front of certain analogies, which are never an answer but a question].[19] This is a solicitation to examine carefully, but without prejudice, the formal connections and the resemblance between the rituals of the past, including the remote past, and those of the present.

The festival of Saint Joseph

The framework we have just outlined is particularly evident in Sicily when it comes to the rites and symbols of spring festivals, notably those of St. Joseph and of Holy Week.[20] Within the rural ceremonial calendar these festivals are configured as New Year's celebrations, as the renewal of life cycles and social relations, but also as the recollection and sharing of a specific cultural memory.[21]

It is no coincidence that in Sicily St. Joseph is one of the most revered saints. He is the protagonist of special celebrations in many parts of the island, in some more than once per year. These celebrations in his honour do not exclusively fall close to March 19, but also in April and May and in the summer, a period in which many areas of Sicily experience higher numbers of people, both tourists and migrants who temporarily return home to honour their patron and protector saints.

Fig. 6: An altar for the celebration of St. Joseph in Leonforte (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

[17] Halbwachs 1952; Hobsbawm, Ranger 1994; Assmann 1997; Fabietti – Matera 1999; Bausinger 2005; 2008; Spineto 2015, 3–44.
[18] Bravo 2001: esp. 149–199; Bonato 2006; Palumbo 2003; 2009; Fournier 2013; Giancristofaro 2017.

[19] Niola 2009, 101.
[20] Buttitta A. 1990; Plumari 2003; Giallombardo 2006.
[21] Lanternari 1976; Grimaldi 1993; Buttitta I. E. 2006.

In addition to the procession with the statue and carriage, the ritual elements that most characterize the celebrations of St. Joseph are: alms and offerings of wheat (always more common than money), 'tables' and 'altars'(**fig. 6**),[22] sacred images (a recurrent motif is the flight into Egypt[23]), and the lighting of bonfires. As is the case with the public cults of many other saints, stemming as they do from the faith of the same ecclesiastical matrix, the celebrations of this patriarch presents – and almost always without the participants being aware of it – a pre-Christian ritual symbolism. The period of the year in which the saint's celebration takes place is of particular interest for agricultural life, as it appears in the rural religious calendar as a period of change, as a veritable ceremony of seasonal passage from winter to spring.

The nature of this rite of passage becomes explicit first of all in the widespread use of *vampi* (bonfires). They are lit in the evening of March 18, the eve of the festival, and are traditionally advertised as winter's last fire. They mark the end of the cold and thus the definitive extinguishing of the braziers used for heating. Like all ritual fires in winter (among which are those for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Lucia, Christmas, St. Anthony the Great), the *vampe* of our patriarch seem to recall archaic purifying and apotropaic rituals, ceremonies of cyclical renewal that have been

reconfigured over the centuries at the hand of historical processes and socio-economic events.[24]

Figs. 7-8: Banquet with children performing St. Joseph, baby Jesus, and Mary, often accompanied by poor or orphaned children in Salemi and Capizzi (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

This dimension of the festival of passage between different time periods can also be seen in the preparation of the votive tables and altars and in the banquet in which the 'saints' participate as representatives of St. Joseph, baby Jesus, and Mary, often accompanied by a varying number of usually poor or orphaned children

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[22] Tables and altars with steps, made for fulfilling a vow to the saint (but also for replying to a request from the saint presented in a dream), framed by branches of laurel and/or myrtle and covered with white fabrics on which an image of the saint is embroidered, breads of the most varied shapes (of animals, vegetables, and stars, related to the story of the saint and of Christ), and the dishes that will be consumed by the actors who represent the Holy Family and those accompanying them: *apostuli*, *santi*, *virgineddi*, *vicchiareddi*, etc. (apostles, saints, maidens, old men, etc.) (Pitrè 1881, 230 ff.; 1900, 445). The table of the god placed on the steps where the sacred image is located, and the table below containing the dishes for the Holy Family and the other guests, constitute a single sacred space where bread is a connective, connotative and commemorative substance (see Cusumano 1992, 73).

[23] *Matthew* 2, 13–23
[24] As already on Lemnos the extinguishing of the fire refers to chaos and death, and its rekindling marks the recomposition of the cosmos and the resumption of life on both the human and cosmic levels (Philostr., *Heroik.*, XX, 24; Dumézil 1924; Delcourt 1957, 171–190; Burkert 1992, 35–56; Bettini 2005). Ritual bonfires appear in various contexts: from the Persian *Nowrouz*, in which on the last Tuesday of the year (*chāršamb-e sūrī*) large bonfires are lit during the night over which people jump, to the fires dedicated to saints, lit during festivals and seasonal passage rites (especially in connection with equinox and solstice) in various parts of Europe (Ariño 1992; Buttitta I. E. 1999; 2002a; Lombardo 2010; D'Onofrio 2018, 90 ff.).

Fig. 9: Consumption of grains and boiled legumes in Ribera (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

(**figs. 7–8**). This devotional practice presents a ritual symbolism that is obviously rooted in archaic land-based imagery. It is not a coincidence, nor can it be explained purely on the basis of charity or wealth redistribution, that it is the children – and traditionally the poorest ones – that are invited to the tables to consume a symbolically very significant dish, one that is

explicitly connected with the agrarian cycle and with the request for safety and abundance. The rural cultural memory, in fact, records the existence at certain times of a symbolic exchange in which the deceased are represented by the poor or by children.[25] Spring is the time of the most acute food shortage.[26] It therefore becomes necessary to celebrate abundance, promote the rebirth of vegetation, and to anticipate abundant food consumption. Here we find the necessary food offerings to the poor, children, and to helpless, people who stand for otherness and who are thereby ritually called upon to represent the deceased guarantors of life cycles and, together, to share in the food as an auspicious sign of future riches.[27]

At the banquet with the dead

The ritual banquet that takes place around the table of St. Joseph is generally called *fari i virgineddi* (make the maidens). In the towns of the Madonie mountain range – Alimena, Isnello, Gangi, Petralia Soprana, Caltavuturo – the boys and girls are called *virgineddi*, are always odd-numbered, and are invited to the votive table together with the 'saints'.[28] Among the various interesting elements of this sacred meal, which is based exclusively on vegetarian products,[29] is the opening dish: rice or pasta with lentils or beans, often accompanied by wild fennel. Cusumano has observed that in antiquity lentils and beans, due to their connotation of seeds in

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[25] Lombardi Satriani – Meligrana 1989, 139. The intimate relationship between children and the deceased is unequivocally established in the child alms of *su mortu mortu* and *sas animas* that are still performed even today in Sardinia on the eve of the Commemoration of the Dead (Mannia 2015). On the liminality of children, Jesi observes that the child is closer to death than the adult is, and at the same time is closer to birth and therefore to the limit of non-existence. He is, more than the adult, near death, because death, as well as for the elderly, can strike him more easily (2013, 35). In many societies, the child is not considered to be a full human being until it has completed certain initiatory rites (Lévi-Strauss 1995; Buttitta A. 1995).

[26] Alcman observes that spring is the season "in which everything blossoms, but there isn't much to eat" (*fragm.* 56). Indeed, in the spring the new seeds have started to rise but the food stores that have sustained the family over the winter are exhausted and the new

harvest is yet to come. A Calabrian proverb goes: "*Prima Natali, né friddu, né fami / Doppu Natali, lu friddu e la fami*" (Before Christmas neither cold nor hunger / After Christmas both cold and hunger) (Teti 1978, 177). See D'Onofrio 1998, 119.

[27] The social value of the ritual must be emphasized. The preparation of the tables and altars requires coordination, organization, and participation among family members, relatives, and neighbours. Eating and drinking together play an essential role in social life. The meal is a form of relationship which creates meaningful bonds and duties (see Giallombardo 2006, 12).

[28] Sottile – Genchi 2011, 270 ff.; Giacomarra 2012.

[29] Vegetables and fresh fruit, as well as various dishes based on legumes, vegetables, and eggs, from which meat is traditionally absent. It may be useful to refer to the *theoxenia* (see ThesCRA 2004, II, esp. 225 ff. 247 ff.).

pods, as well as broad beans, were symbolically the food of the dead and practically the main meal of funeral feasts[30], but in all eras also of religious festivals dedicated to the deceased, from the *Anthesteria*, which was characterized by the consumption of a *panspermia*,[31] "which everyone boils in the city"[32] – a true and proper "supper for the souls"[33] that was forbidden to the priests and only eaten privately within the family[34]– to the folkloric ceremonies that anticipate the consumption of grains and boiled legumes (**fig. 9**).

Both the *cuccìa* (boiled wheat) consumed for the Commemoration of the Dead as well as the soup of St. Joseph (legumes and boiled vegetables) are ritual foods based on unground seeds, and they are part of a unique vitalistic-chthonian symbolism. They represent a powerful life, one that can only express itself fully by being introduced into the earth and the kingdom of the dead: the seeds are delivered to this kingdom, and it is thanks to the dead that they are able to take root and to sprout, to gain robust stems, and finally to produce their kernels.

This relationship between the dead and the living, between the underworld and the earth above where the work of agriculture takes place, and the absolute dependence of a good harvest on the powers of the earth, were very clear to the ancient farmer. He knew perfectly well that:

> *The community was not merely composed of the living but of the ancestors as well. [...] The ancestors, the custodians of the source of life, were the reservoir of power and the vitality, the source whence flowed all the forces of vigour, sustenance and growth. [...] Whatever happened, whether for good or evil, ultimately derived from them. The sprouting of the corn, the increase of the herds,*

potency in men, success in hunting or war, were all manifestations of their power and approval.[35]

In the critical moments of the production cycle it thus becomes necessary to stand in a positive relation to those who guarantee the life and reproduction of the fruits of the earth[36] by offering them, as a form of "obligatory" and "necessary" generosity, vegetal items, the products of the earth –precisely the "gifts" that the deceased themselves have brought forth and must continue to bring forth through the earth as gifts to the living:

> *Par des offrandes alimentaires aux morts, par des rituels qui instaurent la tutelle des puissances souterraines sur les espèces végétales, le groupe veille à relancer sans cesse la circulation entre l'espace souterrain (hypochthonion) et la surface de la terre (epichthonion). Les travaux agricoles sont exécutés, mais ils ne sont pas pensés. Leur efficacité est conditionnelle. Il ne viendrait à l'esprit de personne que l'action humaine ait par elle-même le pouvoir de faire surgir les nourritures du sol: la nourriture en surgira parce que l'on aura su solliciter les puissances dispensatrices des biens. [...] En fait, tout dépend des puissances surnaturelles, l'action humaine est purement médiatrice. [Through food offerings to the dead, through rituals which establish the guardianship of the underground powers over the plant species, the group constantly strives to revive the circulation between the subterranean space (hypochthonion) and the surface of the earth (epichthonion). The agricultural work is done, but they are not thought. Their effectiveness is conditional. It would not come to anyone's mind that human action itself has the power to bring food out of the soil: food will arise*

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[30] See Cusumano 1992, 75.

[31] The *panspermia* was consumed in Athens during funerals and also in another moment of cosmic crisis, namely at the *Pyanepsia* in autumn (Spineto 2005, 106).

[32] Schol. R. Aristoph. *Ran*, v. 218.

[33] Harrison 1991, 37.

[34] Burkert 1981, 173; Daraki 1985, 86. For Nilsson this ritual should be compared to the Roman *Parentalia* and the Persian *Hamaspathmaedaya*, which were also spring ceremonies revolving around the cult of the dead (1992, 597).

[35] Rundle Clark 1959, 119. See Eliade 1976, 363 ff.

[36] See Gernet 1983, 47.

because we have been able to solicit the powers dispensing the goods. [...] In fact, everything depends on the supernatural powers, the human action is purely mediator].[37]

Children ancestors

The evidence that at the table dedicated to the Patriarch, not only the gods and humans participate, but also those who have died[38] becomes especially explicit in some places, like in Cammarata and Troina. There, the young guests at the ritual table assume the same names as those that have passed away and thus reveal their own position as representatives of the ancestors.

In Cammarata, in the Sicani mountains, the traditional ritual entails food and money alms from the women of the families that have obliged themselves toward the saint with a votive. There then follow the arrangement of tables filled with dishes and breads that have been prepared by a group of thirty select women, and a banquet offered to the poor and the children, who are representing the Holy Family. These can extend from a minimum of three to a maximum of thirteen members and are called *i vicchiareddi* (the old men). The holy guests are served at the table by the head of the family and taste all the foods that have been offered, and at the end of the ritual they take the rest of the food along with them.[39]

In Troina in the Nebrodi mountains, until just a few years ago the votive obligation (*a prummisioni*, lit. the promise) toward the saint was fulfilled by inviting the *vicchjunedda* (young old persons). *Fari i vicchjunedda* was understood to mean the organization of a table for a strictly odd number of children, which could stretch from nine to nineteen depending on the magnitude of grace required. The children, who indeed were called *vicchjunedda*, had to present themselves at the lunch without having

eaten any food during the morning. They were offered a meal in the house of the person who had taken the votive, a communal meal in which adults also took part. The number of dishes varied depending on the magnitude of the votive, but corresponding to the number of guests it had to be strictly odd. Significantly, the main dish was chickpeas, either together with pasta and seasoned with wild fennel, or chickpeas alone, upon which other mainly vegetarian dishes followed, like vegetable firstlings, boiled vegetables, thistles, fried cod, fruit (especially oranges), and sweets.

In Troina, the proximity – if not a shared identity – between children and deceased can be seen in another life cycle ritual, namely that of the *vicinieddi* (lit. young neighbours). These were an always odd number (three or five) of neighbourhood children that were invited to the houses where a death had taken place a week or a month previously. The closest family member of the dead would invite them to consume a meal, also in this case after fasting, based on lentils and vegetables. Before they commenced the meal, the children would recite a prayer with the name of the deceased, for the purpose of *arrifriscàricci l'armuzza* (lit. refreshing his soul), that is, of bringing him relief. It is significant that this ritual practice is often recalled by informants just contextually to the *vicchjunedda*s to report affinities and divergences.[40]

U cùnzulu da Bedda Matri

The chthonic-funerary dimension of the ceremonies for St. Joseph is also seen in the contexts where the meal of the Holy Family assumes the explicit meaning of a funeral meal, *u cùnzulu* (lit. consolation).[41] A devotional tradition on the 'death of St. Joseph' does indeed exist in several figurative expressions, based on a passage of the 4th–5th century apocryphal text *The Story of Joseph the Carpenter* (12–32). In

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[37] Daraki 1985, 59. See Gernet 1983, 47; Propp 1978, 45; Bacchiega 1971.
[38] See Cusumano 1992, 76.
[39] De Gregorio 2008, 66–67.

[40] See Castiglione 2016, 176.
[41] Lombardi Satriani – Meligrana 1989, 139 ff.; Cavalcanti 1995, 84 f.; Giallombardo 2006, 69 f.

Alimena, for instance, the ritual of the table with the *virgineddi* represents *u cùnzulu* for the Madonna upon the death of her husband. In Leonforte, the *artaru* (altar) symbolizes *u cùnzulu da Bedda Matri*, that ist the lunch which the apostles themselves and relatives would have prepared for the Virgin Mary on the occasion of the departure of her husband Joseph;[42] here, until just a few years ago, the song *Transitu di lu Patriarca San Giuseppe* (the passing of the patriarch St. Joseph), in the form of a lament by Mary on the death of her husband, was sung on the occasion of the 'funeral meal' for St. Joseph.

In Niscemi as well the banquet, called *cena*, is considered to be a *cùnzulu* for the Madonna after the death of her husband. The night of March 18 is spent according to formalized arrangements of a funeral wake: people pray, but at the same time next-door neighbour and homies tell happy and funny stories, people admire the sumptuous altars and play music and dance. In Niscemi there is a reference to the death of St. Joseph also in the novena (*i setti nuveri ri San Giuseppi* or *i setti ruluri ri San Giuseppi*: the seven novenas of St. Joseph or the seven sorrows of St. Joseph), which takes place from the 12th to the 18th of March. During this time the altars are temporarily opened to the public in order to allow the performance of the songs: The sixth and seventh part of the *nuvera* (novena) deal with the death and the testament of the Saint: even today the oldest witnesses define it as *u lamentu*, a term which denotes, in many Sicilian villages, the dialectal songs narrating the events of the Passion of the Christ.[43]

Along with the funerary aspect of the banquet in Leonforte, as in other towns such as Assoro, Bivona, Mirabella Imbaccari, we also have the laments, which are polyvocal songs that tell of the passion and death of Christ, and which one would have expected to be performed only during Holy Week processions.[44] In Assoro and Leonforte the songs are performed by *confrati* (religious brothers) and elders before the altars in a religious atmosphere. The case is similar in Mirabella Imbaccari, where in the evening of March 18 the *lamentanze* (complaints) are performed in front of altars set up in the homes of the faithful who have expressed a votive, in a calm and formal mood. During the performance everyone else is silent, most of them standing, one or two sitting down; a few women, young and old, are moved to tears. At the end the singers are offered food and drink. Both when they first appear and when they subsequently depart for a new altar, they offer their best wishes to the family. This last act is of particolar importance since it rejects permanent continuity, in spite of the adaptation of the feasts of St. Joseph to the Catholic codes, of the archaic link between the figures of the "otherness" which arrive periodically and the well-being of men and the seasonal and cosmic renewal.[45]

It is here, finally, that the belief that the 'table' should be connected to *u cùnzulu da Bedda Matri* acquires a more articulated meaning: in the *cùnzulu* offered to Mary, the community shows its solidarity with the Mother of God, which reciprocally will be bestowed upon the community of the living in the form of wellbeing and prosperity. More generally, the community commemorates death and the dead at a time when the return of life is celebrated, in the awareness that the eternal cycle of existence is destined to escape human control.

Bread spirals
This is where the spiral-shaped breads called *cudduri* become significant. They are found in Mirabella and elsewhere in other ritual circumstances (for the Commemoration of the Dead in Calamònaci, Augusta, and Syracuse; for Good Friday in Longi), and they refer to the mysterious world of death and yearly rebirth. The

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[42] See Buttitta – Algozino 2006, 34.
[43] See Giallombardo 2006, 44.
[44] Macchiarella 1993.
[45] See Giallombardo 2006, 47.

cutting of them into two parts signifies the beginning of the ritual meal, through which the living will be united with the saints and with their ancestors in order to solicit future commitment to the living and to guarantee the cyclical renewal of life.[46] It is particularly significant, in fact, that the first piece cut from the *cuddura*[47] that introduces the table of St. Joseph, at the beginning of the 'saints' lunch and after having been tasted by the girl who represents the Madonna, is set aside to be dried, after which it is mixed with flour and wheat to be sown in the fall.[48]

As Cirese has observed, the form does not nourish, it conveys information and not calories.[49] The image in the ceremonial breads of a double spiral – the union of two twin elements – has been interpreted as a stylization of sexual intercourse due to the fact that the term used to indicate it, *cùcchia*, can mean "intercourse" or "female sexual organ" as well as "couple" or "pair".[50] Even if this etymological evidence and its concomitant simplistic aetiology of gender cannot be denied, it can nonetheless be added that the breads are also part of an undoubtedly cosmological symbolism that is thoroughly attested: the double spiral is indeed reminiscent of very similar bas-relief decorations on two tomb doors from the Sicilian Bronze Age site of Castelluccio,[51] but also of the spiral motifs that decorate the clay objects of protohistoric island cultures, e.g. that of Serra d'Alto.[52]

A vitalistic-propitiatory value associated with fecundity and resurgence has also been attributed to the symbolism of the *cuddura* in Mirabella, as to the two stone slabs in Castelluccio. The double spiral suggests itself as a synthetic representation of opposing sexual and/or cosmic forces and at the same time as a symbolization of the cyclical process of becoming and periodic rebirth, that is, of the process of agricultural-chthonic creation and re-creation, to which the agricultural, cosmic, and human cycles are intimately connected.[53]

This hypothesis is confirmed by contextual analysis. The double spiral on the breads falls within a well-defined and historicized iconography – it can be compared with a long series of representations of spirals within the plastic and graphic arts, most having to do with the funerary sphere and with the sexuality and regeneration firmly rooted in Bronze Age and most likely Neolithic culture (it is enough to think of the images in the subterranean temples on Malta, or of the necropolis in Newgrange, or of the double spiral on the vulva of the Karanovo

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[46] Filoramo 1993; Cavalcanti 1995, 57 ff.; Bolognari 2001; ThesCRA 2004, II, 247 ff. The ritual breads, like all dishes of the meal for the Holy Family (which traditionally may not include any meat dishes!), are to all effective purposes considered to be a "bloodless" offering. This kind of offering is recorded e.g. by Paus.: *Perieg.*, I, 38, 6; V, 14, 4 and 10; VIII, 42, 14. These offerings are not always consumed by fire but sometimes simply deposited at the feet of the gods: I, 18, 7; VI, 20, 2–3. See Ellinger 2005: *passim*; Pirenne – Delforge 2008: 234 ff. For ancient Sicily we may point to the *mìlloi*, the cakes in the shape of the female genitals that were offered to Demeter in Syracuse (Athen. XIV, 647a).

[47] The large circular bread features a relief of two opposing spirals or two female hands crossed over the chest. This image is considered to be a sign of Mary's

sorrow over her husband's death. The bread therefore represents the Madonna. In the Catholic universe, the mother of Christ was able to re-assume some fundamental values of the female principle. A dual principle, liminal and therefore pregnant with that circularity between death and rebirth which the ancient Goddess impersonated, declined on spiritual isotopy by Christian catechesis (see Giallombardo 2006, 47; Buttitta I. E. 2008, 117–167).

[48] Perricone 2005, 18; Giallombardo 2006, 47–48.

[49] See Cirese 1990, 34.

[50] Pitrè 1889, IV, 350; Uccello 1976, 68.

[51] Tusa 1994, 131–132; Uccello 1976, 56.

[52] Panvini 1996, 11.

[53] Gimbutas 1990, 279 ff. 293 ff.; Lurker 1995, 164 ff.; Guènon 1980, 46–54; Galletti 2015.

Venus). But it is the contextual reading that allows us to establish a clear relationship between Mirabella's *cuddura* and the doors from Castelluccio.

The *cuddura* is the fruit of female labour and destined to guarantee the future harvest. The bread is the door. The opening of the door, that is, the dissection of the liminal bread, is the significative and transformative act that introduces the myth into space-time. The door is the physical symbol of the passage from one space to another and of the transformation from one semantic state to the other.[54] The double-spiral bread is the diaphragm that, like the tomb stone slab, separates the living from the dead, while also being the place and object that symbolically reunites the one with the other. This introduces to St. Joseph's table and to the banquet the element that will unite the dead and the living, and gods and men. It is just like the tomb slab that opens onto the space where the relatives came to commemorate their dead with food offerings, thereby sharing the food with their ancestors and the divine powers, soliciting their commitment toward human beings and sustaining the cyclical reconstruction of life. This is the founding ideology of ceremonies like that of the tables of St. Joseph and of Holy Week, a festive occasion characterized also in Sicily by different ritual behaviour and heterodox symbolism – significantly a vitalistic ambiance – such as the exhibition of physical energy, the orgiastic food consumption, and the display of evergreen branches and bread in the procession of Christ Resurrected on Easter Sunday (such as e.g. in Casteltermini and San Biagio Platani) (**fig. 10**).

Fig. 10 Easter in Casteltermini (ph. A. Russo – G. Muccio)

Conclusions

Whoever wants to find a reason for the material and immaterial expressions of 'popular religiosity',[55] and especially of the ritual symbolism that sustains the performative aspect, must confront the question of their historical and ideological genesis and of the morphological, functional, and semantic transformation that has affected them within the environmental, social, religious, political, and economic framework of the particular culture. It must be recognized that the festive calendar of a rural community should be observed as a coherent system that together with socio-political issues, both on the structural and symbolic levels, reflects the mythic-ritual scenarios connected to the schedule of the productive vegetal and animal cycles.[56]

Recognizing the heuristic efficacy of an approach that examines the relations between forms, types, and times of production, and forms, contents, and times of the cult, and that examines the historical variability of these relations as a result of changing legal systems and political ideologies, of social regimes and religious orientations,[57] allows us to understand

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[54] Greimas 1995, 35; Zanini 1997; Burgio 2015. More generally it can be observed, as does Bourdieu (1980, 374) regarding the threshold of a ritual, namely that of the saints' lunch, which in itself is seen as a movement between two different time periods, that the transition periods have all the properties of the threshold, the limit between two spaces, in which the antagonistic principles collide and the world turns inside out.

[55] On the ambiguity and variability of concepts like "religiosity" and "popular religion": Sobrero,

Squillacciotti 1978; De Rosa 1979a; 1979b; Prandi 1977; 2002; Lanternari 2006; Terrin 2014. More generally also: Schmitt 1977; Ginzburg 1977; Isambert 1977; Vovelle 1977; Alvarez Santaló, Buxó Rey, Rodríguez Becerra 2003.

[56] Brelich 1955; Servier 1962; Lanternari 1976; Dumézil 1929, 1989; Sabbatucci 1988; Propp 1978; Grimaldi 1993; Greimas1995; Buttitta I. E. 2006.

[57] Cauvin 1994; Brelich 2007; Bourdieu 2012, 73 ff.

more clearly the emergence and persistence of certain ritual symbolisms and cultic beliefs and practices. It is also useful to clarify the recurrence of analogous ritual symbolisms in cultures that never came into contact.[58] In spite of deconstructionist and anti-historical approaches we can, finally, assert that a diachronic analysis and comparison – when carried out with care and intellectual honesty – can only benefit the advancement of knowledge.

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[58] D'Onofrio 2018, 237 ff.

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Marduk's Penis.
Queering *Enūma Eliš*

Sophus Helle

Abstract: The paper examines the depiction of gender in the Babylonian epic *Enūma Eliš*. I approach the text from the perspective of queer theory, basing my argument on the assumption that the gender binary is not a natural given but is culturally constructed, and that the process of cultural construction can be traced in the sources at our disposal. I do not argue that *Enūma Eliš* is somehow a 'queer' text in and of itself, but rather that a conscious mismatch between text and theory can reveal new aspects of the ancient epic. I focus on two aspects of the construction of gender in *Enūma Eliš*: the depiction of the female body as constantly restless, disquieting, and impossible to subdue decisively, and the creation of an all-male sphere of discourse, where men become powerfully invested in the company of other men.

Introduction

A strange Assyrian commentary text, which seeks to unpack the deeper symbolic layers of an ancient ritual, identifies the king participating in the ritual with 'the god Marduk, who defeated Tiamat with his penis' (*Marduk ša ina ušārīšu tiāmat i*[*kmû*], l. 17').[1] This brief comment is baffling, particularly because any Assyrian or Babylonian reader would have been familiar with Marduk's defeat of the primordial goddess Tiamat. This is the plot of *Enūma Eliš*, the Babylonian account of how the world was created and of how Marduk became its king.[2]

But in *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk defeats Tiamat by thrusting his wind – not his penis – into her mouth. The commentary's remark is striking because it reinterprets this familiar story and in so doing places the theme of gender and sexuality at the very heart of *Enūma Eliš*. In other words, it makes sex central to the Babylonian account of how the universe came into being.

In this essay, I want to follow this suggestion and explore what it would mean to read *Enūma Eliš* with an eye for gender relations and violent eroticism. *Enūma Eliš* is among the best-known texts to survive from ancient Iraq. Known also as the *Epic of Creation*, it tells of how Marduk, god of Babylon, killed Tiamat, mother of all the gods, and used her body to create the universe as we know it. At the end of the story, Marduk is made king of the gods, and establishes the rules and regulations of a new world order. In the following, I delve into the gendered and

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[1] Livingstone 1986, 94, see also Cooper 2017, 115–116.

[2] *Enūma Eliš* is an epic written in the Standard Babylonian dialect of Akkadian, probably towards the end of the 2nd millennium BCE. It is written in an elevated literary language, full of rare words and strange forms. The story opens in the beginning of time, when the two mythical seas Tiamat and Apsu mingled their waters together, thus creating the first gods. Then follow two narrative sections: first the battle between Apsu and the god Ea, and then the battle between Tiamat and Ea's son Marduk. The two sections mirror one another, as Marduk's story parallels and expands his father's. The remainder of the text tells of Marduk's elevation to

supreme kingship among the gods and his organization of the universe. Finally, Marduk is assigned fifty names, each accompanied by a role he is to play in the ongoing maintenance of world order.

sexual aspects of the ideological order that is established in the text. I examine the construction of a binary division between genders, and of a violent, anxious, self-perpetuating hierarchy between them.

I base my argument on the assumption that gender and eroticism are not biological constants, but factors shaped by the social conventions of any given society – and accordingly, that they are shaped differently in different periods and cultures. This is the fundamental assumption of the theoretical discipline known as queer theory. Queer theory criticizes the notion of a gender binary, that is, the idea that humanity is invariably divided into two categorically distinct genders. Further, queer theory criticizes the idea that human eroticism can be neatly divided into homo- and heterosexuality, and that the meaning of sexuality has remained constant across historical periods. Instead, queer theory points to the myriad different ways in which gender and sexuality have been depicted throughout history and around the globe. Our perception of sex is so thoroughly filtered by our cultural conceptions, psychological structures, and discursive conventions that we have little hope of reaching a 'pure', historically stable idea of what sexuality, femininity, or masculinity are truly like. Accordingly, we cannot project our modern notions of what 'gender', 'sex', 'male', 'female', 'homosexual', and 'heterosexual' all mean onto pre-modern periods, instead, we must examine how these categories were constructed in the cultures that we study.

However, the constructedness of gender and sexuality is in itself a distinctly post-modern notion, and the discipline of queer theory has only existed for some three decades. Does it then make sense to apply its conclusion to texts that were composed some three millennia ago? Is it not inappropriate to export modern theories of gender onto Babylonian epics? These kinds of questions are often raised by philologists who are wary of the application of explicit theories onto ancient texts. In the following, I argue that the application of queer theory to *Enūma Eliš* is indeed inappropriate, but that this kind of impropriety is also fundamentally necessary to uncover the deeper ideological structures of the text.

In defence of an inappropriate theory

A common approach to literary works from the ancient Near East is to read them as the expressions, conscious or otherwise, of a broader ideological program.[3] Scholars seek to discover in these works an underlying normative message addressed to ancient readers. Take *Enūma Eliš*: the story it tells, of the god Marduk's elevation to divine kingship, is generally taken as a way of conveying in narrative form the earthly hegemony of his city, Babylon.[4] Assyriologists thus often read ancient epics as an attempt to impose a specific narrative order on the society that produced them. We must assume that ancient societies comprised any number of contradictory narratives about the world, of which our texts will often enshrine one in particular. Other cities had other stories, but *Enūma Eliš* cements the supremacy of Marduk specifically, over and above competing deities like Enlil or Ninurta. However, this narrative order, which scholars regularly expect to find in the texts that they study, also represents a methodological challenge. If the texts necessarily – and such is the general assumption – present us with a limited perspective on ancient reality, how can we move beyond this limited perspective to gain a more comprehensive view of that reality? How can we resist the ideological restrictions that the texts impose on their readers? How can we ex-

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[3] See e.g. the methodological reflections in Michalowski 1983.

[4] See e.g. Foster 2005, 436, who writes that *Enūma Eliš* 'can be read as a document of Babylonian nationalism.'

amine those phenomena that are repressed by the texts' ideological order?

In *Theory and the Premodern Text*, Paul Strohm argues that modern theory has the potential to help us with this dilemma.[5] While philologists often resist the application of modern theoretical perspectives on ancient evidence, arguing that those perspectives will inevitably prove anachronistic, this anachronism is actually to be celebrated. Strohm argues that the outside perspective provided by modern theory can disclose elements that have been repressed, both by the conceptual order of the ancient text itself and by traditional assumptions in the modern discipline – assumptions that have become so naturalized as to be taken for granted, thereby becoming invisible to us. Theory can help us to step out of our 'orbit of assumptions', and out of the text's own assumptions about the world, so that we can view our evidence anew.[6] What we must not do, of course, is to subsume ancient texts under the explanatory power of modern theories. Theories can give us new ways of approaching the texts, they can give us the language we need to describe what we find, but they cannot be used as rigid explanations of what is 'really' going on. What we can do is to use modern theories to challenge the texts' account of the world.

In other words, there is something inevitably queer, something odd and ill-fitting, about the application of modern theory to ancient texts, but in that queerness lies a crucial promise: that it will move us towards a new and more comprehensive view of the ancient world. But how can we possibly hope to uncover what a text hides from its readers? Strohm's point of departure is that, while texts may impose an ideological order on their cultural world, they will nec-

essarily fail in doing so.[7] Texts are so enmeshed in the logic of their time, with all its internal contradictions and multiplicity of perspectives, that they can never finally reduce them to a single, coherent message. Instead, texts will always preserve a trace of that which they repress. *Enūma Eliš*, for example, excludes the god Enlil from the Babylonian pantheon, replacing him with Marduk, but Enlil keeps returning to the text. Implicit intertextual references recall older stories about Enlil as a foil for Marduk's elevation;[8] the creation of the heavens includes the establishment of Enlil's 'heavenly station' (*manzāz enlil*, V 8), in accordance with the astrological model that was in use at the time; and most significantly, the fifty names that are assigned to Marduk at the end of the epic are an echo of Enlil's divine number, fifty.[9] Even when it seems to pass him over in silence, the epic registers the echoes of Enlil in all sorts of ways. The theoretically informed study of ancient literature thus requires an eye for detail, for the small things that do not seem to fit with the overall program of the text, and which may therefore reveal hidden aspects that the text suppresses or leaves unstated. These kinds of textual suppression need not be consciously willed or programmatic efforts on behalf of their composers, since any text will necessarily leave out a wealth of elements and details in order for the composition to hang together and in order to get the story told. But whether conscious or not, such suppressions can reveal key aspects of the structure and ideological message of the text – and can often be detected in the echoes and traces that they leave behind.

In this essay, I am interested not in the political ideology of *Enūma Eliš*, but in its gendered ideology, and here the ritual commentary's

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[5] Strohm 2000. For a previous application of Strohm's theories to the study of ancient Near Eastern gender, see Guinan 2018.
[6] Strohm 2000, xiv.

[7] Strohm 2000, 155.
[8] See Wisnom 2014, 90–207.
[9] See e.g. Seri 2006, 517, who refers to Enlil as 'the great absent figure' in *Enūma Eliš*.

statement that Marduk defeated Tiamat with his penis is a striking example. In *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk defeats Tiamat, not with his member, but with his wind. If I were to claim that Marduk's wind carries a phallic connotation – on the basis of, say, a Freudian reading – philologists would most likely dismiss my claim as an outrageous application of modern theory on the ancient text. But as the Assyrian commentary shows, the association makes good sense according to the logic of cuneiform cultures as well. The word 'penis' (*ušāru*) contains the word for 'wind' (*šāru*), and to cuneiform scholars of the 1st millennium BCE, an association at the level of sound would have indicated an association at the level of meaning as well.[10] What does this example tell us? First of all, that we must be more open to interpretations that our most immediate reactions would lead us to dismiss as inappropriate. When we encounter something seemingly inappropriate in our texts, we need to ask where that sense of incongruity stems from. Have the conventions of our discipline, embedded as it is in the world-view and morality of modern society, made associations that would have been straightforward for ancient readers seem strange to us? Or is it rather that this particular ancient text displays an exceptional opposition to an ideology that was dominant at the time? Either way, we have a lot to learn from the inappropriate.[11]

I am therefore forced to disagree with those who would gauge whether a theoretical approach can be employed to study an ancient text on the basis of whether they 'fit' one another. Jeremy Black, for example, argues that

> [i]t seems legitimate in these circumstances for those wishing to deal with a dead, alien, fragmentary, undateable and authorless literature to pursue a pragmatic approach led by elements of any theory which seem pregnant and responsive to that literature's special character and special circumstances, and to set aside those which appear inappropriate.[12]

I have no problem with Black's pragmatic approach as such, nor with his wish to pick and choose the theoretical insights that seem particularly fruitful. My concern is rather that, if we engage only with theories that seem 'appropriate' to the evidence at hand, the use of theory risks becoming a rather tautological affair. Using a given theory only because it 'fits' the text in question is just a way of confirming one's own pre-existing assumptions about that text. Apart from anything else, the notion that we must employ only theories that are appropriate to the text we set out to study presupposes that we know in advance what we will find there.

Neal Walls, for example, argues that a queer approach is especially apt for the study of *Gilgameš*, in that 'queer theory provides an appropriate method to analyze the poetics of desire in this ancient Akkadian text because both the theory and the text effectively deconstruct the modern Western dichotomies of sexual/platonic love and hetero-/homo-eroticism.'[13] Walls' queer reading of *Gilgameš* was certainly a path-breaking contribution that clarified much of the complexity in the epic's portrayal of male desire. However, his reasoning in this passage is flawed. Surely, a theory is not appropriate for the study of a text merely because it agrees with its outlook – or rather, with Walls' assumption

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[10] See e.g. Michalowski 1990. For other associations between wind and sexuality in cuneiform cultures, see Zisa 2018, 196–199.

[11] I would further argue that it is not necessary for ancient texts to be explicit about such connections for a critical reading to be valid. The example merely demonstrates that we should not take for granted that we can know in advance which connections are meaningful and 'appropriate', and which are spurious.

[12] Black 1998, 43.

[13] Walls 2001, 17.

about what that outlook will turn out to be. A theory should challenge assumptions, both ours and the text's, not merely confirm them. After all, if a theory does not move us towards a new understanding of the texts, but merely restates a pre-existing premise in new words, then what is the use of it? We need to gauge the value of theoretical engagements by the insights they yield, not by whether they appear fitting at first sight. This is especially important when it comes to queer theory. Queer theory is based on the assumption that the gender binary (the rigid division of the human species into two and only two genders) and the social predominance of heterosexuality (including specific assumptions about what sexuality entails in terms of identity, power, and erotic practices) are not biological constants, but vary across cultures. The meaning and nature of gender and sexuality thus cannot be taken for granted when we turn to ancient periods. Instead, we must examine how they are constructed in that specific context.

However, in the study of the ancient Near East, queer theory is most often marshalled to account for those contexts where it seems 'appropriate', that is, for texts and phenomena that appear to deviate from the dominant gendered and sexual ideology of the ancient world, like the *Epic of Gilgameš* and its depiction of eroticized intimacy between men, or what appear to be third gender individuals such as *assinnu*'s and *kurgarrû*'s.[14] In practice, we thereby end up using a theory that argues for a fundamental fluidity and constructedness of gender and sexuality to account for situations where gender and sexuality appear to be fluid and undetermined by biology.[15] But surely, the premise of

queer theory is that *all* forms of gender and sexuality are constructed, not only those that seem strange to us today or that deviated from ancient conventions.[16] However, this premise is obscured by the one-sided application of constructivist theories to ancient sexuality. For example, in an article entitled 'Are There Homosexuals in Mesopotamian Literature?', Martti Nissinen explains why this question is nonsensical according to a constructivist notion of sexuality.[17] It essentially asks whether a modern invention (a fixed homosexual identity) existed in the ancient world. Even attestations of sex between men cannot be taken as evidence for the existence of 'homosexuals' as a fixed category of identity. This is undoubtedly true, but had Nissinen asked, 'Are there *heterosexuals* in Mesopotamian literature?', the answer would surely have been the same. If the binary division between homo- and heterosexuality is a modern construction, then one side of that binary is not 'more constructed' than the other.[18]

Queer theory highlights the hidden repressions, the naturalized violence, and the discursive structures that shape our perception of sex and gender – not only at the margins, but at the very heart of normality itself. In the following, I intend to take a queer approach to *Enūma Eliš*.[19] In contrast to *Gilgameš*, *Enūma Eliš* is a staunchly heteronormative text, insisting on the division between male and female and on the subjugation of the latter. As Rivkah Harris puts it, '*Enuma Elish* is a male myth, exalting male order, male rule, male relationships, male power and creativity.'[20] A queer approach to the text thus cannot be justified by any similarity be-

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[14] See, respectively, Walls 2001 and Guinan – Morris 2017; Helle 2018, Nissinen and Svärd 2018, 396, and Peled.

[15] One exception is Agnès Garcia-Ventura, who has examined the construction of gender in the management of workforces, especially during the Ur III period, considering also how queer theory can help us to ana-

lyze normalized categories of gender – see e.g. Garcia-Ventura 2016, 182–183.

[16] See Helle 2018.

[17] Nissinen 2010.

[18] Helle 2016, 24.

[19] For previous approaches to gender in *Enūma Eliš*, see especially Cooper 2017 and Metzler 2002.

[20] Harris 1993, 115.

tween text and theory, but this mismatch may in itself be illuminating. It brings out aspects of the text that are obscured by the limited perspective that it imposes, and by the conventions of an academic field that even today takes the binary between genders for granted.

The monstrous female body
Enūma Eliš opens with a scene of primordial sexuality. Before names and destinies had been created, only the two primeval beings Tiamat and Apsu existed. Both are bodies of water: Tiamat is the salt water of the ocean, Apsu the fresh subterranean groundwater. In the beginning, the two bodies mingle into one mass, creating the first gods.

> *apsû-ma rēštû zārûšun*
> *mummu tiāmat muallidat gimrīšun*
> *mêšunu ištēniš iḫiqqū-ma*
> *gipāra lā kiṣṣurū ṣuṣâ lā šē'ū*
>
> *Primordial Apsû was their seed,*
> *and it was Tiamat, the matrix,[21]*
> *who gave birth to them all.*
> *They mingled their waters together,*
> *unbound by meadows, unstuffed with*
> *reed.[22]* (I 3–6)

The landscape of southern Iraq was a checker board of canals and islets of pasture land, and on the banks between land and water stood clusters of reed.[23] The text thus imagines a time before meadows separated the waters from each other, and before reedbeds marked that distinction. Unbound by meadows, the waters were free to mix and mingle, and the first gods were born from that eroticized encounter: 'Within them, the gods were created, / Lahmu and Lahamu came forth' (*ibbanû-ma ilī qerebšun laḫmu laḫāmu uštāpû*, I 9–10).

The sexuality that we find at the beginning of the epic is thus a shapeless, chaotic, and mutual affair. There is no hierarchy or order in this scene. Though they represent different gendered principles – grammar tells us that the ocean is female and the groundwater male – the two waters cannot be distinguished from one another at this point in time. They have mingled together completely, literally 'into one' (*ištāniš*). By the end of the epic, however, a very different ideology will come to prevail. No longer allowed to mix freely, male and female will instead be treated as fundamentally separate categories, the relation between them will become rigidly hierarchical, and the female body will become a site of continuous male anxiety. In the following pages, I track how that reversal unfolds in the text.

As I noted in the previous section, the theory of Paul Strohm suggest that texts will always preserve a trace of what they repress. The textual program to subdue and silence a given ideological element involves a necessary failure. The repressed element keeps returning under new guises, becoming a source of constant irritation.[24] In fact, the more a text wishes to transfix and control an unwanted aspect of its ideological world, the more discursive space will that aspect take up. This structure may help to explain the amount of time that *Enūma Eliš* devotes to the female body. The presence, power, and necessity of a female body within a patriarchal logic acts as an irritant that the text continuously tries and fails to subdue.

Having at first been portrayed as a good and caring mother, Tiamat eventually becomes the main antagonist of the story. She gives birth to an army of monsters and plots to destroy the gods she created. The figure of the cosmic mother is thus turned into a monstrous enemy for the gods to kill. Though their ranks also

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[21] For this translation, see Jacobsen 1976, 168, and Foster 2005, 439, fn. 1.
[22] Here and below, the text is quoted from the edition in Lambert 2003, but the translations are my own.
[23] See Buccellati 1990, 125.

[24] See Strohm 2000, 155–156.

include goddesses, such as Damkina, mother of the main character Marduk, these female characters speak no lines and play at best subservient roles in the plot. As Jerrold Cooper puts it, except for Damkina and Tiamat '*Enuma Elish* is entirely bereft of identifiable females.'[25] The main conflict in the story thus plays out between a community of male gods and their single, monstrous, ancestral mother. But while the focus of the narrative is on the male characters' desire to subdue the dangerous female body, the text also depicts the internal contradiction of that desire. The gods send first Ea and then Anu to defeat Tiamat, but they return without success, being too terrified to confront her. They both urge their forefather Anshar to try again and send someone else: 'My father, don't despair, send another against her! / A woman's strength may be great indeed, but not as much as a man's' (*abī ē tuštāniḫ tūr šupurši / emūqu sinništi lū dunnuna ul mala ša zikri*, II 91–92 = 115–16). Ea and Anu argue that, though they themselves have failed, men are bound to eventually prevail over the inherent weakness of women. There is thus an inevitable self-contradiction in the misogyny of the text. The female body is weak and 'naturally' inferior to its male counterpart, and so ought to be easy to suppress, but at the same time it is frightening and difficult to subdue decisively.[26]

The true danger posed by Tiamat is not the strength of her body in itself, but its monstrously generative potential. She gives birth to an army of monsters, demons, scorpion-men, fish-men, bull-men, all of them sharp-toothed and with poison for blood. Crucially, these monsters spring from her body alone, and not from the sexual union that created the gods in the first place: Tiamat conceives without having been inseminated by a male penis. The female body is thus enthused with its own procreative power,

which becomes monstrous when it is separated from male influence. The text's concern with the possibility of penis-less procreation is underscored by the four-fold repetition of the passage. Again and again we are told how Tiamat creates and weaponizes eleven kinds of monsters. The insistent reiteration and listing of the creatures evokes an image of the female body as constantly generative, breeding monsters without end. The female body thus becomes a site of constant concern, as the fertile female body has become unquiet and disquieting. It cannot be subdued, it will not lie still, and it incessantly brings forth new threats against the male order.

This sense of disquiet surrounding the female body persists even after Marduk has managed to subdue Tiamat. He thrusts his wind into her mouth, binds her, kills her, and dismembers her.[27] In a fragmentary passage (V 45–62), we read of how Marduk manipulates her limbs to create the geographical features of our world: he splits her body in two, her breasts become mountains, her crotch is wedged into the horizon, he bores holes into her body to create wells, and the rivers Euphrates and the Tigris flow like tears from her eyes. One would think that the restless female body would then be finally tamed, definitively fixed in place by Marduk's cosmic violence. But the text suggests otherwise. At the end of the epic, Marduk is assigned 50 names, and with each name, a role that he will play in the maintenance of world order.[28] The 49th is *Neberu*, the Babylonian name for the planet Jupiter, Marduk's sign in the heavens. This name is associated with the following role:

> *mā ša qerbiš tiāmat ītebbiru lā nāḫiš*
> *šumšu lū nēberu āḫizu qerbīšu*
> *ša kakkabī šamāmi alkāssunu likīn-ma*

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25 Cooper 2017, 116.
26 See also Metzler 2002, 398.

27 On the relation between femininity, death, and the shaping of form in *Enūma Eliš*, see Metzler 2002.
28 For the relation between the 50 names and the accompanying role, see Bottéro 1977.

kīma ṣēnī lir'â ilī gimrāšun
likmi tiāmat napištašu lisīq u likri
aḫrâtaš niši labāri šūme
lissē-ma lā uktalla līriqa naṣâta

The one who travels (ebēru) tirelessly
  back and forth inside (qerbiš) Tiamat:
  let his name be Neberu, who seizes
  (āḫizu) her waist (qerbīšu)!
Let him maintain the movements of the
  heavenly stars,
  let him lead all the gods like sheep.
Let him bind Tiamat, let her breath be
  kept short and shallow:
  for generations to come, in future days,
may he travel unrestrained into the dis-
tance, may he roam into eternity.
  (VII 128–34)

According to this passage, Jupiter's movement through the night-sky coordinates those of the stars and of the other planets, each of which corresponds to a god, so that Jupiter herds the gods like sheep. In so doing, the planet moves round and round inside the body of Tiamat, which Marduk has split into two and used to create the heavenly spheres. Jupiter's progression through the heavens is imagined as a continuous process of binding, with the planetary orbit as a sort of astral rope keeping Tiamat's body bound in place. This need for continuous control carries a distinct erotic connotation. Marduk is referred to as 'he who seizes her waist', which is perhaps to be understood as the planet's movement through the middle section of the heavens. One way or another, the epithet is clearly sexualized. The word *aḫāzu*, 'to grasp', also means 'to marry', and *qerbu*, 'middle' or 'inside', also means 'womb'. With Tiamat's womb having previously been represented a site of restless, monstrous fertility, this violent control of her waist seems to be a way of keeping the unruly female body under control.

As such, even when Marduk has killed and bound Tiamat, mutilated her body, and torn it limb from limb, the female body remains unquiet. It continues to disturb the male characters. It is not enough for Tiamat to have been murdered and dismembered – she must be constantly bound, wrapped in Jupiter's orbit again and again, for all of eternity. As noted, the more a text represses an unwanted element of its ideological world, the more that element keeps returning under new guises. Here the monstrously fertile female body returns in the form of Tiamat's waist, and the threat of that return is enough to require an eternal renewal of bondage. In the anxious logic of misogyny, the female body can never fully be subdued once and for all, but must be tirelessly seized and restrained.

The world order that is established in *Enūma Eliš* thus rests on a foundation of gendered violence and sexualized subjugation. According to this story, the world we see around us was created through the murder, mutilation, bondage, and, according to the Assyrian ritual commentary, oral rape of a divine motherly body. I noted above that *Enūma Eliš* opens with a sexualized cosmogony, as Apsu, the primordial seed, and Tiamat, the primordial womb, mix their waters together. The epic also ends with a scene of sexualized cosmogony, as Marduk manipulates Tiamat's limbs – breast, crotch, eyes, and mouth. But whereas the eroticism of the first scene was mutual, chaotic, and free from constraints, the second scene is insistently hierarchical, ordered, violent, and constantly constraining. In this section, I have described how the separation of gendered bodies yields a depiction of the female body as monstrously generative and constantly disquieting; in the following, I turn to the way in which this division between genders also serves to create an exclusively masculine social sphere.

The stories of men

In an older Akkadian epic, *Atra-ḫasis*, the creation of humanity is depicted as a cooperation between two deities, Mami and Enki (the Sumerian name for Ea). The gods first charge the mother goddess Mami with the task of creating humanity, but she responds: 'It is not for me to create, that task belongs to Enki' (*ittīyā-ma lā naṭû ana epēši / itti enkī-ma ibašši šipru*, I 200–201). What she will do instead is to take the clay that Enki has enthused with life and shape it into human form. In other words, the creation of matter belongs to the male god while the creation of form belongs to the female goddess. Not so in *Enūma Eliš*, which also includes an account of the creation of humanity, closely following the text of *Atra-ḫasis* and occasionally reproducing it *verbatim*.[29] But in *Enūma Eliš*, Mami has been removed from the plot, and humanity is instead created through a collaboration between Marduk, who conceives the plan, and his father Ea, who carries it out. In the transition from *Atra-ḫasis* to *Enūma Eliš*, the female deity has thus been denied an active role in the scene of creation.[30] Instead, the female body can participate in creation only as a passive material to be moulded, as Marduk reshapes Tiamat's body to suit his plan for the universe.[31] The creation of form thus no longer belongs to the mother goddess, but has been appropriated by the male deities. In a complete reversal of the gendered logic of creation in *Atra-ḫasis*, now it is men who provide the form and the woman who provides the malleable material, namely her own body, while the relation between them has turned from mutual cooperation to violent imposition.

One outcome of this displacement of gender is that creation becomes a fully homosocial affair. It no longer involves an interaction between two deities of different genders, as it did in *Atra-ḫasis* or in the opening scene of *Enūma Eliš*. Instead, it is something men do together, *to* women and not with them. In *Enūma Eliš*, the creation of humanity is portrayed almost like a father-son bonding activity. Creation is here something that takes place entirely between men, with women relegated to the mute and passive role of malleable matter (though the female body paradoxically also remains forever unquiet and disquieting, as shown in the previous section). Crucially, this shift is reflected in how the text portrays social relations, not only between gods, but also between humans. In the epilogue, the text describes how it would like to be read and received. The gods have finished assigning Marduk his 50 names, and the narrator invites the audience to reflect on them:

> *enqu mūdû mitḫāriš limtalkū*
> *lišannī-ma abu māri lišāḫiz*
> *ša rēʾî nāqidi lipattâ uznāšun*

> *The clever and the wise should discuss them together (*mitḫāriš*), the father should repeat them and make the son understand (*lišāḫiz*) – let them broaden the minds of shepherds and herdsmen!*
> (VII 146–48)

The epic of *Atra-ḫasis* likewise ends by addressing its audience and inviting them to reflect on the text they have just heard: 'I have sung of the Flood to all people – listen!' (*abūba ana kullat niši / uzammer šimea*, III viii 18'–19'). Though it was probably enjoyed by a primarily male audience, *Atra-ḫasis* clearly depicts itself as addressed to everybody, and the imperative 'listen!' (*šimea*) is cast in a collective plural that is unmarked for gender. By contrast, the ending of *Enūma Eliš* restricts its ideal audience to an exclusively male social sphere. It imagines that it will be discussed widely and wisely, by people both clever and common – but only ever by men. The text is to be repeated forever, passed on from father to son, but crucially, this

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[29] Seri 2014.
[30] Frymer-Kensky 1992, 74–76.
[31] Metzler 2002.

miniature genealogical model of textual transmission entirely omits women. It is as if families consist only of fathers and sons, and no mothers. This omission would not in itself have been significant, given the patriarchal nature of cuneiform cultures, were it not for the contrast with the story that these fathers and sons are to discuss together. The entire plot of *Enūma Eliš* revolves around Tiamat's motherly body – its dangers, restless fertility, and necessary subjugation. The epic narrates how this divine mother was killed and subdued, leaving, it would seem, an imaginary family consisting only of men. *Enūma Eliš* thus involves not just one, but two sets of non-heterosexual reproductions. Tiamat gives birth to monsters without having been inseminated by a penis, while gods and men alike procreate without the need of women: Ea and Marduk create humanity without the cooperation of a mother goddess, and the epilogue proposes that the text will be transmitted into eternity by an all-male genealogy.

One of the foundational insights of queer theory is the pervasiveness of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick termed 'homosocial desire'.[32] Sedgwick argues that the dividing line between sexual and non-sexual relations is more historically variable than we usually assume, simply because the category that we term 'sex' is a culturally relative construction. What qualifies as sexual behaviour in one period may not do so in the next.[33] Accordingly, the binary divide between homosexual and non-sexual forms of homosociality is a bad point of departure for studying historical relations between men. Instead, Sedgwick proposes a 'homosocial continuum', a spectrum of interactions between persons of the same gender, where the division between sexual and non-sexual behaviour is not given beforehand. This allows for a historical sensitivity to the different ways in which this continuum may be structured in the cultures that we study. This further allows for the recognition of the role that desire plays in the shaping of male homosociality, even when that desire does not take the form of eroticism. Sedgwick shows that in the periods she examines, even purportedly heterosexual men are powerfully invested in relations with other men. Men desire the company of men and spend their time maintaining a sanitized, exclusively male space, where a number of intense emotional relations may unfold, including close affection, rivalry, aggression, bodily intimacy, and satisfaction. Women may be included in this primarily male space, but only as passive (and often erotic) tokens in a set of exchanges that ultimately link men to men. Male homosociality is thus a social space that fuses power and desire: a hierarchical control over women with a libidinal investment in other men.

When one does not assume a strict division between the sexual and the non-sexual, the homosocial space thus often seems to be structured by an intense mutual desire between men, a desire that may take on a variety of different forms. The same is true of the gendered world of *Enūma Eliš*. I am not claiming that the all-male space imagined in the epilogue of the epic is to be understood as erotic. I merely wish to note how heavily the men of this ideological world are invested in the company of other men, and only men. The violent repudiation of the female body allows for the celebration of a male society where men create together, grow wise together, and raise sons together. In the opening scene of the epic, the male and female seas mixed their waters *together*, literally 'into one' (*ištēniš*), in a scene of heterosexual creation. At the end of the epic, the clever men and the wise men discuss the text *together*, literally 'equally' (*mitḫāriš*), in a scene of homosocial procreation. The 'togetherness' that is celebrated by the epic has thus shifted over the course

[32] Sedgwick 1985.
[33] See also Walls 2001, 13.

of the story towards the exclusive importance of male-male sociality.

Crucially, this male 'togetherness' is created through the telling of stories, namely *Enūma Eliš* itself, which the clever and the wise are to discuss together. As an example of how women figure in the construction of male homosocial spaces, Sedgwick cites three canonical works of English literature – Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess*, George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and William Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* – all of which depict 'a transaction of honor between men over the dead, discredited, or disempowered body of a woman.'[34] In *The Princess* especially, this transaction takes the form of story-telling, as seven men take turns reciting a poem about a princess' loss of power: 'the telling of the story, like a woman, is passed from hand to hand among the young men.'[35] The parallel to *Enūma Eliš* could hardly be more exact. The epic ends with the dead, dismembered body of a woman passed, in the form of a story about her demise, from man to man. The men thereby create a shared discursive space, where they cement their power over women and their investment in each other's company.

Tellingly, the word employed to describe how the fathers are to teach the names of Marduk to their sons is once more the word *aḫāzu*, which had earlier been used to describe Marduk's continuous seizing of Tiamat's waist. Here, the father is to make his son 'grasp' the text in the metaphorical sense, that is, to understand it. The son is to fix it in his mind just like Marduk fixed the limbs of Tiamat in place. This is a curious echo, with the two words being only twenty lines apart. There is perhaps a sense here that, in telling each other the story of how Marduk subdued Tiamat, the human men are somehow re-enacting it. In their safely all-male dis-

cursive space, they repeat Marduk's violation and domination of the anxiety-provoking, almost-but-never-quite passive female body.

Conclusion

The analysis presented above follows from that assumption that gender and sexuality are not trans-historically stable, but are culturally relative, dependent on the social conventions of a given society. Only if we assume that the gender binary is not a natural and necessary feature of society, but is constructed by, among other things, the discourse of literary texts, does it become possible to examine how that construction unfolds. But this requires us to step out of the textual 'orbit of assumptions', to break with the ideology that texts impose on their readers, and to peer into the illogical assumptions they hide. This means that a theoretical perspective on the construction of gender will necessarily seem 'inappropriate', it will be a bad fit with the world view of the text. But in that impropriety lies a crucial potential. The application of a queer perspective on the text proves fruitful, not because *Enūma Eliš* is in itself somehow 'queer' – far from it! – but precisely because the conscious mismatch between text and theory can illuminate the text in a new way.

The story told in *Enūma Eliš* takes the reader from a mutual, unbounded, and shapeless mixing of male and female waters 'into one' at the beginning of the text, to a violent separation and hierarchization of genders at the end of the text. I would like to highlight three aspects of this process: the creation of a binary divide between genders, the disquieting force that cleaves to the female body, and the establishment of an all-male discursive space.

The strange logic behind a binary divide between genders – the idea that male and female are categorically, fundamentally different – becomes apparent in Ea's and Anu's comment, after they have turned back in fear from

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[34] Sedgwick 1985, 137.
[35] Sedgwick 1985, 127.

Tiamat's advance, that 'a woman's strength may be great indeed, but not as much as a man's' (*emūqu sinništi lū dunnuna ul mala ša zikri*, II 992 = 116). There is a distinct irony here. Ea and Anu argue that men are stronger than women at the exact moment when they themselves, as men, have proven to be weaker than a woman. This reflects a view of gender as an essential, inherent feature. The division between men and women, and the characteristics associated with each, transcends any specific evidence to the contrary. There is an overarching, ideal category of 'men', who are strong, and of 'women', who are weak, and these ideal categories are ontologically prior to any actual instance of weak men or strong women.[36]

This misogynist illogic works to create a paradoxical image of the female body. On the one hand, it is weak, yielding, and easily subdued, and on the other hand, it is frightening, restless, and monstrously generative. Accordingly, Marduk, as the primary representative of male order, is tasked with the constant repression and constriction of the female body, in an attempt to keep its disquieting restlessness in place once and for all. This attempt fails, and so must be undertaken anew in an ongoing cycle that reaches into eternity. I have suggested that this structure – repression, failure, return under new guises, renewed repression, and so on – is in fact a more general feature of all textual efforts to establish a coherent order that is free from unwanted ideological elements.

Finally, through the separation of genders, men become emotionally invested in the company of other men. So as to create a purely homosocial space, women are reduced (as nearly as possible, given the impossibility of full repression) to a passive material, which can be moulded, controlled, and passed around within an exclusively male community. Men thus become invested in the continuous repudiation and control of women's bodies, and thereby, in the creation of a self-perpetuating, all-male discursive space.

Appendix

The Assyrian commentary's equation between wind and penis finds a curious cross-cultural parallel in an Anglo-Saxon riddle, Bede's *Joco-Seria* 10, which may be paraphrased as follows: 'How do you make an anus see?' The answer is to add an 'o', turning Latin *culus*, 'anus', into *oculus*, 'eye'.[37] As with Marduk's penis, the double entendre turns on the indecent absence of an initial vowel (*šāru* vs. *ušāru*), but the Anglo-Saxon riddle actually takes this a step further, as the appended 'o' has the same circular shape as the two body parts it is used to link: it resembles both sphincter and socket. The supplemented letter that ostensibly points to a difference in content thus also reveals a sameness in form.

Acknowledgments

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[36] See Metzler 2002, 399–400, and Cooper 2017, 115–116 for a dissenting view.

[37] Orchard 2005, 287.

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Offering Tables as Ritual Landscapes.
An Anthropological Perspective
of Ancient Egyptian *Materia Magicae*

Esmeralda Lundius

Abstract: Offering tables have been neglected in the study of ancient Egyptian funerary ritual and have not been adequately handled as cultic/ritual artefacts placed within a mortuary landscape. This paper will apply theoretical approaches regarding the use, context and ritual significance of mortuary ritual artefacts to the analysis of offering tables in order to illustrate the difficulties in understanding such artefacts and identifying viable approaches to defining ancient Egyptian magical practice. It is proposed that offering tables or platters from Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt (ca.2600-1750 BCE) may reflect architectural and topographic features in their design, revealing essential information regarding their ritual use and context. Several such objects display, in miniature, entire canal systems thus indicating the life-giving forces that such irrigation systems transmitted to fields and pools from the inundating Nile water. The offering objects may therefore be ritual landscapes themselves, used as ritual theatres for activating the *ka*.

Introduction

The Ancient Egyptian Offering Table

In ancient Egyptian rituals offering tables constituted a link between the living and a spiritual sphere, providing nourishment to the deceased[1] while their size, shape, material and placement indicated the social status of their users. Most tables could be found in tombs, in the vicinity of false doors or statues representing members of the elite.[2] The tables are made of numerous materials, and there are examples in diverse shapes and sizes, depending on context and time period. Some may carry depictions of victuals, vessels and vegetation, though most commonly they exhibit features connected with water.[3]

Much research remains to be done in connection with these ritual artefacts, not only within the realm of Egyptology, but also in the archaeological record.[4] The offering tables are generally found in museum collections, though so far they have seldom been studied in an all-encompassing manner,[5] and I hope this study will constitute a contribution to this endeavour.

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[1] Bolshakov 2001.

[2] Forman – Quirke 1996.

[3] Information is based on an ongoing catalogue composed of over 400 offering tables and similar objects in collections in Egypt, Europe and the USA.

[4] This paper is based on a PhD thesis first started in 2016 at the Department of Archaeology at Durham University UK. Since then, over 400 offering tables, including similar objects from museum collections in Europe and the US have been studied in detail and classified according to a strict methodology allowing the author to interpret the context, use and significance

of this type of ritual object in ancient Egyptian funerary ritual.

[5] Important publications concerning the classification and interpretation of offering tables include Regina Hölzl (2002) where she describes, catalogues and analyses an extensive sample of stone offering tables (as well as some pottery offering trays) ranging from the Old to the New Kingdom. Using samples from numerous museums she identifies and categorises different types of offering tables, arranging them in accordance with clear and useful typologies. Even if Hölzl's comprehensive study mentions their potential role in ancient Egyptian funerary ritual, a detailed account of the

Egyptology, Archaeology and Anthropology

An offering table is essential for the performing of specific Egyptian rituals. Anthropologists are generally reluctant to define rituals. They are quite diversified, change over time and are often performed in a routinely, almost instinctive, manner, though they may also be emotionally engaging.[6] Accordingly, rituals may be carried out as highly structured, repetitively performed acts at the same time as they may be deeply personal. Nevertheless, most anthropologists agree that rituals are actions and if being *sacred* they are connected with and dependent on beliefs, symbols and myths.[7] For our purpose we define rituals as activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed within a segregated area and in accordance with an established order.[8] Action is central to any ritual and the kind of performances connected with offering tables were sacrifices, in the broadest sense implied by the Latin terms *sacra,* sacred things, and *facere*, to do.

Social anthropology is characterized by a holistic approach, meaning that it connects things, thoughts and actions within a specific context, demarcated by time and space. An offering table was part of a specific physical context, a tangible reality, such as a landscape and/or, a tomb. Its use and shape depended on myths, traditions and religious beliefs. Accordingly, an in-depth description of an offering table implies an analysis of its appearance, use and context and thus it also becomes a study of human behaviour (*ánthrōpos*, human and *logos*, study).

An anthropological approach implies that the role of the researcher is critical. How does her/his cultural background influence an interpretation of objects and rituals? The context of our modern world, its moral and ethical attitudes, socio-religious framework and scientific approach, affect our understanding of the ancient past, making us either emphasize or overlook phenomena which may have had a different meaning or importance for those people we are trying to understand.[9] As outlined by post-processual archaeologists, it is plausible that the outcome of a scientific excavation, or analysis, is influenced by the researcher´s own principles and ideology.[10] A persistent ideology with its roots in past centuries makes us prone to interpret our findings in the light of "westernized" ideas about the separation of body and soul, linear thinking, a polarization between culture and nature, cosmos and chaos, male and female, purity and impurity, etc.[11]

Since we are mainly concerned with remains found in connection to burials we might be overly focussed on ancient Egyptian attitudes to death and the dead, exaggerating concerns and ideas related to death and afterlife. Remaining pictures, texts and artefacts might have been concentrated to and used by a specific social class and thus create an eschewed notion of ancient Egyptian society, beliefs and traditions. By letting a section represent the whole we might forget differences in space and time, varied attitudes and behaviour among men and women, social classes and geographical areas. Accordingly, there has traditionally existed a certain disconnection between funerary ritual

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context and function of these tables, as well as ritual theory, theological notions and comparisons to other *materia magica,* do not constitute an essential part of the scope of her study. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the fact that offering tables and basins have both symbolic and functional properties and played a vital role in mortuary ritual. There have also been extensive museum catalogues such as Ahmed Kamal (1909)'s early Cairo Museum catalogue as well as Labib Habachi's (1977) Turin Museum catalogue. Nevertheless, offering tables have scarcely to my

knowledge been analysed in relationship with and in accordance to funerary ritual.

[6] McCauley – Lawson 2002.
[7] Bell 1992, 19–29.
[8] Essential studies of rituals are Bell 1992; Turner 1969; Schechner – Appel 1990.
[9] See Nyord 2018.
[10] Shanks – Tilley 1992.
[11] Meskell 2002.

and the study of ancient Egyptian material culture.[12] Egyptology began as a discipline interpreting and analysing texts and finds associated with the elite. The archaeology of funerary contexts, such as tombs and mortuary temples dominated the past century and it is more recently that the entire mortuary landscape has obtained an increased attention through the use of phenomenology, anthropological analysis and theological thought.[13]

A persisting problem is the difficulty of studying objects in their original archaeological context, due to grave robbery, antiquated excavation and collection techniques or, incomplete museum records. Furthermore, it is also common to find typological studies as an end in themselves and archaeological reports where artefacts are analysed and quantified, but not placed within a ritual setting, other than a vague location within a tomb.[14]

Ancient Egyptian funerary texts have only recently been associated with physical, mortuary elements.[15] Interpretations of ancient Egyptian theological thought have in the past mainly been based on the transcription and translation of famous text genres such as the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts and numerous versions of the Book of the Dead, ignoring other traces of written information or their relationship to other material from a tomb.

Furthermore, Egyptology has suffered from a certain degree of "oversimplification", perhaps in a general conviction that ancient Egyptians were obsessed by a yearning for eternal life. The study of magical practice within Egyptology has sometimes also been frowned upon, especially while dealing with objects, which use has been dismissed as "common knowledge",

though interdisciplinary analysis has the potential to recontextualise the material.[16] It is difficult to find abundant examples[17] of cross-cultural comparisons and other anthropological methods intended to define ritual practices. Only a few sources mention ancient sub-Saharan rituals in relation to ancient Egyptian magical practice.[18] It seems that ancient Egyptians have been and still are depicted as being independent from neighbouring civilisations and unique in their practices, but this is certainly not the case.

An archaeological approach to ancient Egyptian culture would be to take a point of departure from a specific object found within a specific geographic/spatial context and examine its shape, material, colour, wear and tear. Such an approach could then be further developed through an anthropological approach, which would connect the use and appearance of an artefact to its assumed spatial and ritual context and thus trace its meaning for the people of a specific time and place.

Already Émile Durkheim, generally considered to be one of the founders of social anthropology, emphasized the importance ritual objects have for identifying a religion´s social aspects.[19] Somewhat later, Marcel Mauss described how rituals *sacralise* objects used in religious acts.[20] Based on direct observations of rituals, cultural anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz did during the 1960s begin to interpret each element of a sacred act by relating it to the symbolic and communicative context of the society in which it was performed.[21] Such an approach was by Geertz labelled as 'thick description'.[22] While connecting each action to its specific context Geertz emphasized the importance of not making any cross-cultural generalisations. However,

[12] Nyord 2018; Quirke 2015
[13] See Baines – Lacovara 2002; Arnold 2015; Gange 2015; Meskell 2004.
[14] See Quirke 2015; Richards 2005.
[15] Maitland 2018; Hays 2009.
[16] Nyord 2018; Bussmann 2015.

[17] See van den Brink 1982.
[18] See Quirke 2015; Wilburn 2005.
[19] Durkheim 1965.
[20] Mauss 1967.
[21] Turner 1969; Geertz 1973.
[22] Geertz 1973, 3–32.

Geertz was generally not concerned with utensils used during a ritual. He concentrated more on the symbolic functions of ritual behaviour, this while Turner (1977) tried to integrate both action and materials. He defined ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests".[23]

Turner´s more inclusive definition of rituals may be taken as a point of departure for a thorough investigation of ritual utensils in the field of artefact studies.[24] Archaeological methods have an even more post-processual approach, putting emphasis on "contextual archaeology" and therefore a combination of scientific methodology, ethnographic and anthropological theory, ethical implications, and archaeological processes. As a result, material culture has gained momentum and is not only a diagnostic tool, or an indicator of context, but is provided with symbolic meaning, indicating the imagination and ideology of the individual behind its production, use and disposal.[25] In this sense, "thick description" might be considered as a viable method for understanding the potential use of a ritual artefact. Accordingly, in my study of offering tables and similar material I apply a holistic archaeological/anthropological approach similar to the "thick description" outlined above.

The point of departure will be ancient Egyptian notions about the transforming force of water and how this is mirrored in mythology, rituals and magical practice. Iconography, form, colouring and material are connected with an ideological context. Since rituals are carried out within a specific space, offering tables can be connected with specific ritual landscapes, with the placement of some examples within such known areas. How the spatial context has influenced the appearance of offering tables is discussed in connection with their likeness to tombs, houses, temples and irrigation structures. Lastly, the use of offering tables is linked to written spells, like chants, instructions and lists that have been used to activate their life-giving force and involve participants in the rituals.

Setting the Scene
The creative power of words and imagery was central to ancient Egyptian magical practice and the task of a priest, or magician, was to discern and use the essence, the *ka*, in humans and objects.[26] Magical powers were believed to be inherent in stones, metals, minerals, plants and animals.[27] Anyone who could manipulate objects into becoming charged with divine energies was considered to be a kind of magician, even sculptors and artisans were described as "life givers".[28] The *Ka* was assumed to be a vital force resting in all things, both material and immaterial, while *Heka* was the creative impulse which activated the vital forces in everything, the word actually means "He who propels ka".[29] Liquids, foremost water, were the main vehicles for transferring and maintaining *Heka*.[30] *Heka* was the foremost method to capture the cosmic power of *ka,* generally through the help of water, and channel it through specific rituals. It is important to note that the definitions of *Heka* used here are strictly related to plausible interpretations regarding the use of ritual artefacts such as offering tables, and therefore the mechanics of ritual, rather than defining the complicated and numerous aspects of *Heka* and *Ka*.[31]

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[23] Turner 1977, 183.
[24] Hicks 2010.
[25] Hicks 2010.
[26] Pinch 2006.
[27] Ritner 1993, 17; see Aufrère 1997.
[28] Raven 2012, 33.

[29] Raven 2012.
[30] Gallash-Hall 2003, 53.
[31] For further reading on the mechanics of *Heka* see Fitzenreiter 2018; Testa 2017; da Silva Vega 2009; Étienne 2000; Velde 1970.

Water was a means of unifying the forces of chaos, as evidenced in Egyptian creation myths and mirrored in libation rituals, which could be considered as the transference of creative force through "god´s dew".[32] The distributive properties of water carried magical properties from one object to another, thus materialising the essence of a magical utensil. As a life providing entity, active but not alive, water was considered to be transformative, both in its passive and active form.[33] Rituals intended to harness and distribute its force.

To understand the role and use of water we need to consider its function in ancient Egyptian cosmogony. *Nun*, the primeval waters, was regarded as the origin of everything, while the seasonal flooding of the Nile was an obvious sign of water's dynamic life force.[34] Canals and reservoirs may be considered as efforts to harness the chaos and unpredictability of natural forces, to secure welfare and prosperity, and the use of *Heka* may be assumed to have a similar purpose.

The triad of Seth/Osiris/Horus was believed to collaborate to activate magical properties of inanimate objects. Seth was the active agent who killed Osiris and disbursed his energy by dividing his corpse between Egypt's *nomes*. He also deprived Horus of his eye to spread its moisture throughout the universe. Osiris´s efflux and Horus's eye were liquid entities and the cyclic force of water was believed to be set in motion by Seth's actions.[35] The active and passive events described in myths related to the Heliopolitan triad were reflected in the changing states of the Nile. Before the Aswan dam, the Nile became red when its water mixed with soil during the inundation period. Before the inundation, stagnant water remaining in fields and pools became green from vegetation and rotting

organic matter and when these organic substances receded through the influx of the vitalizing, inundating Nile water, it became white and creamy. These colours became related to mythology – the red symbolized the death of Osiris and the life-giving qualities of his streaming blood, green symbolized the vegetation nurtured by Osiris´s efflux in his state as a rotting corpse, while white water suggested the milk and tears of Isis, who restored Osiris to life and gave birth to his successor Horus.[36]

As described by Oestigaard (2011), the ancient Egyptian idea of cosmos, like in most creation myths, was centred on water in its various aspects of activity and inactivity. Water does in its stagnant form create life, while in its active form it carries with it the force of life. Furthermore, water "mirrors" cosmos since elements within the sky are reflected onto bodies of water, while their depth indicates access to obscure areas, making it an axis point to realms beyond human existence.[37] Cosmos signifies order and thus allows humans to define themselves and their role in universe.[38] Conman (2003) states that most ritual elements within ancient Egyptian religion reflected a dynamic understanding of the cosmos and its various elements. The sky, Nut, could thus be considered as both an active and ever-changing goddess and as an inanimate body, more like Nun.[39] Cosmos was both stable and in a constant state of flux, dependent on dichotomies between elements that complemented each in such a manner that a perfect balance was achieved, supported by the flux and changing nature of water. Nun, the counterpart of Nut, was often labelled as "the watery one", constituting a connection between the sky and its mutability in the form of water.[40] Both the Heliopolitan and

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[32] Blackman 1995, 78.
[33] Oestigaard 2011a.
[34] Rotsch 2005.
[35] Oestigaard 2011a, 30–38.
[36] Oestigaard 2011a, 51–53.

[37] Oestigaard 2011b, 41.
[38] Ragavan 2013.
[39] Conman 2003.
[40] Allen 2011.

Hermopolitan cosmogonies place much emphasis on water.[41] Both cosmogonies indicate the eternal existence of an essential natural force behind all creation, namely fertility and regeneration, supported by a constant presence and flux of water.[42]

While trying to define an individual's place within society it is essential to understand a civilisation's notions about cosmos. What is evident in ancient Egyptian cosmogonies is a need to address the duality and inevitability of nature, expressed through tangible and visible elements, such as water, darkness, and feelings of angst, linked to agency. The Heliopolitan cosmos reflects the legitimisation of royal power as an urge to unify the nation to secure cycles such as the inundation of the Nile and the rising of the sun. The Hermopolitan Ogdoad[43] reflected notions present in almost all societies: what is "hidden" and what is "constant" and what links these notions–namely water, encompassing the entire sacred space, a means to create and transfer the energy needed for creation. In this context, the offering table constituted an essential tool for supporting, harnessing and activating the life-giving force of water.

Various Forms and Appearances of Offering Tables

Offering tables were placed in the proximity of, or inside tombs where they transmitted life providing force to the dead, or in temples and private homes, where they served as a means of communication with deceased ancestors and the divine realm.[44] They were used to bring forth and store *ka*, through basins and other watery features. As cultic objects, offering tables formed the centre of attention and their specific aspects may have influenced their placement in a royal funerary temple, or in the badly lit intimacy of a private tomb chapel.[45] Accordingly, most offering tables are equipped with a spout where the water comes forth to be collected after flowing across the "energizing" surface of the tables and then being poured into the tombs, bringing gifts and services to the inhabitants of another realm.[46] The size, shape, material and placement of offering tables indicated the intentions and social status of their users.

Most offering tables consist of a stone slab with reliefs depicting food and beverages. Several are inscribed with symbols and hieroglyphic texts. However, variations are numerous, as are the beliefs and rituals they reflect, which furthermore changed over time. Spouts are generally present to collect the water, which was then

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[41] Ancient Egyptians believed in both tangible and intangible cosmic elements, demonstrated by the Heliopolitan and Hermopolitan cosmogonies. The first one represented a dynamic existence with Osiris as god of regeneration, Isis connected with nurturing and motherhood, Seth representing change and movement, while Nephtys acted as mediator and a complement to Seth. The Hermopolitan Ogdoad (the eight primordial deities worshipped in Hermopolis) maintained cosmic order through masculine and feminine pairs represented by Nun (inertness and water) and Naunet, Kek (darkness), Kauket, Heh (infinity and formlessness) and Hauhet, as well as Temenu (lostness) and Temenet (Allen 1988), commonly referred to as Amun and Amaunet, "hiddenness or wind", see Wilson 1997; Wilkinson 2003; Baines – Lesko – Silverman 1991.

[42] Allen 1988; Bickel 1994, 28.

[43] It is argued that the Hermopolitan Ogdoad does not appear in sacred texts or iconography before the Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1650–1550 BCE) or even the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BCE) and their fe-

male counterparts do not appear until much later (Zivie-Choche 2006; Bickel 1994). However, there may also be evidence of a form of the cosmogony which may even date back to as early as the Old Kingdom. Wilson 1997, 728; Borchardt 1913, Bt.21.

[44] The following section is based on observations made during examinations of offering tables and similar offering tables in various museum collections, which in my upcoming PhD thesis are recorded in a catalogue which in detail describes each individual object. A database is currently compiled, providing essential statistical analysis.

[45] Harrington 2015.

[46] Similar ritual processes involving the different phases of water which occur in the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony as described in Roth (1992) as well as the act of planting grain seeds in wooden Osiris Mummy effigies. As you would water the seeds, the grain would grow, just as the inundation would cause the banks of the Nile to overflow with produce. Centrone 2005.

absorbed back into the earth to reach the dead, collected in basins, or recycled and reused. Canals and basins may indicate the number of people to which the table was dedicated. However, they may also illustrate the inundation of fields and canals, indicating the active and inactive states of the Nile. Basins depicted on offering tables may thus be considered as representing the inactive, dormant qualities of water, connecting it to notions like those related to the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, while canals/mazes interlink irrigation fields and may thus be considered as representations of the active qualities of Seth in the Heliopolitan cosmology. During the New Kingdom and later periods, staircases within central basins begin to emerge on offering tables, maybe as a reference to sacred lakes within temple complexes used by priests to purify themselves before their contact with the divine during the required rituals. These features may be present to purify the water and accordingly the offerings, while at the same time they were activating the water.

Some stone offering tables are inscribed with, or have the shape of the *hotep* sign, meaning "to be satiated" or "offering".[47][48] This sign may have been incorporated to represent the table as a tool for offering life-giving liquids to the dead pharaoh, now in the semblance of Osiris and may thus also be considered as a reference of the efflux of Osiris, which within the Nile water brings rejuvenation to the land.

The colouring of an offering table could be considered as a sign of its property as transmitter of magical potency, indicating the different colour of the Nile water described above. Pottery offering trays often contain traces of red paint,

which may be a reference to the Red Nile condition and thus the efflux of Osiris, the use of whitewash may indicate the White Nile condition and thus refer to the restorative powers of Isis and Nephtys. Some stone offering tables could apparently have been painted with blackish/reddish hues with natural pigments which would have had a particular effect when in contact with water.[49]

Material used to manufacture offering tables may have had both practical purposes and a symbolic significance. Alabaster, granite and basalt were generally reserved for temples and prestigious tombs, while softer materials such as limestone and sandstone were cheaper and more readily available.[50] The latter were furthermore porous, absorbing materials (especially sandstone), a property that may be assumed to preserve the force of water, due to the moisture remaining in the stone. Steatite (soapstone) erodes easily and water flowing across it could thus release and carry with it magic force previously absorbed through the offering table´s contagious quality. Basalt was a prestigious material reserved for larger temple basins and offering tables. When water was poured over them the basalt may have provided a shimmering effect, making a powerful impression during communal rituals. Smaller offering tables, such as trays and soul houses were usually made out of pottery, or malleable materials, indicating that they can have been manufactured within and for the use in a private household, rather than in specialized workshops.[51] Such offering tables are particularly interesting to study and handle since they often have an "individualistic" character, indicating a personal

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[47] Betrò 2010, 56.

[48] ⟨𓊵⟩ Htp sign – this triliteral sign originates from the predynastic offering ritual of placing loaves of bread and other victuals on a reed mat in front of the deceased within grave-pits. Bolskakov 2001; Taylor 2001.

[49] Numerous stelae dating back to the Middle Kingdom contain natural coloured pigments such as red and

green. However, it is difficult to exactly identify the colouring on offering tables present in this study, mostly due to wear and a possible use of liquids. In this context it may be mentioned that the stela of the "Overseer of Artisans *Irtisen*", mentions the existence of methods for making natural pigments water resistant. Barta 1970; Delange 2015, 153.

[50] Aston et al. 2000.

[51] Bourriau et al. 2011.

choice of shape and use, often demonstrated by specific wear and tear.[52]

The Ritual Landscape

Space is understood as a physical and social landscape imbued with meaning through place-bound social practices. A sacred space is generally understood as an area set apart from everyday life, nevertheless this does not mean that it has to contain any specific, tangible constructions made by humans. Space is changed into *place*, if it is socially constructed to facilitate interaction between people and groups, while being based on institutionalized land use through political, religious and economic decisions. This means that a place is constructed in the sense that it generally contains structures made by humans. Temples, and tombs can thus be considered as sacred places.[53] Boundaries between the landscape of the living and that of the dead are not impermeable, both spheres are interconnected and look similar. The connection between a "spiritual" space and everyday life is crucial for an understanding of ancient Egyptian ritual. A sacred/ritual landscape is where *hierophany* takes place, "the explicit manifestation of the divine".[54]

Ancient Egyptian cult sites influenced the design of offering tables. A tomb may, just like an offering table, be considered as being placed between two realms: that of the dead and that of the living. Numerous ancient Egyptian texts indicate that the inner chambers of a tomb are part of the Duat, the Underworld. New Kingdom tombs were cut deep into cliffs and reached through intricate pathways,[55] maybe indicating notions related to Duat and the cult of Osiris.[56]

In the Old Kingdom, a ritual landscape was exclusively dedicated to the king, constituting a "landscape of power", a manifestation of order and cosmos.[57] During the Middle Kingdom the sacred landscape became slightly changed since it became not exclusively reserved for the king, but was also made accessible to the elite and middle classes.[58] In spite of the fact that a sacred landscape was constructed to mirror cosmos and could even be considered as an intent to exercise a certain power over it, its creation was still dependent on the shape and specific character of the actual landscape. As evidenced by sites such as Giza, Saqqara, Memphis, etc., the location of sacred buildings was not only strategic but significantly symbolic, in tune with both the cosmos and social customs and ideology.[59]

Landscape in ancient Egypt constituted an interplay between natural and human-made elements, connected through processional routes. Chapels dedicated to the gods were built close to the quays of the Nile, while tomb chapels were positioned higher up on the slopes, reflecting the hierarchy present in the arrangement of Middle Kingdom towns.[60] The non-elite and the elite were separated in life as in death, something made evident through numerous types of tombs and their positions within necropoleis in Middle Egypt. At sites such as Qaw el-Kabir, Qubbat al-Hawa, Dayr al-Bahri, Beni Hasan, as well as Asyut, there is a clear differentiation between elite and non-elite tombs. At these sites, rock-cut tombs are quite common, sculpted directly into the cliff-face they are usually highly elaborate with extensive courtyards and façades, while directly beneath them are shaft-tombs and shallow tombs, lack-

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[52] See Kilian 2012; Spence 2011; Leclère 2001.
[53] Further reading on ritual landscapes and specific case studies in archaeology see Hölscher 2012; for the conversion of "space" into "place" see De Certeau 2001.
[54] Magli 2013, 22.
[55] Harrington 2015.
[56] Quirke 2015, Magli 2013.

[57] Magli 2013, 22.
[58] Or at least there is more evidence for non-royal ritual landscapes during this time period. There are numerous examples for royal ritual landscapes before this, even when considering Predynastic burial sites. Dodson – Ikram 2008.
[59] Love 2004; Arnold 2015.
[60] Richards 2005; Moeller 2016.

ing commemorative superstructures, being reserved for the lower classes.[61] Since they were cut into nearby rock walls, elite tombs were visible from nearby towns and connected by communal processual routes, thus influencing the mind-set of the non-elite.

During the First Intermediate Period, dynastic Egypt endured a turbulent time with a rising "nomarchy" in Upper Egypt composed of local elites often engaged in territorial disputes[62]. New towns emerged within settings deprived of connotations to previous sacred spaces.[63] For the first time elite and non-elite were free to erect elaborate monuments, like stelae and votive chapels, while ritual utensils made in pottery became more common (or at least more commonly found). Traditions from the Old Kingdom blended with new influences, local styles mixed with royal, standardised designs.
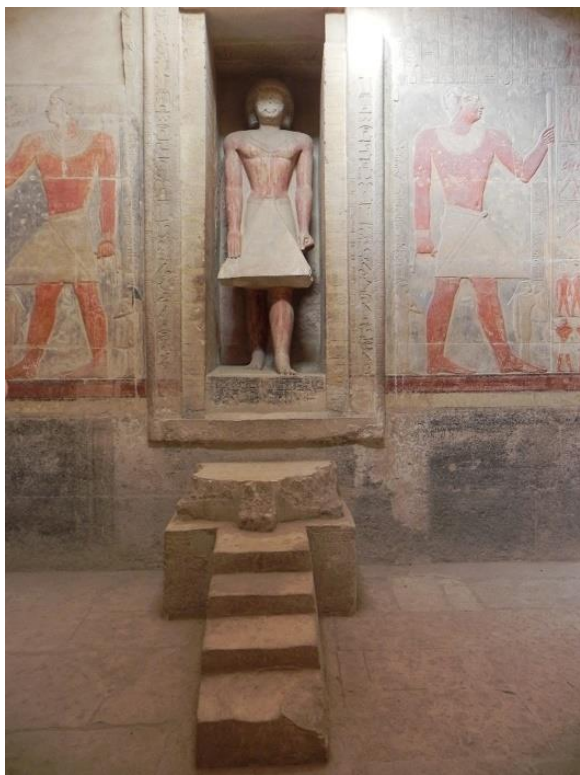

Fig. 1: The Ka statue of Mereruka in Tomb LS10 in the Teti Cemetery in Saqqara. (Lundius 2017).

Local towns and settlements grew in importance, such as Qaw el-Kabir, Deir Rifa, Asyut, Meir, Deir el-Bersha, Beni Hasan.[64] These developments altered the sacred landscape, as well as they gave way to what may be described as "personalised cults", indicated by ritual artefacts not only shaped like everyday objects, but also reproducing royal insignia, indicating an individual, everyday endeavour to get in touch with divine.[65]

Inside tombs, doorways constitute liminal spaces, separating areas that symbolise heaven, earth, and the underworld, indicated by specific imagery, such as sunken vs. raised reliefs, red colours vs. green, the depiction of underworld entities vs. scenes of the living.[66] Statues, stelae and offering tables were positioned by doorways as points of interaction during festival periods, placed in dark areas, but painted with vibrant colours, playing with light. Offering tables found in such liminal spaces were important in rituals intended to activate the deceased within the hidden chambers of the tomb complex. The monumental limestone offering table still found in situ at the foot of the *ka* statue of Mereruka, (Tomb LS10) located in the Teti Cemetery in Saqqara may be an example of such spaces (**Fig. 1**).

Generally speaking, there are three typical shapes of offering tables, including a potential fourth which is classified as a "soul house", due to its similarity to ancient Egyptian houses found in towns.[67] Such "soul houses" have been found in various mortuary contexts, though they all have common features which may be linked to the sacred landscape and mortuary architecture. *Type A* (**Fig. 2**) below is an offering tray usually oval with a t-shaped canal in the centre separating the table into two sections, above may depict a courtyard space or in-

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[61] Willems 2014.
[62] Kemp 1995, 38.
[63] Arnold 2015.
[64] Arnold 2015.

[65] Arnold 2015.
[66] Harrington 2015, 144.
[67] Spence 2011; Niwinski 1975; Petrie 1907.

Fig. 2: *Type A* – **An oval pottery offering tray (***MM13888***), unknown origin, showing traces of red paint and a t-shaped canal.** Medelhavsmuseet i Stockholm.

Fig. 3: *Type B* – **A limestone offering table** *(CG 23.017)* **containing a sunken area with depictions of offerings in raised relief, two basins and a canal flowing through an external spout.** (reproduced from Kamal 1909, Pl. IX).

ternal offering chambers reserved for ritual offerings, while a second section may indicate an "active" area where water is activated via canals. *Type B* (**Fig. 3**) consists of a typical limestone offering table, with a raised or sunken central platform containing offerings encircled by a canal. *Type C* (**Fig. 4**) is constituted by pottery offering trays representing a courtyard

with offerings, including a shrine/throne positioned at the top of the tray, mirroring chapels or shrines that became common during the Middle Kingdom. *Type D* (**Fig. 5**) are "soul houses" which contain a courtyard in front them, depicting offering items and canals.

Offering rituals performed in the vicinity of burial chambers and tombs were generally separated from the actual burial chamber by a wall and/or a shaft and were later in some cases even replaced by symbolic practices and rituals carried out in separate offering chapels.[68] A relevant example of monumental offering tables in situ can be found in the Heqaib Sanctuary on Elephantine Island, dating back to the Middle Kingdom (**Fig. 6**). This example illustrates how offering tables were placed in front of their respective *Ka* statues.[69] Nutrition for the dead was offered by family members, or in the case of the royal funerary/elite cult by priests (*hemu-ka*).[70] They entered accessible areas of the tomb, or nearby chapels and used the offering tables in combination with rituals activating depictions of offering lists and following instructions that were depicted and/or written on the

Fig. 4: *Type C* – **A pottery offering tray (***ÄM 14357***) containing a shrine or enclosed structure inside a sunken courtyard containing various offerings and a spout.** ÄMP Berlin.

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[68] Harrington 2015, 138.
[69] Arnold 2006, 21.

[70] See Eaton 2013; Cauville 2012.

Fig. 5: *Type D* **– A pottery "soul house"** (*F1939/1.19*) **made in coarse-ware with a four-columned façade and external spout. Note that the roof contains a smaller spout and various basin-like features.** RMO Leiden.
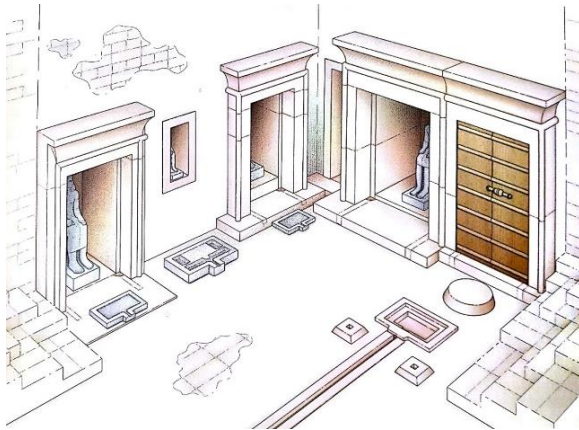

Fig. 6: Reconstruction of the internal features in the Heqaib Sancturary on Elephantine Island in Aswan (ca. 2030-1650 BCE). (Arnold 2015, 21).

walls.[71] That aspects of Middle Kingdom tombs influenced the design of offering tables becomes evident through a comparison between offering tables in the form of "soul houses" and rock-cut tombs and their respective courtyards, for example the rows of elite rock-cut tombs at Beni Hasan, where every tomb has a small square courtyard below ground level reached by a stairway (**Fig. 8**).[72] Most tombs were accessed through a causeway as evidenced by the elite rock cut tombs at Beni Hassan (Upper Cemetery). The offering tray (*E3253*) (**Fig. 7**) from Beni Hassan at the Manchester Museum, UK has a shape similar to the

outer space of elite tombs, separating the public area from the secret internal structures.[73]

Fig. 7: A pottery offering tray (*E3253*) from Beni Hassan. Manchester Museum.

The "Upper Cemetery" at Beni Hassan includes elaborate façades with pillars and small covered spaces leading to internal offering chapels and then further into underground burial chambers. There are similar tomb structures at Asyut and Rifeh, as well as at Kahun and Lisht.[74] Less elaborate graves were constituted by "shaft tombs", vertically cut into the bedrock during the Middle Kingdom.[75] Several soul houses (**Fig. 5** above) and pottery offering trays (**Fig. 2&4** above) have been found in the vicinity of shaft tombs (**Fig. 9**).[76] Such soul houses and trays may not only be considered as miniature representations of "houses for the *ka*", but could also have been used as centrepieces in ritual spaces, similar to those in front of elite tombs. Most soul houses have a courtyard, a portico and a façade, as well as a spout, indicating that water was poured over them to become "energized" before being conducted into the tomb shaft via canals, or simply poured into

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[71] Taylor 2000, 175; Strudwick 2005, 270.
[72] Snape 2011.
[73] Garstang 2002.

[74] Snape 2011.
[75] Garstang 2002; Arnold 2007.
[76] Garstang 2002; Petrie 1907, 14.

Fig. 8: A photograph of the elite rock cut tombs (BH15 and BH17) at the Upper Cemetery at Beni Hassan. (Ludius 2018).

Fig. 9: Soul house "in situ" next to a brick-lined Middle Kingdom shaft tomb at Abydos. (The Garstang Museum of Archaeology, University of Liverpool).

it.[77] Soul houses could simply be representations of tombs for the non-elite mirroring the monumental structures of elite tombs in miniature. A soul house (E4368) (**Fig. 10**) from Deir Rifa at the MET in New York represents features similar to the façades at the elite cemetery at Deir Rifa (**Fig. 11**)[78]. Another soul house

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[77] Taylor 2000.
[78] Garstang 2002.
[79] See Quirke 2015.

(07.550) (**Fig. 13**) at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston from Beni Hasan illustrates how soul

Fig. 10: Pottery soul house (07.231.11) from Deir Rifa (Tomb 72). MET.

houses mirror the facades of elite tombs seen from below (**Fig. 12**).

It is difficult to establish a context for most of the artefacts from early excavations, as their find-spot was often not recorded in detail. It is thus important to try to link them to their wider potential contexts, not only the mortuary land-scape, but also by considering their use within a domestic setting, in household shrines.[79]

Another architectural feature alluded to by of-fering tables could be drainage canals sur-rounding mortuary temples, as well as irriga-tion systems present in the fields and/or in the Underworld. Several offering plates display en-tire canal systems and basins, indicating the life-giving forces such structures transmitted to fields and pools. Canals may also encircle of-fering plates, as if to limit them and perhaps charge them with empowered water. Several offering tables are manufactured in such a man-ner that they allow water to cover their entire surface, charging the whole table to an utmost degree. It may be assumed that the varying depths and engravings on the tables indicate
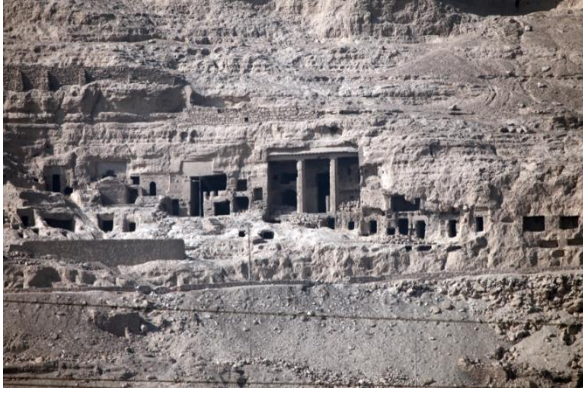
Fig. 11: The elite rock cut tombs of Deir Rifa. (Unger 2010).

Fig. 12: Two-columned façade of Tomb 15 at Beni Hasan. (Buhlke 2018).

that water was "activated" through its movement across the table, making it possible for the *ka* to permeate the water flowing across the table, at the same time as the ritual process could be prolonged in accordance with ritual actions and pronunciations of spells and utterances.[80] Designs on the surface of offering tables may also mimic the natural cycle of water, since water was poured upon them like the annual flood, inundating depictions of food, canals and other life enforcing imagery, and then becoming absorbed back into the earth, or collected in a vessel.

To get an impression of the ritual proceedings and their mimicking of real life it may be illuminating to compare them to techniques still used in Egyptian agriculture, where fields are flooded and separated by canals, similar to the imagery upon and the processes indicated by offering tables. Like the surface of an offering
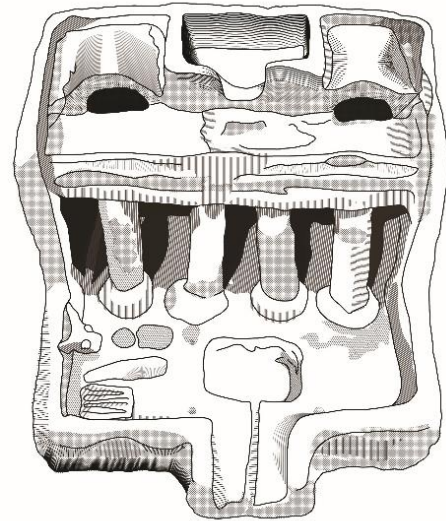
10 cm

Fig. 13: Illustration of a pottery soul house (07.550) present at the MFA in Boston with numerous basins, canals and spouts also featuring a four-columned façade. (Lundius 2018).

table a field is filled with water and then drained after the water has soaked the ground. Egyptian irrigation fields near the village of Sa el Hagar in the Delta Region in modern Egypt (**Fig. 14 & 16**) and an example of a Middle Kingdom limestone offering table (32.1.213) (**Fig. 15**) from Lisht at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA may be representations of these processes. As seen in Fig. 14, the fields are initially being irrigated illustrating how the water fully covers areas while being separated by canals. These practices may be reflected in the ritual phases carried out upon an offering table: activation (water being flooded/poured) stagnation (water left to seep into the ground) and the final stage: inactivation (**Fig. 16**).

The iconography, form and material, of an offering table was functional, supporting the *Heka* process. Depictions of bread, vegetables, fruits, libation vessels and parts of slaughtered animals, may be considered as remnants of the original function of the tables when victuals

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[80] Based on personal observation and handling of offering tables.

Fig. 14: Irrigated fields outside the village of Sa el Hagar in the Delta Region. (Lundius 2017).

Fig. 15: Limestone offering table (*32.1.213*) from Middle Kingdom Lisht containing various basins with interlinking canals leading to an external spout structure. MET.

were placed directly on reed mats or plates to ensure the survival of the deceased's *ka*,[81] real offerings eventually were replaced by reliefs, indicating beliefs in contagious magic.[82] If drained with water, provisions represented by their imagery were believed to transmit their nutritional essence to the liquid. Likewise, symbols of natural fecundity could be reflected by the imagery, shape and forms of the offering tables - lotuses, reeds, water, phallic forms, wombs, etc. transferring their fertility to the water that had been flushed over them. Depictions of vegetation and watery features may also refer to the primordial waters of Nun and the creative flux of the cosmos, as expressed in the Hermopolitan cosmogony. The tables may thus not only be considered as a means to connect the ritual performer with the deceased, but

may also nurture, support and guide the inhabitant of the tomb into another realm, relating him/her to a sacred landscape, cosmos, providing her/him with agency as well as a purpose.

While studying offering tables it is important to consider the elaborate offering lists presented both on tomb walls and written down on various objects inside the burial chambers. There is an evident relationship between the table iconography and the iconography of the tomb, as well as an even clearer connection between the positioning of the table and that of the offering lists. Most lists are placed in specific areas in the inner offering chapels.[83] Over time offering lists moved closer to the deceased and were eventually placed within the actual coffin.

Fig. 16: Fields outside the village of Sa el Hagar in the Delta Region post-irrigation. (Lundius 2017).

Considering that the offering tables functioned as a means to interact with the deceased their imagery and the offering lists found in their vicinity indicate the religious importance and meaning of victuals. The specific victuals depicted, and lists were probably chosen since they were believed to be imbued with meaning due to their forms, nutritional value and origin. Food is integrated into religious/magical systems like those observed by Mary Douglas and elaborated in her theories about symbolic boundary maintenance.[84] Likewise, Claude Lèvi-Strauss assumed that everyday experience with things and concepts (like raw and cooked, fresh and rotten, moist and parched) could

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[81] Bolshakov 2001; Taylor 2000.
[82] Frazer 1996.

[83] See Barta 1963; Deicher – Maroko 2015.
[84] Douglas 1966.

serve as conceptual tools for the formation of abstract notions.[85]

Finding the Ritual:
Written sources concerning ritual practice in connection with offering tables
There exists a connection between texts reserved for the deceased, which may be found on tomb walls, on various tomb paraphernalia, in coffins and in the numerous versions of funerary 'books', and rituals carried out for the well-being of the dead, not least those associated with the function of offering tables.[86]

Altenmüller (1972), systematised utterances from Pyramid Texts into roughly five rituals assumed to be performed in an official funerary setting: The Funeral Procession, The Great Offering Ritual, The Lesser Offering Ritual, The Ritual for the Royal Statue and The Rites of the Sacred Precinct.[87] According to Altenmüller, rites outlined in the Pyramid Texts may have been actual scripts for both words spoken and acts carried out during a ceremony, while offering lists depicted on the tomb walls might have served a similar purpose. However, the inscribed utterances lack any clear instructions and thus the connection between image and ritual action remains ambiguous.

Rituals described in Coffin Texts, and especially those concerning the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, have been related to Altenmüller's theories regarding funeral rites. In his article "The social and ritual context of mortuary liturgy of the Middle Kingdom (CT Spells 30-41)", Harco Willems (2001) outlines a mortuary liturgy and identifies specific physical events.[88] The texts, myths and rituals investigated by Willems are closely intertwined, making it difficult to decipher real life action performed by the priests and funeral party from presumed activities of the deceased in another

realm. A next step in the interpretation of funerary rituals could be, to a higher degree than before, relate written texts to the extensive funerary equipment in the archaeological record, specifying the use of tools and traces of liquids found in tombs. In a more recent publication, Willems (2016) attempts to interpret ritual and votive artefacts found in an almost undisturbed tomb at Deir el-Bersha, dating back to the Middle Kingdom.[89] In his analysis Willems does not only consider the original context of the finds (including several miniature offering tables), but their relationship to each other to decipher the ritual outlined in Coffin Texts. As suggested by Hölzl (2002), even though not explicitly outlined in the texts, offering tables may have played a major role in almost all rituals and especially in the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony.[90]

As outlined above, there have been studies connecting offering tables with mortuary rites described in ancient Egyptian funerary literature. However, this paper emphasises the relationship between offering tables and the ritual landscape that may be discerned in funerary texts, comparing them to the actual mortuary landscape, thus trying to identify their ritual function. In ancient Egyptian contexts three types of religious texts are of particular importance:

Pyramid Texts (Pyr), dating back to the Old Kingdom (2575–2150 BCE) were inscribed on the walls of royal mortuary temples, where ritual practice included utterances repeated in accordance with a strict scheme and within a specific place – thus creating a kind *hierophany,* i.e. a visible manifestation of the sacred which is related to a specific place, a fixed ritual and the use of specific magical utensils. The Pyramid texts could thus be considered as "vehicles for performance" and not as mere descriptions of religious notions.[91] In addition to this, ritual

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[85] Lèvi-Strauss 1964.
[86] Harrington 2015; Pirelli 2002.
[87] Altenmüller 1972.
[88] Willems 2001.

[89] Willems 2016.
[90] Hölzl 2002; Willems 2016.
[91] Baines 1991.

activities described by the texts indicate a separation between this world and the one beyond death, while inserting the same level of meaning and agency to individuals in both places, something which Jan Assmann (1977) has labelled "sacramental exegesis".[92]

Pyramid texts reflect certain notions that may be connected to the use of offering tables, for example the recurring theme of the efflux of Osiris, references to the offering table as the Eye of Horus and spatial connotations concerning the movement and actions of the priests during the rituals. Pyramid texts are generally concerned with ritual connections to mythology and their symbolic language may be related to the performance of specific ritual, occasionally with connotations to the handling of offering tables. Accordingly, expressions concerning the handling of the efflux of Osiris, could be described as "taking back the moisture" which had left the pharaoh during his death and mummification, may be interpreted as an indication of the pouring of water over an offering table.

Osiris' efflux could be imagined as existing in the form of different liquids, such as warm fermented beer, which was used to represent the rotting liquids issued from the corpse of Osiris, or cold water which equalled the rejuvenating waters of the Nile inundation as evidenced in a text directed to Osiris:

> *O Pepi! Your water is the inundation; your cool water is the great inundation that comes from you (PT 460).*[93]

The life-giving flow of Osiris' efflux may be interpreted as the inundation, however it could also be imagined as the movement of liquid over an offering table depicting an Egyptian canal system:

> *The canals fill, the rivers flood, and with the cleansing that comes from Osiris (PT 455).*[94]

Certain texts may also allude to libations poured over an offering table:

> *Osiris Unis, accept the foam that comes from you. 1 BLACK QUARZITE BOWL OF BEER (PT 49).*[95]

The offering table as the Eye of Horus may be a reference to Seth who takes the Eye from Horus, causing him to lose power and later he succeeds in restoring his live-giving moisture embodied as his Eye and becomes powerful once again. The offering table embodies this transfer of power:

> *Thoth, get him with it. Come forth to him with Horus's eye. THE OFFERING TABLE. (PT 82).*[96]

Liquids that had been energized through their contact with an offering table might have been alluded to:

> *O Osiris the King, take the Eye of Horus, and absorb it into your mouth – the morning meal (PT 63).*[97]

Pyramid texts may also allude directly to ritual practices relating to offering tables:

> *The marshes become content, the irrigation basins flood, for this Meryre on this day on which he is given his akh, on which he is given his control. (PT 457).*[98]

> *You, father Osiris Pepi! Raise yourself from off your left side, put yourself on your right side, toward this fresh water I have given you (PT 482).*[99]

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[92] Assmann 1977, 9–25.
[93] Allen 2015: Pyr. U460, Pepi I, 124.
[94] Allen 2015: Pyr. U455, Pepi I, 115.
[95] Allen 2015: Pyr U49, Unis, 23.
[96] Allen 2015: Pyr. U82, Unis, 25.

[97] Incomplete. This interpretation is Pyr. U63: 87, Translated into English by R.O. Faulkner 1969; see also extracts in Allen 2015, 250 and Pyr, U62, Neith, 309.
[98] Allen 2015: Pyr. U457, Pepi I, 123.
[99] Allen 2015: Pyr. U482, Pepi I, 136.

Coffin Texts (CT) (ca. 2130–1630 BCE) were spells placed *closer* to the deceased, since they were written inside the actual coffin and dealt with a personal journey through the Duat, generally constituted by descriptions of its geography, mostly composed of water-systems and irrigated fields.[100]

Coffin Texts often provide advice to the deceased, such as what foods to eat and drink and how to overcome obstacles and challenges in the Netherworld by uttering specific words and phrases and by attending to certain actions, which are described in great detail. Such pieces of advice may be compared to certain ritual acts, perhaps carried out in connection to offering tables:

> *...your bread and your meal are laid on the ground; come to the front of your (offering)-slab. Your spirit is seated (CT 702).*[101]

> *Spell for eating bread from upon the offering-tables of Re, giving oblations in Ōn. [...] O you who are at your altar – four times – [..] (CT 165).*[102]

The ritual is often described as taking place in the "field of offerings", a part of Duat, where the offerings are received by Osiris, the dead king:

> *My two plots are in the field of offerings among those who know, and I care for Osiris there; [...] I am a pure one who cooks for Osiris daily among those who know offerings (CT 1159).*[103]

Coffin Texts also describe how magically transformed food and drink are ritually consumed to gain force and power:

> *... my bread is the Eye, my beer is the Eye, [...] – four times (CT 939) ...*[104]

> *He has filled his body with magic, he has quenched his thirst with it (CT 36).*[105]

The "***Book of the Dead***"[106] is a more complex accumulation of sacred texts and are a development of the themes described in the previous texts. By the end of the New Kingdom they were present in almost all elite tombs, on papyri, objects and the tomb walls establishing a "doctrine" behind mortuary rituals and concepts of the afterlife concerning the judgement of the dead and the fate of their *ka*.

The "Book of the Dead" constitutes a further development of the themes found in the Coffin Texts, concentrating on what will happen to the deceased in the Underworld. The individual is increasingly identified with a god, especially Osiris, and is advised to use moral behaviour in order to endure challenges such as attacks from Apep and the judgement of the dead to achieve immortality. This endeavour is supported by sustenance provided via offerings, apparently using offering tables that eventually may lead to the transformation of the deceased into a pure entity.

> *O givers of cakes [and] beer to souls perfected in the house of Osiris, give ye cakes [and] beer at the double season to the soul of Osiris Ani [...] (Pap Ani Spell 1: 35).*[107]

The actual presence of the "*Book of the Dead*" in the tomb, may be considered as a guarantee that offering rites, which probably have been carried out using an offering table, may continue to be repeated even after those left behind in life have ceased to exist. Endurance spells

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[100] It is important to note that the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts are probably one corpus, which was then modified, extended or reduced over centuries. See Bickel – Mathieu 2004.
[101] Faulkner 1973: CT Spell 702: a-h.
[102] Faulkner 1973: CT Spell 165.
[103] Faulkner 1973: CT Spell 1159.

[104] Faulkner 1973: CT Spell 939.
[105] Faulkner 1973: CT Spell 36.
[106] Am Duat and similar funerary texts
[107] Pap Ani, Spell 1: 35, Translated into English by E. A. Wallis Budge 1913.

tend to end with a repetition of the term "millions of times" and "eternity", thus indicating that the specific ritual could be symbolically repeated forever:

> *Given him are bread and beer and a chunk of meat from the altar of Osiris. He ascends to the Field of Rushes. [...] A truly excellent spell (proved) a million times. (Spell 72, T1-2).*[108]

Transubstantiation of the deceased into a divine entity may be evident in extracts from spells which indicate that if rituals are carried out correctly a transformation will take place. The ritual may include the ingestion or use of liquids as a means of transferring divine essence into matter.

> *I have spat (for him) upon the wounds. Make way for me, (that I may pass) <among> you, I am the Eldest of the gods (Spell 147e).*[109]

> *Verily I am one who came forth from the flood and to whom the Overflow has been given, that he may have it available as the Inundation (Spell 61).*[110]

Conclusions

Archaeology deals with tangible objects. In forensic anthropology the shape and wear of a tooth may tell things about the life of the individual it once belonged to. Likewise, the shape, imagery, material, wear and tear of an offering table can inform us about the actual rituals that once were performed in connection with them, as well as beliefs behind these actions. However, to be able to discern the rituals behind an object like an offering table we need to apply a holistic, multidisciplinary approach, not the least insights gained from an anthropological point of view. Just as translation and analysis of an ancient text is in need of an understanding of deeper levels of the anthropological and social meaning of practices,[111] the same approach is also valid for the interpretation of an object like an offering table. Since its birth in the 19th century anthropology has studied people, not only through various means of observation and communication, but also though their use of objects, and the last methodology has been of particul importance for archaeology,[112] sometimes to such an extreme extent that the human behind the object and its use has almost been forgotten. This is one of the reasons to why I in my research made a conscious effort to find how the appearance of offering tables may reflect their ritual use and place within a sacred/social landscape. While doing this I have tried to apply what social anthropologists used to label as "thick description".[113] By handling these objects, closely observing their imagery, material, colour, wear and tear, I may arrive at conclusions regarding the use and meaning they had for people living within a very specific social and geographical context – i.e. the sacred landscape that surrounded them.

Bourriau (1996) stated that "the analysis of the whole context, the entire burial, not just one element in it, has received relatively little attention [...]"[114]. However, as outlined by the research quoted above, this state of affairs may finally be changing. Nevertheless, there remain several limitations to the methodology described in this paper. Firstly, it is not without

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[108] Papyrus of *M s-m-nTr* from Thebes, 18th Dynasty, Louvre, Spell 72: T1-2, includes a vignette of deceased praying to three mummiform gods standing in a shrine, Allen 1960, 65.

[109] Papyrus of *Ani* from Thebes, 18th Dynasty, BM 10470, Spell 147e: P1-S2, includes a vignette of deceased and his wife in prayer before the spell. The spell is divided into seven sections, each written in front of a gate. At each gate there are three squatting gods: the doorkeeper, the guardian, the announcer, Allen 1960, 137.

[110] Papyrus of *Nwnw* from Thebes, 18th Dynasty, BM 10477, Spell 61:S, includes a vignette of deceased holding his *ba*. In another similar version, the deceased is taking water from a pool with his hands, Allen 1960, 55.

[111] Pirelli 2002.

[112] Nyord 2018.

[113] Geertz 1973.

[114] Bourriau 1996, 1.

risks to place so much emphasis on the object itself while placing it within a potential context, especially when an object lacks its archaeological context and is exclusively compared to similar objects. One remedy to this shortcoming may be to concentrate further on the context of ritual texts, such as offering scenes and offering lists depicted on tomb walls, as well as within coffins, to gain a better understanding of the relation between written texts and ritual artefacts, as well as their potential importance and position within a mortuary setting.

It is important to note that this paper reflects a work in progress. Several theories remain to be studied, tested and developed, especially those dealing with the relation between religious texts and actual rituals, as well as the use and context of "soul houses". Being initially defined as three dimensional "models" similar to the wooden models of daily life present in Middle Kingdom tombs, such as the tomb of Meket-Re (TT280), it is difficult to prove a connection between "soul houses" and tomb architecture and their assumed role within mortuary rituals.[115]. A significant limitation to this paper is its lack of concrete evidence, as well as a description of the socio-historical context of the presented material. The reason for this is simply that these objects are still being studied and a next step would be to pinpoint when and especially why "soul houses" emerged in conjunction with offering trays and water rituals, and why they rather suddenly diminish within the archaeological record.

As illustrated by the examples above, it is evident that offering tables were the central object within the ritual landscape, whether it is a private shrine, elite tomb or royal temple. Accordingly, whatever they may represent is central to understanding ancient Egyptian funerary ritual. Offering tables had their origins as plates of offerings and became an artefactual focus in the tomb that could activate all magical entities via the manipulation of water accompanied by the use of spells – canals for movement, basins for sustenance and storage of energised water. The table itself served as a recurring funerary banquet for the dead where the living could interact with them in a liminal space. By the New Kingdom onwards laity could access temple courtyards and witness spells and rituals performed by the priesthood, allowing the non-elite to experience a closer relationship with the divine – something which may be reflected in the design of offering tables and their further development. These changes in the mortuary cult and in the mindset of the non-elite as well as the elite may be more evident through a study of the offering table.

Any ritual object is part of a context, a ritual landscape, i.e. the environment, daily existence, actions and cosmos which are animated by the faith of a believer, which motivates its shape, material, function and placement. An offering table did not only constitute an integrated part of a ritual site – it became a ritual landscape in itself, not only by mimicking the scenery of which it was part of, but also by becoming the centre of a sanctified environment. Through the handling of it, and its links to the sacred acts and texts, it became an instrument of sacred power – materialising the immaterial.

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[115] Winlock 1955.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ÄMP Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin, Germany.
RMO Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, Netherlands.
MET Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, USA.
MFA Museum of Modern Art in Boston, USA.
CT Coffin Text: Faulkner, R. O. (1973) *Coffin Texts*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips.
Pap Ani Papyrus of Ani: Budge, E. A. (1967) The Egyptian Book of the Dead. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
PT Pyramid Text: The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (Atlanta 2015).
Spell Book of the Dead: Allen, T. G. (1960) *Book of the Dead*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

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Die Begegnung von Hahn und Schildkröte.
Kultursemiotische Betrachtungen zu einem spätantiken Bodenmosaik in der Basilika von Aquileia

Stefan Metz

Abstract: Aus dem reichen Bildbestand des Fußboden-Mosaiks der Basilika von Aquileia sticht das Motiv der Begegnung von Hahn und Schildkröte aufgrund seiner im Kontext einer christlichen Basilika ungewöhnlichen Figurenkonstellation heraus. Zur Interpretation des Mosaiks wird im vorliegenden Beitrag auf das Konzept der *Dichten Beschreibung* des Kulturanthropologen C. Geertz zurückgegriffen. Als kultursemiotischer Ansatz steht hierbei die Interaktion von Elementen eines Überlieferungszusammenhangs im Mittelpunkt. Geschichte wird hierbei als Transformationsprozess verstanden, in dem das Alte langsam in das Neue übergeht, ohne vollständig dahinter zu verschwinden. Mit diesem Ansatz wird gezeigt, wie sich bisherige Interpretationen dekonstruieren lassen und bekanntes Wissen unter einem neuen Blickwinkel zu neuen Erkenntnissen führt.

Abstract: From the rich abundance of floor mosaics of the basilica in Aquileia the motif 'Encounter of Rooster and Tortoise' stands out as an unlikely combination of figures in context of a christian basilica. For an interpretation the author turns to the concept of *Thick Description* by cultural anthropologist C. Geertz. As an approach of cultural semiotic nature, it centers around the interaction of elements in a historical tradition. History is hereby seen as a process of transformation in which the old transmutes into the new without fully disappearing. Using this approach the author shows how existing interpretations of the mosaic can be deconstructed and established knowledge can be viewed under a new perspective to create new insights.

I. Einleitung

Aus der reichen Bilderwelt, die den Mosaikfußboden der Basilika von Aquileia schmückt, sticht die Darstellung des Aufeinandertreffens eines Hahns und einer Schildkröte hervor. Nicht nur ist die Schildkröte in der christlichen Ikonographie selten zu finden, auch die Begegnung mit einem Hahn stellt eine in der Natur seltene Konstellation dar. Da das Motiv nach bisherigem Forschungsstand sowohl in paganem als auch christlichem Umfeld einzigartig ist, ergibt sich einerseits ein erhöhter Bedarf nach Deutung des Mosaiks, der durch dessen auf Aquileia beschränkte Singularität zugleich erschwert wird. Im vorliegenden Beitrag wird eine Interpretation des Motivs gegeben, die sich methodisch auf Geertz' kultursemiotisches Konzept der *Dichten Be-schreibung* stützt.[1] Zur Vorbereitung dieser Deutung folgen zunächst eine Beschreibung des Mosaiks sowie ein Überblick über einige bereits bestehende Interpretationen, vor deren Hintergrund das Besondere des kultursemiotischen Ansatzes deutlich wird. Eine Darstellung des Ansatzes von Geertz und eine kultursemiotische *Relecture* der *interpretatio romana* gehen der eigenen Deutung voraus.

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[1] Die Idee, Geschichte und historischen Wandel mit dem Konzept der „Dichten Beschreibung" zu betrachten, stammt von Peter von Möllendorff in seinem Vortrag „Griechisch-römische Intertextualität der Johannes-Offenbarung" (Wuppertal, 04.11.2015).

II. Das Mosaik im Kontext der Basilika

Abb. 2: Nordsaal-Mosaik.

Abb. 3: Südsaal-Mosaik.

Der Kampf von Hahn und Schildkröte findet sich in der Basilika von Aquileia in zweifacher Ausfertigung; einmal im Nordsaal und einmal im Südsaal des als Doppelbasilika angelegten Kirchenbaus. Beide Mosaiken sind Felder eines je mosaizistisch reich gestalten Paviments der jeweiligen Säle. Das Nordsaal-Mosaik zeigt in der linken Bildhälfte eine Schildkröte, deren Panzer in Dunkelgrün gehalten ist und von einem Rautenmuster in Schwarz und Rot durchzogen ist. Der hellbraune Kopf ist nach links-oben gerichtet. Die rechte Seite zeigt einen Hahn, der sich mit nach vorne gebeugtem Oberkörper der Schildkröte nähert (der Schnabel berührt fast den Kopf der Schildkröte). Farblich dominieren Rot-, Orange- und Gelbtöne den sehr naturalistisch dargestellten Hahn. Der Blick des Hahns ist auf die Schildkröte gerichtet. Das Bild ist in der Mitte durch eine Säule gegliedert, auf der ein Gefäß steht. Nimmt man an, dass die Säule die Mitte markiert, so fällt auf, dass der Hahn die Mitte in Richtung der Schildkröte überschreitet.
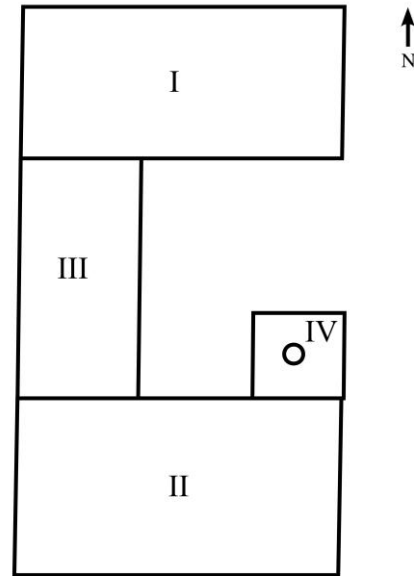
Abb. 1: Grundriss der Doppelbasilika.

Das Mosaik im Südsaal ist ebenfalls durch ein turmartiges Gebilde in der Mitte zweigeteilt. Links der Mitte befindet sich wiederum die Schildkröte. Ihr Panzer ist in nach unten heller werdenden Brauntönen gehalten und durch ein Rautenmuster gezeichnet. Den Kopf, der in denselben Farben gehalten ist wie der Panzer, reckt sie nach oben, in Richtung der rechten Seite des Mosaiks. Die rechte Hälfte des Mosaiks zeigt einen Hahn in gestreckter Haltung. Es dominieren die Farben Braun, Gelb und Türkis. Lediglich Kamm und Kinnsack sind in hellem Orange gehalten. Die Darstellung, v.a. des Hahns, ist weniger naturalistisch und dynamisch als beim Mosaik des Nordsaals. Die Turmstruktur in der Bildmitte trägt im oberen, dunkel gehaltenen Bereich die Inschrift: „∞CCC".

Die Anlage mit ihren drei Saalbauten (Doppelbasilika mit einem verbindenden Mittelsaal) entstand nach derzeitigem archäologischem Stand im Zuge eines Bauvorhabens als Neubau.[2] Eine Datierung der Bauten und der

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[2] cf. Lehmann 2010, 157.177.

Mosaiken auf das frühe 4. Jh. n. Chr. ermöglicht eine Inschrift des Bischofs Theodor v. Aquileia im Südsaal, in der die Weihung des christlichen Kultraums genannt wird.[3] Mit dieser Entstehungszeit können die Basiliken von Aquileia „als die ältesten archäologisch fassbaren, eigenständigen Kirchenbauten überhaupt gelten."[4] Eine noch sichtbar vorhandene Nähe zur pagan-römischen Kultur zeigt sich darin, dass das einzig dezidiert christliche Motiv der Mosaikböden die Jona-Darstellung im östlichen Teil des Südsaales ist.[5] Die Mosaikfußböden in Nord- und Südsaal aus der theodorischen Zeit hatten allerdings nur kurzen Bestand. Bereits Mitte des 4. Jhs. (Nord), spätestens jedoch im 5. Jh. (Süd), wurde der bisherige Komplex überbaut, was eine Anhebung des Bodenniveaus und die Verschüttung des theodorischen Bodens nach sich zog.[6]

Die rekonstruierte Entstehungszeit der Mosaiken stellt sie in eine Zeit produktiven Wandels und Transformation religiös-kultischer Kos-

moi. Mit der Konsolidierung des Christentums, das durch das Toleranzedikt des Galerius (311) sowie das Mailänder Edikt Konstantins (313) einen gewaltigen Schub erhielt, kam es durch die verstärkte Verankerung des Christentums in der römischen Gesellschaft und Gedankenwelt auch umgekehrt zu einer stärkeren 'Romanisierung' des Christentums im Sinne einer Interpretation des christlichen Glaubens vor dem Hintergrund eines römisch-paganen *Mindset*. Ein Beispiel hierfür ist, dass die pagane Basilika zum Haupttypus des christlichen Kirchbaus wurde.[7] Für die Basilika von Aquileia, deren Bau noch zum Beginn dieser Entwicklung von paganem Zweckbau zu christlichem Kultraum stattfand, bedeutet das, dass von einem starken paganen Einfluss auf die Bau- und Innengestaltung ausgegangen werden kann.

III. Bisherige Interpretationen
Die bisher vorgelegten Interpretationen des Mosaiks lassen sich grob zwei Ansätzen des Verständnisses der Christianisierung des Imperium Romanum zuordnen. Die erste Gruppe versteht Christianisierung als Bruch mit der bisherigen paganen Tradition. In dieser Sicht endet – meist mit der sog. Konstantinischen Wende – das pagane Rom und ein christliches beginnt. Jedes Kunsterzeugnis nach diesem Bruch hat nun eine exklusiv christliche Bedeutung. Eine Variation dieses Ansatzes vertritt die zweite Gruppe. Hier hat das pagane

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[3] Die Inschrift lautet: „Theodore feli[x] / [a]diuvante Deo / omnipotente et / poemnio caelitus tibi / [tra]ditum omnia / [b]aeate fecisti et / gloriose dedicas / ti", darüber ein Christusmonogramm. Eine Inschrift Theodors findet sich auch im Nordsaal: „[Theod]ore felix hic crevisti hic felix". Theodor ist neben aquileianischen Quellen nur noch als Teilnehmer der Synode von Arles (314 n. Chr.) nachzuweisen. Unter Einbezug der (allerdings erst im Frühmittelalter schriftlich greifbaren) Angaben zur Amtsdauer Theodors von neun bis elf Jahren und dem frühesten Nachweis eines Christogramms (auf einem 313–315 geprägten Silbermedallion, cf. Overbeck 2000) ergibt sich für die Weihe des Südsaals eine Spanne von 315–325 n. Chr. (cf. Lehmann, 2010, 162.167).

[4] Lehmann 2010, 177.

[5] Eine besondere Nähe zum Christentum lässt sich darüberhinaus für die Hirtenfigur mit dem Lamm auf der Schulter („Guter Hirte") im südlichen Feld des Südsaals annehmen.

[6] cf. Lehmann 2010, 172. Dass die Doppelbasilika von Aquileia am Beginn der Konsolidierung und signifikaten Ausbreitung des Christentums im Imperium stand, zeigt sich auch daran, dass die theodorischen Gebäude bereits nach ca. 50 (Nordsaal, Basilica Post-Theodorana) bzw. ca. 100 Jahren (Südsaal) wieder durch größere überbaut wurden.

[7] Die frühchristliche Basilika wird hier verstanden als eine Entwicklung aus der römischen Marktbasilika als Ort zur Ausübung administrativer, juristischer und merkantiler Funktionen. Zu den Ursprüngen und weiteren Bedeutungen von ,Basilika' siehe: Lorenz 2000/2001, bes. 118–122. Lorenz 2000/2001, 127–131 argumentiert darüber hinaus für einen Ursprung der frühchristlichen Basilika in den – ebenfalls als Basilika bezeichneten – Säulenhallen in herrschaftlichen Häusern, die vor der Konsolidierung des Christentums ab Konstantin als Versammlungsräume dienten. In den als christlicher Kultraum neu errichteten aquileianischen Basiliken fließen Bauform und Funktionen (öffentlicher christlicher Kult) ineinander, ohne einen klaren, eindeutigen Ursprung der Bauform benennen zu können.

Erbe zwar materialiter in der Bilderwelt Bestand, ist aber von seiner paganen Bedeutung gereinigt und hat nur noch eine christliche Bedeutung. Der hier verfolgte kultursemiotische Ansatz soll – als dritte Möglichkeit – eine Alternative zu diesen beiden Modellen bieten. Zur Illustration der Unterschiede folgt hier zunächst eine Darstellung bisheriger Interpretationen.

Zu den Interpretationen der ersten Gruppe zählen diejenigen von Marini und Iacumin.[8] Sie beginnen ihre Interpretation des Mosaiks mit einer dezidiert christlichen Auslegung. G. Marini leitet zunächst her, dass die Kombattanten Licht und Finsternis repräsentieren: Der Hahn kündigt mit seinem Ruf das Aufgehen der Sonne an. Die Schildkröte lebt in den Tiefen des Wassers (ihr griechischer Name sei *tartaroukos*, was 'Bewohner der Finsternis' bedeute)[9]. Daran anknüpfend, geht Marini direkt zu den Lichtworten des Johannes-Evangeliums als Interpretationsrahmen über.[10] In einem nächsten Schritt folgert er, der Kampf zwischen Hahn und Schildkröte repräsentiere den Kampf zwischen Christus und dem Satan bzw. zwischen dem Licht des Christentums und der Finsternis des Paganismus.[11] Dem Mosaik des Südsaals schreibt er eine besondere Bedeutungsnuance zu, denn hier repräsentiere der Kampf von Hahn und Schildkröte die Auseinandersetzung von Orthodoxie und Arianismus. Er stützt sein Argument mit einer Interpretation der Inschrift, die sich auf der Säule zwischen Hahn und Schildkröte befindet:[12] „∞CCC". Das '∞' (das ersatzweise für 'M' steht), als '1000' die größte lateinische Zahl, steht zugleich für einen infiniten Wert und nach Marini somit für die Un-

endlichkeit Gottes. Die drei 'C' (='100') seien von einer Predigt des Chromatius v. Aquileia inspiriert, in der dieser den Sieg Gideons über die Philister mit dem Sieg der Orthodoxie über den Arianismus vergleicht.[13] Gideon hatte nach bibl. Überlieferung sein siegreiches Heer in drei Gruppen à 100 Mann aufgeteilt, was Chromatius auch mit der Trinität parallelisiert. Neben Anfragen an die inhaltliche Haltbarkeit dieser Interpretationen stoßen Marinis Überlegungen aber auch auf ein materielles Problem: Er nennt die Synode von Aquileia 381 als *terminus post quem* für das Mosaik des Südsaals.[14] Das steht im Widerspruch zur Annahme, dass der Südsaal aufgrund der Theodor-Inschrift (s.o.) bis spätestens 325 datiert wird.[15] Das bedeutet, das Südsaal-Mosaik wurde vor dem Ausbruch der sog. arianischen Streitigkeiten (nach 325) im Westen des Imperiums fertiggestellt.

R. Iacumin dagegen bezieht das Motiv im Nordsaal direkt auf die gnostische Strömung der Sethianer mit ihren drei Prinzipien Licht, Finsternis und Pneuma.[16] Der gnostische Hintergrund zeige sich im Hahn, der das Licht (d.i. Gott) symbolisiere, der die Schildkröte, Symbol der Finsternis (d.i. der materiellen Schöpfung), besiegt. Die Amphore auf der Säule stehe für den Geist (d.i. die „Benetzung durch das Licht"[17]). Iacumin nimmt somit dieselben allegorischen Bestimmungen der Figuren vor, weicht aber in deren konkreter Interpretation von Marini ab.

Im weiteren Verlauf dieses Beitrags soll gezeigt werden, dass mit diesen exklusiv christlichen Interpretationen eher vom Ende her gedacht wurde, mithin, dass die christliche Interpretation zwar eine mögliche, aber (im

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[8] cf. Iacumin 1988; Marini, 2003.

[9] Zum Terminus *tartaroukos* für die Schildkröte s.u.

[10] cf. Marini, 2003, 33; Joh 1,4.9: „In ihm war das Leben und das Leben war das Licht der Menschen.[...] Das wahre Licht, das jeden Menschen erleuchtet, kam in die Welt."; sowie Joh 8,12: „Ich bin das Licht der Welt."

[11] cf. Marini 2003, 33.

[12] cf. Marini 2003, 37.

[13] Marini 2003, 34.

[14] cf. Marini 2003, 37.

[15] cf. Lehmann 2010, 174.

[16] cf. Iacumin 1988, 26; Die Bildunterschrift zur Abbildung des Mosaiks aus dem Nordsaal bei Iacumin beschränkt sich konsequenter Weise auf: „La Luce, le Tenebre e lo Spirito" (ebd., 25).

[17] Iacumin 1988, 26.

Sinne eines Palimpsests) eine sekundäre ist. Sie steht am Ende eines Transformationsprozesses, innerhalb dessen sich das Christentum im römischen Reich ausbreitete und dabei die Kultur des paganen Umfelds nach und nach zusammen mit christlichen Traditionen aufgriff, um neue Interpretationen zu erschaffen.

Die Interpretationen der zweiten Gruppe gehen zwar vom paganen Erbe aus, dieses wird aber als seiner paganen Interpretation(en) entledigt und durch eine christliche Bedeutung ersetzt angesehen. Dabei kommt es zu einer singulären Dependenzbestimmung, welche christliche Bedeutung auf welches pagane Motiv zurückzuführen sei. Einflussreiche Vertreter dieser Gruppe sind Egger und Fink.[18] Egger ordnet Hahn und Schildkröte dem Mithras-Kult zu. Als Beleg dient ihm ein Altarrelief des Mithraeums in Ptuj (Slowenien), das einen Hahn auf einer Schildkröte stehend zeigt. Als Attribute des Mithras symbolisiert der Hahn, nach Egger, entsprechend das Licht und die Schildkröte die besiegte Finsternis.[19] Er leitet daraus ab, das Mosaik stelle den Kampf zwischen Orthodoxie und Arianismus dar.[20] Fink sieht deutlich die Grenzen von Eggers Auslegungen, die u.a. in dem Versuch bestehen, sowohl Hahn als auch Schildkröte zwingend auf den Mithraskult zurückzuführen. Fink argumentiert, dass Ptuj das einzige Beispiel für eine Schildkröte im Mithraskult sei. Auch die dämonisierende Deutung der Schildkröte als vulgärgriechisch *tartaroukos* weist Fink zurück. Im lateinischen Sprachraum ist mit *testudo* dazu keine Verbindung herzustellen.[21]

Gegen Egger sieht Fink in seiner Interpretation in den Tieren Attribute des Merkur/Hermes. Es sei eine große Anzahl von Merkurdarstellungen vorhanden, die ihn in Begleitung von Hahn und Schildkröte zeigen.

Auch der Widder – in den Nordsaal-Mosaiken im Feld neben Hahn und Schildkröte – sei typisches Attribut Merkurs. Für die Interpretation geht Fink nun – basierend auf der Annahme, der Nordsaal sei zunächst eine pagane Sepulkralstätte gewesen – davon aus, im Nordsaal ein paganes Merkur-Motiv zu sehen; die Übernahme des Motivs für die Gestaltung des Südsaales geschah demnach nur aus ästhetischen Gesichtspunkten.[22] Unter Verweis auf die merkurische Tradition sieht er die Paarung als Variation eines Hahnenkampfs.[23]

Problematisch an dieser Interpretation ist, dass sich für Aquileia kein Merkur-Kult nachweisen lässt (s.u.). Finks Interpretation fehlt somit die Einbettung in das kulturelle Netz Aquileias und seiner Umgebung. Sie mag somit in sich stimmig sein, doch ohne Anknüpfung an die konkreten Signifikate auf die es sich beziehen soll. Fink und Egger ist gemeinsam, dass beide versuchen, Hahn und Schildkröte einer gemeinsamen Überlieferungstradition zuzuordnen.

IV. „Dichte Beschreibung" nach C. Geertz

Als Alternative zu den bisher beschrittenen Wegen bietet sich der Ansatz der *Dichten Beschreibung* des amerikanischen Ethnologen Clifford Geertz an. Seine Betrachtung von Kultur als einem System miteinander durch Interaktion verwobener Zeichen ermöglicht es, die Christianisierung des Imperium Romanum nicht als Bruch (im Sinne einer vollständigen oder nur bedeutungsmäßigen Trennung) zu sehen, sondern als langsamen, interaktiven Transformationsprozess, in dem Alt und Neu langsam ineinander übergehen und sich vermischen, so dass das Alte unter dem Neuen für das geübte Auge stets sichtbar bleibt, vergleichbar einem Palimpsest.

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[18] cf. Egger 1962; Fink 1954.
[19] cf. Egger 1962, 148–150.
[20] cf. Egger 1962, 157.
[21] cf. Fink 1954, 33.

[22] cf. Fink 1954, 49f.
[23] cf. Fink 1954, 38f. Diese Traditionslinie betont auch Jastrzebowska 1975.

Für Geertz, der seinen Ansatz in Anlehnung an G. Ryle als „Dichte Beschreibung"[24] bezeichnet „[ist] der Mensch ein Wesen, das in selbstgesponnene Bedeutungsgewebe verstrickt ist, wobei ich Kultur als dieses Gewebe ansehe. Ihre Untersuchung ist daher keine experimentelle Wissenschaft, die nach Gesetzen sucht, sondern eine interpretierende, die nach Bedeutungen sucht."[25] Als deskriptives Verfahren geht es in dieser Betrachtungsweise nicht darum, Dependenzen zwischen verschiedenen Überlieferungen (schriftlich, ikonisch, akustisch, mental) aufzustellen. Vielmehr geht es darum, das 'kulturelle Hintergrundrauschen' – als Summe allgemein bekannter kultureller Zeichen bzw. als *Mindset* – der Entstehungszeit wahrzunehmen, dessen Konkretionen die einzelnen Überlieferungen (schriftlich, ikonisch, akustisch) darstellen. Da jede Überlieferung als Konkretion des 'Hintergrundrauschens' einen Knotenpunkt im kulturellen Netz (dem „Bedeutungsgewebe") seiner Gesellschaft darstellt, ergibt sich für den Betrachter aus der Gesamtheit der Konkretionen des Netzes wiederum das 'kulturelle Hintergrundrauschen', das sich wiederum nur an den einzelnen Knoten/ Konkretionen manifest fassen lässt. Als Konkretion tragen diese Überlieferungen als Knotenpunkte im kulturellen Netz wieder zur Modifikation und Bereicherung des Netzes bei. Durch diese Bereicherung des Netzes beeinflussen die Modifikationen und Akzentuierungen in den einzelnen Konkretionen – in dem sie das kulturelle Referenznetz bilden – wiederum das 'kulturelle Hintergrundrauschen'. Dabei werden die Knoten auch zu sehr heterogenen Zwecken aufgegriffen und verwendet. Dies zeigt das Beispiel der Satire: Senecas Apocolocyntosis etwa verwendet panegyrische Stilmittel und Motive nicht um zu loben, sondern um Kaiser Claudius lächerlich zu machen.

So gedeutet, stellt sich kulturelle Entwicklung als Mischung von Alt und Neu dar. In diesem Ansatz wird das Denken in Dependenzen obsolet. Hinzu kommt: Zwei Überlieferungen in ein unumkehrbares Abhängigkeitsverhältnis zu bringen, wird umso schwieriger, je näher diese zeitlich und kulturell beieinander liegen, da beide als Konkretion des gleichen 'kulturellen Hintergrundrauschens' gemeinsam von diesem gespeist sind. Das kann dazu führen, dass sich die bisher angeführten Interpretationen von Christianisierung als Bruch oder Uminterpretation oftmals weder verifizieren noch falsifizieren lassen bzw. mehrere valide Hypothesen in Frage kommen. Verschiedene Hypothesen, die jeweils eine singuläre Abhängigkeit für sich beanspruchen, stehen so letztlich nebeneinander. In einer deskriptiv-kultursemiotischen Perspektive können einzelne Ursprungshypothesen – nicht im Sinne einer Abhängigkeit, sondern einer Interaktion – als Konkretionen bzw. Knoten des kulturellen Netzes aufgegriffen werden und im Falle einer Nicht-Falsifizierung zum Verständnis im kultursemiotischen Sinn beitragen.[26]

Für die Rekonstruktion des kulturellen Netzes (s.u.) bedeutet das, eine gewissenhafte Erforschung des geistig-sozialen Umfelds der zu untersuchenden Überlieferung vorzunehmen. In der Terminologie von Geertz: zu klären, welche für eine Interpretation relevante Knoten des kulturellen Netzes sich im raumzeitlichen Umfeld der zu untersuchenden Überlieferung nachweisen lassen. Nur so lässt sich jenseits eines totalen Relativismus eine

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[24] Geertz 1983, 10.
[25] Geertz 1983, 9.

[26] Dabei darf nicht vergessen werden, dass es sich auch bei der Rekonstruktion eines kulturellen Netzes um eine Interpretation handelt. Letztlich sogar um Interpretationen zweiter (Rekonstruktion des Kulturellen Netzes) und dritter Ordnung (Einfügen des untersuchten Knotens bzw. der untersuchten Konkretion). Es kann festgehalten werden, dass Rekonstruktion auch immer „Fiktionen sind, und zwar in dem Sinn, daß sie 'etwas Gemachtes' sind 'etwas Hergestelltes'". (Geertz 1983, 22). Das darf aber nicht beunruhigen – in semiotischer Perspektive ist jegliche Äußerung bzw. Information als Zeichen schon Interpretation bzw. der Interpretation bedürftig. Das gilt somit auch für 'Informationen' erster Ordnung, wie sie der Urheber einer kulturellen Äußerung bzw. eines Knotens geben könnte.

verantwortete und begründete Aussage bezüglich plausibler Ursprünge eines Überlieferungsgegenstands treffen. Dass sich die Untersuchung dabei, jenseits von absoluter Verifikation und Abhängigkeiten, ihrer interaktiven Offenheit bewusst sein muss, liegt in der Natur ihres Gegenstandes: „Die Untersuchung von Kultur ist ihrem Wesen nach unvollständig".[27] Das bedeutet, dass unser rekonstruiertes Netz nie vollständig sein kann. Für die historischen Wissenschaften gilt das alleine aufgrund der zeitlichen Differenz zum Untersuchungsgegenstand, sowie der damit meist einhergehenden Fragmentarität der zur Verfügung stehenden Quellen.

V. *Interpretatio romana* und *interpretatio christiana*: Eine kultursemiotische *Relecture*

Da das zu interpretierende Feld des Mosaikfußbodens in einem kultisch-religiösen Kontext steht, ist es für die Deutung von eminenter Wichtigkeit, auch diesen Teil des 'kulturellen Hintergrundrauschens' in grundlegender Weise zu bedenken. Das bedeutet, es geht nicht nur darum, einen Bestand der Kulte zu erheben. Es gilt auch aufzudecken, wie Religion bzw. Religiosität im pagan-römischen Verständnis gelebt wurde.[28] Denn im Sinne eines interaktiven kulturellen Netzes spielt dieser Faktor eine entscheidende Rolle dabei, wie das Christentum im Imperium rezipiert wurde. Daher muss dieses Charakteristikum – das *Mindset* – der römischen Religiosität als Vorbedingung hier einer Reflexion unter kultursemiotischen Vorzeichen unterzogen werden.

Als klassischer Terminus für die Art und Weise, wie im römischen Imperium sozialisierte Menschen fremde Götter in ihr Pantheon integrierten, hat der Terminus *interpretatio romana* etabliert. In ihrer grundlegenden Form wurden dabei die fremden Götternamen als Appellative in die lateinische Sprache übersetzt und der fremde Gott so mit einem Gott des eigenen Pantheons identifiziert.[29] Bei diesem Prozess der Namensangleichung kam es aber auch zu inhaltlichen Veränderungen. So konnten besondere Züge einer lokalen Gottheit unter dem Eindruck der römischen Gottheit zurücktreten. Ein weiteres Phänomen ist, dass die *interpretatio* zum Teil als solche sichtbar blieb. Entweder indem vordergründig der Name der fremden Gottheit beibehalten wurde, der Gläubige aber um die Identifizierung mit der entsprechenden römischen Gottheit wusste (in Aquileia etwa Belenus, der mit Apollon gleichgesetzt wurde, s.u.) oder indem dieses Wissen um die *interpretatio* explizit in Form eines Epithets beigegeben wurde (etwa Belenus-Apollon).

In anderen Worten handelt es sich bei der *interpretatio romana* um eine Analogie im (Wirk-) Prinzip: Sachverhalte (hier: Götter), denen ein vergleichbares Wirkprinzip zugrunde liegt, können mit gleichem Namen benannt werden. Hierbei liegt die Begrenzung der einbezogenen Prinzipien auf der Hand. Keine zwei Sachverhalte sind genau gleich. Es wird eine Auswahl relevanter Prinzipien getroffen (hier: Eigenschaften der Götter), um so die Gleichsetzung legitimieren zu können. Innerhalb eines polytheistischen Systems hatte man somit eine geeignete Methode bzw. ein *Mindset*, um produktiv mit fremden Kulten umzugehen. In kultursemiotischer Perspektive bedeutet dies, dass aus den rezipierten Knoten, die die Bedeutung(en) der römischen Gottheit abbilden, und den rezipierten Knoten der fremden Gottheit ein neuer Knoten mit einem neuen Konzept, das nun die beiden Götter (meist unter dem Begriff der römischen Gottheit, s.o.) integriert, gebildet wird, etwa indem an einem lokalen Heiligtum explizit dem Gott unter römischem Namen gehuldigt wird.

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[27] Geertz 1983, 41.
[28] Dazu grundlegend Rüpke 2006.

[29] cf. Giaro – Graf 2006; in Sonderfällen konnte auch – wenn es opportun schien – der ursprüngliche Name beibehalten werden, etwa beim Mithras-Kult.

Diese Bildung eines neuen Knotens aus der Verbindung bereits vorhandener Knoten kann auch am Beispiel der *interpretatio christiana* aufgezeigt werden. Ein entscheidender Unterschied zur pagan römischen *interpretatio* liegt darin, dass das christliche Religionssystem ein monotheistisches ist. Die *interpretatio christiana* verstand sich als Lesart von paganen Kulten, als „Trägerin apokrypher christl. Botschaften".[30] Es handelt sich also eher um eine christliche Umdeutung paganer Elemente, als um eine Gleichsetzung. Kultursemiotisch betrachtet, vollzieht sich aber der gleiche Vorgang wie bei der *interpretatio romana*: Aus verschiedenen bekannten Knoten wird ein neuer gebildet, der einer paganen Tradition nun eine neue Bedeutung zuweist. Als Realisation findet sich ein solcher Knoten etwa im Mosaik der Schildkröte und des Hahns, in welchem pagane Ikonographie im christlichen Kontext gedeutet wird.[31] Aufgrund des Kontextes einer neu errichteten christlichen Basilika kann davon ausgegangen werden, das eine solche Interpretation vom Mosaizisten oder dem Auftraggeber intendiert wurde.

Bei dieser säuberlichen Trennung von *interpretatio christiana* und *romana* darf allerdings nicht vergessen werden, dass es sich dabei um

spätere Reflexionskategorien handelt, die dem zeitgenössischen Betrachter oder Hersteller etwa der Mosaiken der Basilika von Aquileia nicht bewusst waren. Vielmehr muss angenommen werden, dass der römisch sozialisierte Mensch (zumindest bis zur Konsolidierung des Christentums im Imperium), der über keine besonderen theologischen Kenntnisse verfügte, auch das Christentum bzw. den christlichen Gott im Sinne der *interpretatio romana* wie einen römischen Gott – und somit tendenziell polytheistisch – rezipierte. Als Beispiel für diese These kann bezeichnenderweise Konstantin der Große angeführt werden. Noch im Jahr 310 n. Chr. huldigte er am Apollon-Granus-Heiligtum im heutigen Grand (Frankreich) – *interpretatio romana* – dem Sol-Invictus als seinem Sieghelfer, wobei er eine Sonnen-Vision hatte. Laut einem anonymen lateinischen Panegyricus aus dem Jahr 310 wird dieses Ereignis von Konstantin zunächst auf den von ihm verehrten Sol-Invictus bezogen.[32] Im Jahr 313 oder spätestens 315 jedoch hatte sich Konstantins Feldzeichen von der stilisierten Sonne aus drei Balken, durch umbiegen des oberen Endes des vertikalen Balkens, in ein Christusmonogramm (☧, d.i. ein X = Chi und P = Rho übereinandergelegt) gewandelt.[33] Zusammen mit den Schilderungen des Eusebius in der Vita Constantini[34] liegt der Schluss nahe, dass Konstantin seine Erscheinung am Granus-Heiligtum nun mit Christus anstelle von Sol-Invictus verband.[35] Bemerkenswert an dieser Erzählung ist, dass Konstantin Christus in der gleichen Funktion wie bislang Sol-Invictus, nämlich als Sieghelfer, annimmt. Dies findet seinen Niederschlag in der Schilderung der Vita Constantini des Eu-

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[30] Eberlein 2006.

[31] Die Kategorien *pagan* und *christlich* sind, wie es die bisherigen Betrachtungen andeuten, fließend. Besonders die Arbeiten von Éric Rebillard (Rebillard 2012) haben gezeigt, dass es sich bei diesen Kategorien um Aspekte handelt, die sich nicht ausschließen, sondern (im Individuum) nebeneinander stehen können und situativ aktiviert werden. (Bekanntestes Beispiel ist die spätantike Bestattungskultur: hier konnte Rebillard zeigen, dass römische Christen bei ihrer Bestattung ihr *Christsein* in keiner Weise zum Ausdruck brachten, sondern sie nach römischer Sitte bestattet wurden. Die Kategorie *Christsein* spielte im Vergleich mit der Kategorie *Römersein* bei der Bestattung keine Rolle) Im Sinn einer kultursemiotischen Betrachtung kann dabei auch von einer Gleichzeitigkeit und gegenseitiger Beeinflussung der Kategorien *pagan* und *christlich* gesprochen werden. Wenn sie hier dennoch verwendet werden, dann um ein hermeneutisches Prinzip (pagan-römisches *Mindset*) oder eine oberflächliche und äußerliche Zugehörigkeit (pagane Götterstatuen, christliche Autoren) auszudrücken.

[32] cf. *Pan. Lat.* VI/7, 21,2–7.

[33] Nachweisbar auf einem Silbermedallion aus Ticinium (Pavia), das Konstantin mit Christusmonogram am Helm zeigt (cf. Overbeck 2000). Nicht zu verwechseln mit dem Staurogramm (T = Tau und P = Rho übereinandergelegt), dass erst in nachkonstantinischer Zeit erscheint (cf. Giradet 2007, 38 Anm. 36.)

[34] cf. Euseb., *VC* I, 32.

[35] cf. Giradet 2007, 35f.

sebius, der die o.g. Vision[36] im Rückblick nun als Zeichen des christlichen Gottes interpretiert, dennoch aber den Charakter des Sieghelfers bewahrt: „In hoc [signo, i.e. cruce] vinces".[37] Christus wird von Konstantin im Rahmen eines polytheistischen bzw. henotheistischen Religionsverständnisses verehrt – er bleibt in seiner Religiosität ein Römer.[38] In diesen Rahmen fügt sich auch die Tatsache, dass Konstantin sich nach seiner Hinwendung zum Christus-Kult problemlos der Ikonographie des Sol bedienen konnte. So etwa auf dem Konstantinsbogen in Rom oder noch im Jahr 330 – fünf Jahre nach dem Konzil von Nicaea – in dem er sich für eine Statue auf der Konstantinssäule in Konstantinopel als Apollo-Sol-Invictus porträtieren ließ. Unabhängig davon, wann genau und durch welche Ursachen Konstantin sich nun Christus zuwandte, entscheidend ist für den vorliegenden Fall, *wie* er es tat: Als Römer, der Christus wie einen römischen Gott behandelte.[39]

Diese theoretischen Gedanken werden im Folgenden nun am Beispiel des Mosaiks vom Kampf des Hahns mit der Schildkröte aus der frühchristlichen (theodorischen) Bauphase des Doms von Aquileia expliziert.

VI. Kultursemiotische Deutung des Mosaiks

VI.1 Das kulturelle Netz knüpfen I: Der Befund zu den paganen Kulten in Aquileia

Für das vierte Jahrhundert ist ein für unsere Zwecke aufschlussreicher Vorgang dokumentiert. In Inschriften dokumentiert ein Septimius Theodulus, *corrector Venetiae et Histriae*, in den Jahren um 360 n. Chr., pagane Götterbilder auf dem Forum von Aquileia wieder aufgerichtet zu haben (u.a. das eines Hercules).[40] Dass es sich dabei nicht um eine rein museale Angelegenheit gehandelt hat, wird deutlich, wenn man bedenkt, dass in nächster Umgebung von der Existenz eines paganen Sakralbaus ausgegangen werden muss.[41] Hinzu kommt, dass in den Briefen des Augustinus von Hippo die Situation geschildert wird, dass bei einer Wiederaufstellung paganer Götterstatuen auf dem Forum von Madaura (Algerien), ihnen offensichtlich noch wirkmächtige, religiöse Züge zugeschrieben wurden.[42] Durch eine Inschrift ist Septimius Theodulus als Christ bekann,[43] was Steuernagel erwähnt, um das Aufrichten römischer Götterbilder durch einen Christen zu betonen.[44] Je nach Standpunkt können diese Statuen für den 'Christen' Septimius auch eine akzeptable Repräsentation der weniger wirksamen, aber dennoch vorhandenen römischen Götter sein bzw. sein 'paganes' Christsein kann ihn nicht von seinen römischen Wurzeln als *vir clarissimus* oder

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[36] Es besteht in der Forschung inzwischen Konsens, dass nur von einer Vision Konstantins ausgegangen werden kann. Die Schilderung einer weiteren Vision vor der Schlacht an der Milvischen Brücke ist demgegenüber eine literarische Bildung, die von der Darstellung der Vision in Gallien abhängig ist (dazu Weiß 1993).

[37] Euseb., *VC* I,28,2.

[38] Das hat auch Folgen für die Frage, ob Konstantin denn ein Christ war. Vielmehr kann man sagen, dass diese Frage so nicht mehr gestellt werden kann. Für den Römer Konstantin war es keine Schwierigkeit, Christus als den 'besseren' Sieghelfer an die Stelle der bis dato von ihm in dieser Sache verehrten Gottheit Sol zu setzen. Selbst wenn er nun Christus verehrt, ist er in seinem Denken noch pagan-römisch. Die Suche nach und die Fixierung eines Zeitpunkts, an dem eine 'pagane' Phase endet, und eine 'christliche' Phase beginnt (exemplarisch etwa bei Giradet 2007) erübrigt sich in dieser Hinsicht.

[39] Dies zeigt sich auch beim von Konstantin einberufenen Konzil von Nicaea. Für Konstantin standen dort nicht dogmatische Fragen (Arianismusstreit) im Vordergrund, sondern die Frage des korrekten Osterfesttermins um den – im römischen Verständnis für das Bestehen des Kosmos zentralen – korrekten Kult vollziehen und somit den Ausgleich mit den Göttern zu ermöglichen (cf. Ayres 2006, 88, Anm. 8).

[40] cf. Brusin 1991, Nr. 501.

[41] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 73.

[42] cf. Aug., *Epist*. 17,1.

[43] CIL XIII, 10027, 69. Die Inschrift befindet sich auf einem Trinkgefäß und enthält neben Namen und Titel („SEPTIMIVS THEODOLVS CORRECTOR VENETIAE ET ISTRIAE EXAC") auch ein Christogramm (☧), flankiert von den griechischen Buchstaben A (als Majuskel) und ω (als Minuskel).

[44] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 74.

seinen Aufgaben als *corrector* trennen. Davon abgesehen zeigt der Fund, dass auch noch um 360 n. Chr. von einem aktiven Kult der römischen Götter in Aquileia ausgegangen werden kann. Genaueres, als dass um das *forum* von Aquileia der offizielle römische Kult vollzogen wurde, lässt sich aus dem gegebenen Befund zunächst nicht ableiten. Insgesamt galt das *forum* in der Spätantike für einen auf die Absage an die pagan-römischen Götter bedachten Christen als un-christlicher Ort. Ambrosius von Mailand schreibt dazu: „in foro aut in plateis Christus non invenitur. [...] Non est Christus circumforaneus [...] Christus in Ecclesia est, in foro idola".[45]

Neben dem offiziellen Kult im Bereich des *forum*, fand in Aquileia besonders der Kult des Belenus bzw. Apollon-Belenus, dessen Heiligtum sich südlich der Stadt befand, großen Andrang. Bei Belenus handelt es sich um eine keltische Gottheit, die als Apollon in das römische Pantheon integriert wurde.[46] Der Höhepunkt der Verehrung des Belenus lag im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert. Um das Jahr 300 ist der Kult in einer Inschrift von Diokletian und Maximinian das letzte Mal greifbar. Diese sahen in Belenus eine Ausprägung eines von ihnen verehrten solaren Kultes.[47] Belenus galt als territoriale Schutzgottheit Aquileias und wurde in allen sozialen Schichten der Gesellschaft verehrt.[48] Viele Weihungen in Aquileia deuten auch auf einen heilkräftigen Aspekt des Gottes hin,[49] was neben der Bedeutung als solare Gottheit eine weitere Schnittmenge mit Apollon ausmacht.

Neben dem Belenus-Kult finden sich auch Nachweise für sog. orientalische Kulte, die allerdings stark romanisiert wurden. So finden sich Belege für einen vor allem unter Freigelassenen und Händlern beliebten Kult der Isis, der das Epithet *Augusta* beigegeben wurde.[50] Daneben ist auch der Kult der Mater Magna belegt. Gemeinsam ist den Kulten der Isis-Augusta und Mater Magna in Aquileia, dass diese nicht über das 3. Jh hinaus nachweisbar sind.[51] Für die kultursemiotische Perspektive sind sie für das 4. Jh. höchstens noch über das kulturelle Hintergrundrauschen in Form von Erinnerung oder durch noch bestehende Knoten in Form von älteren Inschriften o.ä. präsent.

Ebenfalls für Aquileia nachgewiesen ist der Kult des Mithras. Anders als die beiden zuletzt genannten Kulte bestand er bis ins 5. Jh. fort.[52] Für das Ende des Mithaskults kann letztlich die Hinwendung des Herrscherhauses zum Gott der Christen angenommen werden; hatte der Mithraskult stets ein starkes Moment der Loyalität zum Herrscher, so konnte diese Eigenschaft – neben dem offiziellen Verbot heidnischer Kulte unter Theodosios I. im Jahr – zu endgültigen Niedergang des Mithraskultes beigetragen haben, als sich die römischen Kaiser seit Konstantin zum christlich Gott bekannten.[53] Hier sei noch einmal darauf hingewiesen, dass dieser Wechsel der Gottheit nicht notwendig ein Wechsel des Religionsverständnisses beinhaltete. Nach den obigen Ausführungen ist es wahrscheinlicher, dass sich die Bewohner Aquileias schlicht dem scheinbar stärkeren (weil erfolgreicheren) Gott zuwandten.

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[45] Ambr*., Virg*. 46. Es ist sicher kein Zufall, dass die auf Absage an die paganen Wurzeln bedachten Christen aus dem gebildeten Klerus stammen (neben Ambrosius auch der schon erwähnte Augustinus).

[46] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 80.

[47] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 85.

[48] cf. Euskirchen 2006; Steuernagel 2011, 84. Zu den Dedikanten gehörten Unfreie, Freigelassene, Personen aus der kaiserlichen Verwaltung, sowie Händler.

[49] cf. Euskirchen 2006.

[50] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 88f.

[51] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 91.

[52] cf. Steuernagel 2011, 92. Hierbei muss allerdings seit dem Ende des 4. Jhs. von einem Fortbestehen im privaten ausgegangen werden (cf. Clauss, 1990, 40).

[53] cf. Clauss, 1990, 179. Eine Ausnahme von diesem Götterwechsels stellte Julian, gen. *Apostata* (Kaiser von 360–363) dar. Dieser versuchte den Einfluss des Christentums zurückzudrängen und förderte die klassisch-paganen Kulte.

V.2 Das kulturelle Netz knüpfen II: Schildkröte und Hahn im Umfeld der aquileianischen Kulte und der kulturellen Überlieferung

Der Hahn steht in antiken Darstellungen tatsächlich für eine Lichtsymbolik, da er als Künder des Morgens galt: „Sie [d.i. die Hähne] lassen (uns) nicht ungewarnt vom Aufgang der Sonne überraschen".[54] In dieser Funktion wurde er zum geläufigen Attribut von solaren Gottheiten, wie u.a. Apollon und Mithras oder auch Hermes[55] – was sowohl Fink und Egger im Grundsatz korrekt benannten. Hinzu kommt eine dem Hahn zugesprochene Funktion, böse Geister abzuwehren.[56] In dieser Funktion findet man entsprechende Abbildungen auch auf Grabsteinen.[57]

In der christlichen Überlieferung ist der Hahn vor allem aus der Episode der Verleugnung Jesu durch Petrus bekannt.[58] Dort hat er zunächst schlicht die Funktion des Zeitansagers, erfüllt sich doch so die Vorhersage Jesu, dass Petrus ihn noch vor Anbruch des durch den Hahnenschrei angekündigten Tages verleugnen wird.[59] Eine Deutung des Hahns als Mahner zur Umkehr und als solcher zugleich Stimme Christi findet sich später bei Ambrosius von Mailand.[60]

Der Schildkröte kamen in der antiken Vorstellung zunächst positive Attribute zu. Plinius d. Ä. erwähnt, dass Landschildkröten Heilkräfte gegen Gifte und Augenkrankheiten sowie Zauberei zugesprochen wurden.[61] Ambrosius greift die Schildkröte in seinem Exameron auf, indem er an ihr die in der Schöpfung den Tieren anerschaffenen Instinkte lobt: suchen sich doch die Schildkröten nach einem giftigen Natternbiss selbstständig ein Antidot.[62] In Aesops Fabeln ist die Schildkröte zum einen Allegorie für Übermut,[63] zum anderen für Behäbigkeit, die Aesop aber durch kluge Selbsteinschätzung kompensiert sieht.[64]

Gemeinsam ist diesen Feststellungen ihr eher allgemeiner Charakter. Der Hahn als Künder des Tages oder die Behäbigkeit der Schildkröte stellen für jeden Beobachter sichtbare Eigenschaften dar. Kultursemiotisch gesehen, handelt es sich, v.a. bei Plinius' Naturalia und Aesops Fabeln, dabei um wenig bestimmte, aber dafür sehr anschlussfähige Knoten. Man hat mit diesen Beobachtungen einen Punkt erreicht, von dem aus sich viele Knoten des kulturellen Netzes entwickeln konnten: Auch die Interpretation etwa des Hahns als Sonnen-Symbol in den verschiedenen Kulten basiert zunächst auf dieser grundlegenden Beobachtung. Von dort aus war ein Aufgreifen dieser Interpretation/dieses Knotens für die Darstellung in einem christlichen Kultraum möglich. Der Rückgang auf eine grundlegende Bedeutungsschicht für die Interpretationen stellt im vorliegenden Fall keine Schwäche, sondern eine Notwendigkeit dar. Kann man im Fall des Hahns noch vom Knoten des Sonnen-Symbols ausgehen, bleibt die Schildkrötensymbolik im gegebenen Umfeld derart dunkel, dass kultursemiotisch verantwortet nur mit den allgemeinen Charakteristika als Hintergrundrauschen gearbeitet werden kann.

V.3 Deutung

Für die Begegnung der beiden Tiere in den Mosaiken von Aquileia ergibt sich daraus zunächst folgendes Bild: Auf der Ebene der dargestellten Tiere kann es, geht man von einem Kampf aus (wie es die oben vorgestellten Interpreten tun), keinen Sieger geben. Wie die Schildkröte nichts gegen den Hahn ausrichten

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[54] Plin. *HN* X, 46.

[55] cf. Hünemörder 2006.

[56] cf. Ael., *NA* 3,31.

[57] cf. Hünemörder 2006.

[58] Mk 14,30 parr.

[59] cf. Schramm 2011, 2.

[60] cf. Ambr., *Exa*. Dies 5, XXIV, 88 und XXV, 90. Dass Fink 1954, S. 17 hier den Hahn als etwas Bedrohliches sehen möchte, leuchtet nicht ein.

[61] cf. Plin., *HN* X, 32.33.

[62] cf. Ambr, *Exa*. Dies 6, IV, 19.

[63] cf. Aesop., *Fabulae* 35.

[64] cf. Aesop., *Fabulae* 36.

kann, ist auch der Hahn gegenüber der Schildkröte mittellos. Zieht sich die Schildkröte in ihren Panzer zurück, kann der Hahn nichts mehr ausrichten. Als nur begrenzt flugfähiges Tier ist ihm die einzig erfolgversprechende Technik, die Schildkröte zu töten – das Greifen der Schildkröte und sie aus großer Höhe auf einen Stein o.ä. fallen zu lassen, um ihren Panzer zu zerstören[65] – nicht verfügbar.

Betrachtet man die Gegenüberstellung nicht als Kampfmotiv, sondern als Begegnung,[66] so kann man, unter Berücksichtigung der archäologisch nachweisbaren paganen Kulttopographie Aquileias, sowie den genannten, im kulturellen Hintergrundrauschen vorhandenen Eigenschaften der Tiere, folgende Deutung versuchen, die sowohl paganen Ursprungs als auch offen für christliche Interpretation ist: Der Hahn steht als Künder des Lichts und des neuen Tages der behäbigen Schildkröte gegenüber. Pagan findet sich hier der Künder des neuen Lichts und Symbol der Sonnengötter Apollon und Mithras. Seit Konstantin ist eine Gleichsetzung des Apollon mit Christus bezeugt, was eine Übernahme entsprechender Symbolik auch in einen dezidiert christlichen Kultbau also nicht behindert.

Im Kontext der Basilika von Aquileia kann das Mosaik als Ruf zur Umkehr an alle noch an der Wahrheit des christlichen Glaubens Zögernden (= Behäbigen, Grübelnden, versinnbildlicht in der Schildkröte) gelesen werden. Es handelt sich dabei um eine Variation des Rufs zu Umkehr, der aus den Evangelien bekannt ist. Das Neue des Christentums kann mit dem im Hahn präsenten neuen Tag parallelisiert werden, bzw. es kann die bereits erwähnte Christus-Sol-Identifikation im Hahn aufgerufen werden. Es liegt nahe, dass in den Mosaiken von Aquileia pagane Motive und

Überlieferungen neu kombiniert wurden, um für die römisch-pagan-sozialisierten Menschen Anknüpfungspunkte zum Christentum zu schaffen.[67] Über die weitere Intention der Mosaizisten oder ihrer Auftraggeber bei der Wahl des Motivs kann (auch aufgrund der fehlenden Parallelen der Darstellung)[68] nur spekuliert werden – was sich aus genau diesen Gründen verbietet. Unbestreitbar ist jedoch, dass dem Motiv ‚Begegnung von Hahn und Schildkröte' in Aquileia eine hohe Signifikanz zugewiesen wurde. Ansonsten wäre seine doppelte Überlieferung in der Nord- wie der Südhalle nicht zu erklären.

VI. Conclusio

Die kultursemiotische Geschichtsbetrachtung blickt auf geschichtlichen Wandel als ein Ineinander von bestehenden Traditionen anstelle eines Denkens in Brüchen. Geschichte wird zu einem Transformationsprozess, in dem durch Interaktion von Zeichen neue Bedeutungen und Zeichen entstehen. Knoten im kulturellen Netz als Manifestation dieser Zeichen und ihres Wandels geben durch ihre palimpsestartigkeit Zeugnis von diesem Prozess.

Am Beispiel der Mosaiken der Begegnung von Hahn und Schildkröte wurde dieser Prozess für die Etablierung des Christentums nach der sog. Konstantinischen Wende veranschaulicht. Wie anhand der Baugeschichte gezeigt wurde, entstanden die Mosaiken zu einer Zeit, in der sich die römische Basilika als Haupttypus des christlichen Kirchbaus erst zu etablieren begann, d.i. noch in einer Phase der Findung und des Übergangs. Das bedeutet

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[65] cf. u.a Aesop., *Fabulae* 35; Ael., *NA* 7,16.
[66] Somit wird auch das von Kähler 1962 aufgeworfene Problem obsolet, dass nach klassischer Kampf-Ikonographie – in der der Sieger in der Bewegung von links nach rechts dargestellt wird – die Schildkröte der Sieger sein müsste.

[67] Es ist zentral, dass im Mosaik pagane *und* christliche Traditionen zusammenkommen – es handelt sich nicht um eine christliche Umdeutung im oben (III. Bisherige Interpretationen) beschriebenen Sinne eines gereinigten Bildes. Stattdessen ist es für den Christen pagan-römischer Prägung entscheidend, dass er etwa noch das Palimpsest Sols/Apollons oder des Mithras im Hahn erkennen kann.
[68] Aus dem Grund der Einzigartigkeit des Motivs der Zusammenstellung von Schildkröte und Hahn erscheint auch die Annahme des Motivs als Genreszene nicht sinnvoll.

einerseits, dass zwar von einer christlich motivierten Ausgestaltung ausgegangen werden kann, die Bedeutung des Bautypus als römisches, nicht-kultisches Gebäude aber noch präsent war. Dies erhöht die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass bei der Bodengestaltung noch pagane Motive verwandt wurden oder aber diese so gewählt wurden, dass sie im Sinne einer *interpretatio romana* christlich gedeutet werden konnten – ohne dass sie dabei ihre pagane Bedeutung vollständig verloren ('Palimpsest'). Methodisch hat sich, im Kontrast zu den bisherigen Interpretationsversuchen des Mosaiks, die besondere Herangehensweise einer kultursemiotischen Betrachtung gezeigt. Gingen die konventionellen Interpreten rein vom Bildbefund aus, um daran anknüpfend Bezüge und Dependenzen zu finden, beginnt die Kultursemiotik neben dem Bildbefund zunächst mit einer Bestimmung des kulturellen Netzes, in den das zu interpretierende Objekt hineingeknüpft ist. Erst auf Basis dieses kulturellen Netzes und seines Hintergrundrauschens kann eine verantwortete Interpretation gegeben werden.

Abbildungen

Abb. 1: Nordsaal-Mosaik
„Mosaici dell'aula del vescovo teodoro, iv secolo, 02 tartaruga e gallo 01.jpg", by Sailko,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaici_dell%27aula_del_vescovo_teodoro,_iv_secolo,_02_ta
taruga_e_gallo_01.jpg>, licensed under a Creative Commons license:
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/, bearbeitet von S. Metz.

Abb. 2: Südsaal-Mosaik
„Mosaico pavimentale della basilica di aquileia, 313-350 dc. ca. 02 gallo e tartaruga.jpg", by Sailko
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaico_pavimentale della_basilica_di_aquileia,_313-
350_dc._ca._02_gallo_e_tartaruga.jpg>, licensed under a Creative Commons license:
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Abb. 3: Grundriss der Doppelbasilika
Erstellt nach Lehmann 2010, 160.

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Nature as Conceived by the Mesopotamians and the Current Anthropological Debate over Animism and Personhood.
The Case of Ebiḫ: Mountain, Person and God

Anna Perdibon

Abstract: The present paper considers how Mesopotamians conceived and related to the mountains according to Sumerian and Akkadian literary sources, while combining them with current anthropological theories, especially the so-called new animism with its innovative notion of personhood. From the written sources pertaining to the religious framework (i.e. myths, incantations, rituals and personal names) a multifaceted portrayal emerges, in which mountains were conceived not only as the abode of the gods and cosmic places at the border of the world, but were also conceptualized as living beings, acting in the world on behalf of humans and partaking of the divine community. The case of Mt. Ebiḫ offers the most striking evidence for how a mountain was regarded by the inhabitants of Mesopotamia over the centuries: it was envisioned as a mountain, as a person and as a god.

Introduction

Mountains are major topographical entities, that form a crown embracing the Mesopotamian plain. With their distant but bulky presence, mountains represented a dialectic element with the urban plain, and were fertile ground for the imagination of the ancient Mesopotamians. Together with other natural elements and topographical features of the landscape – such as rivers, trees, and stones– mountains constitute an essential part of the Mesopotamian landscape. In ancient Mesopotamian myths and rituals, mountains are referred to as living beings, acting in the world and partaking of the divine community: they protect and heal, do not submit to deities and threaten the divine spheres with their beauty, radiance and divinity.

This evidence speaks for different understandings of divinity, personhood and nature on the part of ancient Mesopotamians, as reflected by the literary sources, and calls into question the different ways in which the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia related, understood and conceptualized their natural surroundings. The present article focuses on how mountains were embedded within the religious framework through the emblematic case of Ebiḫ.[1] While exploring the ancient cuneiform sources, I use anthropological explanations to better understand the ancient myths and rituals, in order to investigate and further explain the connections between nature, the sacred and their materiality. I focus on the ongoing anthropological discussion about the term animism, with its innovative notion of personhood, which I apply as a theoretical tool in order to explore the ways in which mountains were understood, conceptualized and worshipped.

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[1] The present paper is based on the part of my PhD dissertation *Mountains and Trees, Rivers and Springs. Animist Beliefs and Practices in ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (submitted in June 2018 and accepted in March 2019) focusing on Mt. Ebiḫ.

Anthropological theory and ancient Mesopotamian religion: a fertile dialogue

The anthropological concept of animism, especially in its innovative notion of "other-than-human" person, represents a category and conceptual tool which enables a great variety of questions regarding the relationship between humans and nature to be asked, and which can contribute to shedding light upon various aspects of Mesopotamian conceptions and practices involving religion, magic and nature. Hallowell's concept of "other-than-human" person (1960), Descola's modes of interaction between humans and nature (1996 and 2013), and Harvey's relational animism (2006 and 2013), are all notions that contribute to pointing out relevant aspects of how an ancient culture related to and conceptualized its natural surroundings.

These notions are employed as conceptual tools to reassess some emic notions of nature, divinity and personhood in the ancient Mesopotamian polytheism, understood as complex and multilayered lived religion. The applicability of anthropological theories and approaches to the study of an ancient culture is considered a challenge and an opportunity to try to explore some aspects of how ancient human communities, far away in time and place, envisioned, knew and related to their world.[2] As noted by Rochberg, this matter poses several challenges, but such an approach is required for anyone attempting to interpret and explore those societies, according to the different written sources.[3] Thanks to the advance of philological and linguistic understandings of the cuneiform sources, with the consequent flourishing of editions of different textual corpora, the ancient Mesopotamian documentation has become more easily available and awaits further studies on the *Sitz im Leben* of the ancient Mesopotamians. Hence, the anthropological theories should not be as-sumed as establishing anachronistic and uncritical parallels between an ancient culture and a non-Western one, nor between oral and written cultures, but it represents a fertile conceptual tool in order to explore and to interpret the written sources from an emic perspective.[4]

With the progressive dismissal of the classic use of the term animism, due to its colonialist and evolutionist connotations (Tylor; Frazer), a new usage of the term has come into being in the light of recent ethnographic, cognitive, literary, performative and material culture approaches (Bird-David; Descola; Harvey). According to the new animism, in some societies (or in some worldviews within a given society), the world is perceived and conceptualized as a relational and social one, as a "community of living beings",[5] populated by different persons, most of whom are non-human. Differently from its metaphysical counterpart of Tylorian memory, the new understanding of animism should be considered not as a deluded belief that everything is alive, nor as a mere fossil from earlier stages of mankind, but rather as a "sophisticated way of both being in the world and of knowing the world", that is "a relational epistemology and a relational ontology".[6] Consequently, the new animism highlights radically different understandings of divinity, person, and nature, and calls into question the dualistic naturalistic worldview, with its oppositions of animate and inanimate, natural and cultural, natural and supernatural, immanent and transcendent.

The notion of "other-than-human" person is one of the salient features of the school of the new animism (Hallowell 1960; Bird-David 1999; Harvey 2006; Harvey 2013a, Harvey 2013b), and was firstly used in Hallowell's pioneering study on the Ojibwa worldview

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[2] Robson 2008, 455–483; Rochberg 2016, 57–58.
[3] Rochberg 2016, 57–58.

[4] Rochberg 2016, 57–58.
[5] Harvey 2013a, 2. See also Sahlins 2017, 121–123.
[6] Hall 2011, 105 (commenting on Harvey 2006).

(1960).[7] This notion partakes of a broader philosophical and ontological debate which is still ongoing, and which involves disciplines as varied as cognitive sciences, ethology, philosophy and biology. According to this innovative understanding, the salient trait for defining a person is not physical appearance, but behavioral and relational features. In fact, the matter of personhood cannot be reduced to mere anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism. As stated by Hallowell, anthropomorphism is not a marker of what distinguishes a person from a non-person. What characterizes a person is its behavior and relationality: according to Hallowell, "animate persons" are "relational beings, actors in a participatory world".[8] Within the Ojibwa myths, Thunderbirds are conceived as acting like human beings.[9] Other indicators of the animate nature of relational beings are movement, gift-giving and conversation.[10] Thus, "all beings communicate intentionally and act toward each other relationally: this makes them 'persons'".[11] Reassessing Hallowell's definition of what a person is, Harvey argues that

> *Persons are those with whom other persons interact with varying degrees of reciprocity. Persons may be spoken with. Objects, by contrast, are usually spoken about. Persons are volitional, relational, cultural and social beings.*

They demonstrate agency and autonomy with varying degrees of autonomy and freedom.[12]

The animistic universe is permeated by personalities, forces and spirits, which are interconnected and related to one another, in a "heterarchy of related beings".[13] According to Harvey, animist people "recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others".[14] Exploring the different "other-than-human" persons of the lively and personal ancient Mesopotamian polytheism is an essential step toward readdressing the interactions between humans and non-humans, and the conceptions of nature, landscape and the cosmos according to the Mesopotamians (Black 2002; Horowitz 1998; Rochberg 2016).

Together with the notion of personhood, Descola's modes of identification between humans and non-humans are relevant tools for investigating the connections between the ancient myths and rituals with their materiality. In his exploration of the modes in which humans relate to the natural world, and in discussing the dichotomy of nature and culture, Descola identifies four modes of interaction between humans and the natural world around them: animism, totemism, naturalism and analogism (Descola 1996; Descola 2013). With the notion of animism, he refers to a system which "endows natural beings with human dispositions and social attributes".[15] Conversely, he intends by totemic systems those where "the differential relations between natural species confer a conceptual order on society".[16] According to these definitions, animist systems "use the elementary categories structuring social life to organize, in conceptual terms, the relations between human beings and

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[7] Hallowell 1960, 19–52. Hallowell's ethnographic work focused on the Ojibwa of Manitoba, Canada, a First Nation population speaking an Algonkian language.

[8] Harvey 2013b, 125.

[9] The term Thunderbird refers to the conception and representation in the Ojibwa mythology of the thunder in an avian form (See Hallowell 1960, 30–34).

[10] Harvey 2013b, 124. As Harvey further argues, commenting on Hallowell, "persons are known to be persons when they relate to other persons in particular ways. They might act more or less intimately, willingly, reciprocally or respectfully. Since enmity is also a relationship, they might act aggressively" (Harvey 2013b, 124).

[11] Harvey 2013b, 125. See also Levy-Bruhl's "law of participation" (1985), and Buber's I–Thou relational ontology and the "mystery of reciprocity" (1970) (Rochberg 2016, 52).

[12] Harvey 2005, preface xvii; Hall 2011, 105.

[13] Hall 2011, 107.

[14] Harvey 2006, xi.

[15] Descola 1996, 82–102.

[16] Descola 1996, 87–88.

natural species".[17] Descola further explains that while in "totemic systems non-humans are treated as signs, in animic systems they are treated as the term of a relation".[18] Naturalism is the third mode and represents the typical Western worldview, based on an ontological duality of nature and culture.[19] Finally, analogism refers to "the idea that all the entities in the world are fragmented into a multiplicity of essences, forms and substances separated by minute intervals, often ordered along a graded scale".[20] What is peculiar to analogism is the "recombination of the initial contrasts into a dense network of analogies linking the intrinsic properties of each autonomous entity in the world".[21] It has to be underlined that these four modes of identifications are not mutually exclusive and can be organically present within a single society, or "each human may activate any of them according to circumstances".[22]

The predominant Western naturalistic mode of identification and interaction with nature does not match with the entirety of Mesopotamian worldviews and conceptions. Some evidence points in this direction, but other contexts, especially myths and rituals, speak to a different vision of the relationship between humans and nature, and to a radically diverse conception of personhood and divinity.[23] The emblematic case of Ebiḫ offers the most complex evidence of how a mountain was conceived within the

religious framework of ancient Mesopotamia. With its long-lasting tradition, Ebiḫ is one of the most relevant mountain ranges of the cosmic and sacred landscape of ancient Mesopotamia, and sheds light upon the various conceptions revolving around these majestic topographical features in the complex and fluid polytheisms of ancient Mesopotamia.

The case of Ebiḫ: mountain, person and god

Ebiḫ (Sum. E n - t i , Akk. *Ebeḫ* or *Abiḫ*) has a particular history in the literary and ritual evidence, being attested as a person and as a deity from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE. In the Sumerian myth which describes the battle between Inana and Ebiḫ, the mountain is represented as a topographical entity, while also being described with the attributes typically ascribed to a person and to a deity. Its divine status is featured also in the onomastic, god lists, rituals and incantations throughout the centuries. This mountain has been identified with Jebel Hamrin, which is an outlier in South-West Iraq of the western range of the great Zagros mountains.[24]

As an antagonist of the goddess Inana, Ebiḫ is a main character of the Sumerian myth *Inana and Ebiḫ* from the Old Babylonian period.[25] This myth tells of the battle that the goddess Inana initiates against Ebiḫ, which is alternatively described as a topographical entity and as a person with divine attributes. The mountain is firstly referred to as a mountain range, which acts intentionally against the goddess:

> in-nin₉-me-en kur-re te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak
> ᵈinana(-me-en) kur-re te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak
> ḫ[ur-saĝ] Ebiḫᵏⁱ-ke₄ te-a-me-en ní-bi na-ma-ra-ak
> ní-bi-ta na-ma-ra₇-da-ab-ak-gin₇

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[17] Descola 1996, 87–88.
[18] Descola 1996, 87–88.
[19] Descola 1996, 88; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 310.
[20] Descola 2013, 83.
[21] Descola 2013, 83.
[22] Descola 2013, 85.
[23] In this line, see Porter's arguments and methodological enquiry about the anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic divine in ancient Mesopotamia (Porter 2009, 153–194). See also the works of Haberman on how rivers and trees are conceived in contemporary India (Haberman 2007; Haberman 2013). The centuries-old devotion to the goddess Yamuna draws an intriguing picture of the diverse conceptions and theologies concerning this river goddess, while his study of the sacred trees of India highlights the understanding and perception of them as persons.

[24] Black 2002, 50.
[25] See Limet 1971, 11–28; Attinger 1998, 161–195 for the main editions of the myth. See Bottéro – Kramer 1989, 219–229; Attinger 2015, 37–45.

giri₁₇-bi ki-šè na-ma(-ra)-ab-te-a-gin₇
nundum saḫar-ra na-ma-ni-ib-ùr-ra-gin₇
ḫur-saĝ zi šu-ĝu₁₀ ga-àm-mi-ib-si ní-
ĝu₁₀ ga-mi-ib-[zu]

When I, the mistress, approached the
mountain, it didn't show any fear to
me, when I, Inana, approached the
mountain, it didn't show any fear to
me, when I approached the mountain
range of Ebiḫ, it didn't show any fear
of me.Since it showed me no respect,
since it did not approach its nose to the
ground for me, since it did not rub (its)
lips in the dust for me, I shall fill my
hand with the soaring mountain range,
and it shall learn fear of me.[26]

In this meeting, Ebiḫ is described as behaving like a person, who shows no respect to the goddess and does not fear her divine status. By not bringing its nose to the ground nor rubbing its lips in the dust, Ebiḫ refuses to act according the code of obedience and submission to the great gods. The understanding of Ebiḫ as a person is remarked by the grammar: the verbal chain denotes the specification of Ebiḫ as an animate being, a trait that is typically ascribed to humans, deities and animals in the Sumerian language. However, an alternation between animate and inanimate specification is notable in both the grammar and the narrative description of Ebiḫ.

Upon the continuation of the narrative, Ebiḫ is described as a topographical entity, featuring a forest and an abundance of watercourses, but it is also referred to as possessing a moral aspect. The mountain is said to be wicked and inaccessible, being part of the Aratta mountain range.[27] Because of its inaccessibility and threatening features, Inana turns to her father Anu, telling him of the mountain's arrogant conduct and her desire to destroy it. Ebiḫ is here once more described both in anthropomorphic terms and in topographical ones: the

mountain is characterized by its evil deeds of not putting its nose on the ground and its lips in the dust, but also by its majestic slopes, forest and watercourses.[28]

Anu's reply assumes a position in favor of Ebiḫ, that is referred as a cosmic and divine mountain. Ebiḫ is the pure abode of the gods, whose fearful splendor is said to spread upon the land of Sumer and beyond. The *melammu*, "radiance",[29] of the mountain is perceived as terrible and awe-inspiring, weighing upon all the lands, while reaching up to the heart of heaven with its height. The mountain emerges as a powerful entity, cloaked with a divine aura, that covers all the divine and human realms.[30] Anu continues with Ebiḫ's portrayal focusing on the physical description of the mountain, which is depicted as a luxuriant forest, abundant with trees, fruits and wild animals, in a triumph of joy and exuberance.[31] Its thriving gardens and magnificent trees, which

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[26] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 29–35 (Attinger 1998, 170–171: 29–35; ECTSL 1.3.2: 30–36).
[27] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 44–47 (Attinger 1998, 170: 44–47; ECTSL 1.3.2: 45–48).

[28] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 89–106 (Attinger 1998, 170–174: 89-106; ECTSL 1.3.2: 89–107).
[29] The term *melammu* is generally translated as "radiance, supernatural awe-inspiring sheen" (CAD M II, 9–12, s.v. *melammu*) and also as "aura". It is an attribute mainly associated with and possessed by deities, kings and royal objects, but also with temples, and with cosmic and divine entities –such as the Tablet of Destinies, Anzû (the mythical Thunderbird), and the cosmic mountain. This evidence addresses the question about the emic concepts of divinity and the dichotomies of natural/supernatural and animate/inanimate in the Mesopotamian cultures (see Porter 2009, 153–194).
[30] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 116–120:
(116) ki-gub diĝir-re-e-ne ke₄ ní ḫuš im-da-ri-ri
(117) ki-tuš kù ᵈA-nun-na-ke₄-ne su-zi im-du₈-du₈
(118) ní-bi ḫuš-a kalam-ma mu-un-ri
(119) ḫur-saĝ(-ĝá)(ní) me-lim_x-bi ḫuš-a kur-kur-ra (ša-)-mu-ri
(120) sukud-rá-bi an-na šà-bi NIR mi-ni-i[b]-[è]
"The abode of the gods is covered by a fearful splendor, the pure dwelling of the Anuna (deities) is adorned with awe. Its furious splendor is spread over the land (of Sumer), the *melammu* of the mountain is terrible and is spread upon all the lands. With its height, is has formed an arch in the center of heaven" (Attinger 1998, 174–175: 116–120; ECTSL. 1.3.2: 116–120).
[31] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 121-128 (Attinger 1998, 174–176: 121-128; ETCSL 1.3.2: 121–128).

are called the "crown of heaven",[32] offer shelter and dwelling to lions, wild goats, red deer, and wild bulls. The mountainous forest emerges as a dimension abundant of life, radically different from the urban plain, and displays the features of the cosmic mountain. Anu's response stands for preservation and respect of the established cosmic order, which comprises the fearsomeness and the divinity of the mountain. Thus, Inana cannot enter in Ebiḫ's kingdom, nor oppose its supremacy.[33]

Despite Anu's denial, Inana, who cannot stand her pride to be hurt, prepares for battle against the mountain. The battle scene between Inana and Ebiḫ refers to the mountain with both anthropomorphic and natural features. Inana is said to kill the mountain in the same way a person is murdered: the goddess grasps its neck like alfalfa grass, presses a dagger into its heart, and splits its big mouth like a thunderbolt. The stones, which form Ebiḫ's body, are said to be flesh themselves. Their collapse creates a dreadful noise, while Inana moves

on, in her fury cursing the forest, cutting the destinies of the trees short and making them die of thirst, scattering fire all over, until she finally spreads silence in the mountain.[34]

Upon proclaiming her victory over Ebiḫ, Inana addresses the mountain range as a powerful "other-than-human" person, with divine attributes:

> ḫur-saĝ íl-la-zu-šè sukud$_{(x)}$-rá/da-zu-šè
> sa$_6$-ga-zu-šè si$_{12}$-ga-zu-šè
> tu$_9$-ba$_{13}$ kù-ge mu$_4$-ra-zu-šè
> an-né šu si sá(-a)-zu-šè
> giri$_{17}$ ki-šè nu-te-a-zu-šè
> nundum saḫar-ra nu-ùr-ra-zu-šè
> mu-un-ug$_5$-ge-en ki-šè mu-un-sì-[ge-en(?)]

> *Mountain range, because of your elevation, because of your height, because of your goodness, because of your being green, because of your wearing a pure tuba-garment, because of your extending your hand straight to heaven, because you did not put your nose to the ground, because you did not rub your lip in the dust, I have killed you and thrown you down into the earth.*[35]

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[32] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 122: ĝeš mah-bi TÙN(aga$_x$) an-na, "its majestic tree, crown of heaven" (Attinger 1998, 174: 122; ETCSL 1.3.2: 122).

[33] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 121–128:
(121) ^{ĝiš}kiri$_6$ nisi-bi gurun im-lá giri$_{17}$-zal i[m-du$_8$-du$_8$]
(122) ĝeš mah-bi TÙN(aga$_x$) an-na ní di u$_6$ di-[dè ba-gub]
(123) Ebiḫ^{ki}-a ĝeš-an-dil$_x$ pa mul-mul-la-ba ug tab-ba mu-un-LU
(124) šeg$_9$ lu-lim-bi ní-ba mu-un-durun
(125) am-bi ú lu-a mu-un-DU
(126) duraḫ-bi ḫa-šu-úr ḫur-saĝ-ĝá-ka e-ne-sù-ud-bi im-me
(127) ní-bi ḫuš-a nu-mu-e-da(-an)-ku$_4$-ku$_4$
(128) ḫur-saĝ-ĝá me-lim$_x$-bi ḫuš-a/àm ki-sikil ^{d}Inana saĝ nu-mu-e-dé-ĝá-ĝá
"In its flourishing gardens fruit hangs and joy spreads, Its magnificent trees, crown of heaven, (…) stand as a wonder to proffer. In Ebiḫ, lions are abundant under the protecting trees with their shining branches. Its lions are abundant companions, its stags stand on abundant grass, its wild goats of the Hašur-mountain are distant in playing(?). Its fearsomeness is terrible: you cannot enter! The *melammu* of the mountain range is terrible – Maiden Inana, you cannot oppose it!" (Attinger 1998, 174–177: 121–128; ECTSL 1.3.2: 121–128).

[34] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 141-150:
(141) Ebiḫ^{ki}-a/e gú-bi ^{ú}númun(-bur)-gin$_7$ šu ba-an-ši-in-ti
(142) šà-ba/bi gù miri-a ba-ni-in-ra
(143) ka gal kurku-gin$_7$ mu-un-si-il-(l)e
(144) Ebiḫ^{ki}-e na$_4$ su ní-ba-ke$_4$
(145) bar-bi-a dub-dab$_5$ ḫé-em-mi-ib-za
(146) á-ta(-)ri-a-t^a muš šà-tùr gal-gal-e uš$_{7/11}$ mu-un-gú-guru$_5$-gú
(147) $^{(ĝeš)}$ter-bi áš bí-in-du$_{11}$ ĝeš-bi nam ba-an-ku$_5$
(148) ^{ĝeš}al-la-nu-um-bi su-ba mi-ni(-in)-ug$_5$
(149) bar-bi-a izi mi-ni(-in)-ri ib(b)i$_x$-bi bí-in-mú
(150) in-nin$_{(9)}$-e kur-re me bí-in-tál
"She grasped the neck of Ebiḫ like alfalfa-grass. She pressed the dagger's blade in its heart. She split its big mouth like a thunder. On the flanks of Ebiḫ the stones, which are themselves flesh, crackled down in a rumbling noise. From its sides, she cut down the poisonous spittle of big horned vipers. She cursed the forest and decreed the fate of its trees. She made die its oaks with thirst, she set fire on the flanks and made grow smoke. The mistress... spread silence over the mountain." (Attinger 1998, 176: 140–150; ECTSL 1.3.2: 141–150).

[35] Inana and Ebiḫ,152-159 (Attinger 1998, 178: 153-159; ECTSL 1.3.2: 153-159).

The divine status of Ebiḫ is here affirmed, together with the reasons for Inana's anger and envy. Ebiḫ's characteristics are elevation, height, goodness, beauty, and it is said to wear a holy garment typical of deities, and to reach heaven with its hand. Together with divinity and beauty, Ebiḫ shows a rebellious and powerful temperament: the mountain did not show any fear or respect to Inana, who could not stand to have such a majestic rival. The myth concludes with the establishment of a palace and a cultic area on Mt. Ebiḫ by Inana. Her triumph over the mountain was probably celebrated in the urban temple, during the rites for Inana, or even during a commemorative festival.[36]

The literary description of Ebiḫ displays an alternation, or rather a coexistence, of natural features and human-like features: Ebiḫ is portrayed as a bearded man with divine status, and as a luxuriant mountain rich in lakes, trees and animals. The portrayal of Ebiḫ as a half-anthropomorphic and half-mountainous entity finds a correspondence in the visual representations of mountain-deities in the iconography throughout the centuries. An eloquent example is offered by a limestone mold fragment attributed to Nāram-Sîn which features one of the earliest depictions of mountain deities and a river deity (figs. 1 and 2).[37] On this mold fragment, the king is portrayed together with the goddess Ištar sitting on a ziggurrat. The ziggurrat is bordered by a female river goddess bearing offerings, while Ištar is holding ropes in her left hand. These ropes lead to the noses of two mountain deities and two human prisoners.

Focusing on the representation of the mountain deities, their lower bodies are portrayed as mountains with the indicative pattern of drill holes, while their upper body is

Fig. 1: Drawing of the scene portayed in the mold fragment (Hansen 2002, 93).

Fig. 2: Detail of the human prisoners, mountain deities and river goddess (Hansen 2002, 95).

anthropomorphic. The divinity of these male figures is shown by their horned crowns.[38] Their bearded heads wear horned crowns, like that of the king Naram-Sîn, a clear indication of their divinity. Moreover, the large chignons at the back of the head are a typical representation of gods and kings in the Akkadian period.[39] Each divine prisoner carries in their hands an offering vessel, which is filled with objects defined as a series of drill holes similar to those used to represent the mountains.[40]

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[36] *Inana and Ebiḫ*, 171–175 (Attinger 1998, 178–179: 171–175; ECTSL 1.3.2: 171–175).
[37] Hansen 2002, 91–112; Aruz − Wallenfels 2003, 296–297; Woods 2005, 17–18.

[38] Hansen 2002, 99.
[39] Hansen 2002, 96.
[40] Hansen 2002, 96.

Notable in the Sumerian myth is a tension between a more "ecological" worldview, which tends to behave with a reverential and protective attitude toward the natural entities and to the cosmic order (i.e. An), and one which aims at objectifying and taming the natural world (i.e. Inana). Interestingly, these two worldviews appear both to belong to the same realm, presided over by the great anthropomorphic gods. Moreover, some transfers of genres and changes in religious beliefs and symbolic meanings regarding Ebiḫ are traceable. This mountain is defeated by the anthropomorphic goddess, but it later reappears as a deity worshipped in the temple and called upon in the ritual performances. Indeed, while in the Old Babylonian myth Ebiḫ represents a divine power challenging the urban gods with its beauty, radiance and superiority, in other genres Ebiḫ is addressed as an healing and protecting deity, partaking of the entourage of the main deities of the pantheon.

Ebiḫ's divinity and agency stretches from the 3rd until the 1st millennium, appearing in the onomastic, offering lists, lists of deities and rituals. This mountain occurs as a theophorous element in personal names from late Early Dynastic to Old Babylonian times, especially in Semitic names from the Diyala region, until the Middle Assyrian period.[41] Names such as *Ir'e-Abiḫ* (written *Ir-e*-[d]E n - t i), "Abiḫ-shepherded", *Ur-Abiḫ* (*Ur*-[d]E n - t i), "Hero-of-Abiḫ", *Puzur-Ebiḫ*, "Shelter/Under-the-protection-of-Ebiḫ", and the Middle Assyrian *Ebeḫ-nāṣir*, "Ebiḫ is protector/protects", and *Ebeḫ-nīrāri*, "Ebiḫ is assistant/assists", show Ebiḫ as a god actively involved with worshippers.[42] The theophoric name *Abiḫ-il* (written E n - t i -il), "Abiḫ-is-god", explicitly states the divine nature of the mountain.[43] This name is attested written on the back of an Early Dynastic statuette from Mari, which represents a

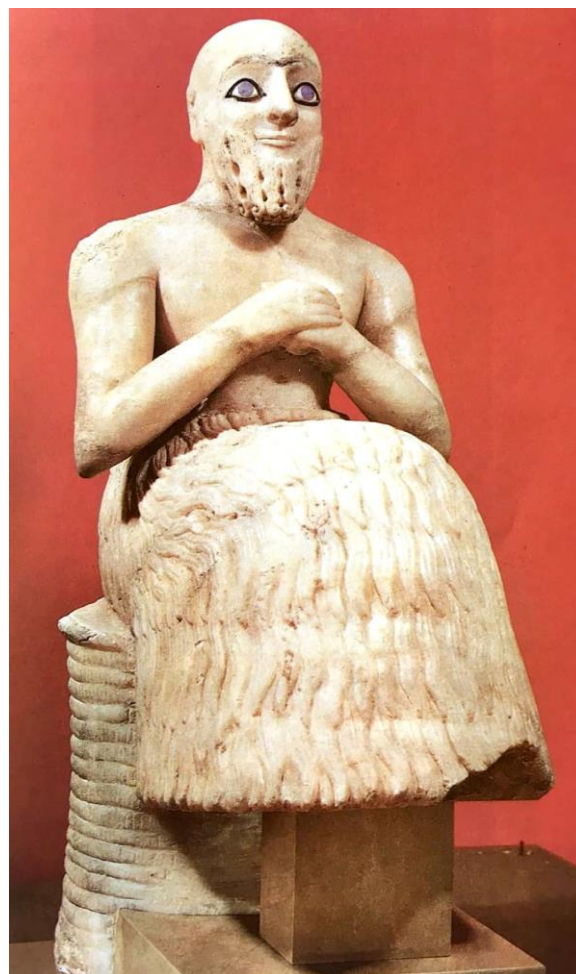man called *Abiḫ-il* and was found in the temple of Ištar (fig. 3).[44]

Fig. 3: Statue of Abiḫ-il from Mari, Early Dynastic (Orthmann 1985, 166, Abb. III).

Ebiḫ is recorded in an Old Babylonian god list from Nippur,[45] but it is in the Neo-Assyrian rituals that Ebiḫ re-emerges as a god with full divine status, invoked among the great deities of the Assyrian pantheon, and as a recipient of offerings.[46] In the *Tākultu*[47] for Sennacherib in

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[41] Lambert 1983, 84.

[42] Roberts 1972, 12; Lambert 1983, 84; Porter 2009, 169.

[43] Porter 2009, 169.

[44] Orthmann 1985, 166; Hrouda 1991, 66.

[45] Lambert 1983, 85.

[46] Menzel 1981; Lambert 1983, 84–85; Porter 2009, 169; Parpola 2017.

[47] The term Tākultu (literally "meal") refers to the major Neo-Assyrian festival. This festival, "stemming from an older tradition of communal food consumption of the king with his officials and soldiers, … gained an increasing popularity until it became one of the most important elements of State propaganda due to its universalistic and celebratory features that echoed the royal ideology" (Ermidoro in the *Introduction* of Parpola 2017, xxvi).

Nineveh, Ebiḫ is listed three times: first, with Mt. Dibar, and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates; it is recorded twice with the determinative for deity (ᵈE-bi-iḫ) while standing with the gods of the House of Anu and of those of the House of Sîn; while the third attestation refers to Ebiḫ in its topographical characterization (k u r –E-bi-iḫ), but while including it in a list of deities.[48] In the Tākultu[49] for Assurbanipal, the god Ebiḫ occurs four times, where he is invoked together with the great gods of the Assyrian pantheon and he is the recipient of offerings in the various shrines of Assur. Ebiḫ stands among the great gods of the House of Anu and Adad of the Inner City together with the Ulaya river, in the House of Sîn and Šamaš, and among the gods whose name is to be invoked in the evening of Kurbail.[50] The divine Ebiḫ is recorded, once among the nine gods of the House of Anu and once more among the five gods of the House of Sîn, in a text which displays the cultic topography of Assur.[51] In the royal coronation ritual, two stones are placed to represent this deity, while all the other gods are embodied by one stone each.[52] Finally, Ebiḫ, without the divine characterization, is invoked in the Tākultu[53] ritual for Aššur-etel-ilāni together with the Tigris and the Upper and Lower Zab, all the villages and the divine boundaries.[54] All this evidence speaks to the fact that this mountain was con-

sidered a deity of some importance within the Neo-Assyrian pantheon.[55]

Mt. Ebiḫ occurs also in the 1ˢᵗ-millennium incantations as an active agent in ritual performance. Ebiḫ is invoked in the Lipšur Litanies, where it is called "the bolt of the country" (sikur māti).[56] This epithet reminds us of the scene in the Lugale when Ninurta piled up the corpses of dead stone-warriors, creating the Zagros mountains.[57] This myth reports that the pile of rocky bodies arose like a great wall, forming a barrier around the land of Sumer and Babylonia.[58] Furthermore, Ebiḫ is called upon, together with the temple E'ulmaš, in an incantation that aims at dispelling the malevolent demoness Lamaštu.[59] In this incantation Ebiḫ is not characterized by the determinative for deity, but by that of mountain (kur), and its epithet is "strong mountain" (šadû dannu), referring to it as topographical entity. However, in this passage the two topographical entities, the mountain and the temple, are considered to be helpless with regard to the wicked actions of Lamaštu, since they are said to have been unable to remove her defiling hands from the chosen victim. Mountain and temple are seen as active and powerful entities, which would normally have been able to act on behalf of the patient against the demonic forces.

This evidence from religious literature offers a glimpse into the animate and relational cos-

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[48] SAA XX, 38, II: 37, [ᵈe-b]i-iḫ; SAA XX 38, ii: 53, ᵈe-bi-iḫ ; SAA XX 38, iv 3': KUR.e-[bi]-[iḫ] (Parpola 2017, 105–107).

[49] Parpola 2017.

[50] SAA XX, 40, II 15: ᵈe-be-eḫ; SAA XX, 40, II 28: ᵈEN.TI; SAA XX, 40, rev. I 4, ᵈe-be-eḫ; SAA XX, 40, rev. IV 34', ᵈe-bi-iḫ (Parpola 2017, 112 ff.) See also duplicate SAA XX, 41, ii 1 ᵈ[e-be-eḫ] (Parpola 2017, 120); and a fragment of a Tākultu text SAA 20, 46, rev. I 5', KUR.e-b[i-iḫ] (Parpola 2017, 126).

[51] SAA XX, 49: 57 and 64, ᵈe-be-eḫ (Parpola 2017, 133–134).

[52] SAA XX, 7: rev. iii 26: 2 ᵈe-be-eḫ (Parpola 2017, 18).

[53] Parpola 2017.

[54] SAA XX, 42, rev. III 3', KUR.e-b[i-iḫ] (Parpola 123).

[55] Porter argues that "these references establish that Ebiḫ was viewed as a living and active divine entity. They do not refer however to the physical form in which Ebiḫ was represented in temples or how he (or it) was envisioned, although they seem to imply a non-anthropomorphic form by giving the deity the name of the well-known mountain range" (Porter 2009, 169).

[56] Lipšur Litanies, 37 (Reiner 1956, 134–135).

[57] Black 2002, 51.

[58] See Lugal.e, 349-351 (ECTSL 1.6.2: 349–351).

[59] Lamaštu II, 1-3: ÉN anamdi šipta lazzu milikki ul ušši qātēki Ebiḫ šadû dannu E'ulmaš qašdu šubat ilī rabûti, "Incantation: 'I am casting a spell (against) your persistent counsel: Ebih, the strong mountain, was unable to remove your hands, (nor) holy E'ulmaš, the residence of the great gods'" (Farber 2014, 164–165).

mos of ancient Mesopotamians. Ebiḫ should be thus understood as an "other-than-human" person, partaking of divinity within the ancient Mesopotamian polytheism. In such a relational cosmos, the notions of natural and supernatural, and of immanent and transcendent, dissolve, leaving the ancient written sources to speak for different ontologies and epistemologies, where the concept of personhood plays a key role in shedding new light upon the emic notions of divinity and nature.[60]

Conclusions

Through the lens of the anthropological theory pertinent to the current debate over animism, nature and the human-environmental relationships, some insights into various aspects of Mesopotamian conceptions and practices about their natural surroundings emerge. In ancient Mesopotamian literature and religion, the notions of personhood and relationality are fully expressed and call into question the ways in which the ancient Mesopotamians engaged with and conceptualized their divine cosmos. Ebiḫ emerges as a powerful person and deity, who was called upon on behalf of humans for its protecting and helping attributes, as much as for its mighty strength. Ebiḫ is not only considered as a bearded man, tall and beautiful, but is worshipped due to its goodness, purity, divinity and rebellious spirit. This mountain is thus to be considered not only as cosmic topographical entity or as the mere abode of the gods, but also as an "other-than-human" person and god. The personhood ascribed to Ebiḫ derives not only from its physical representation, but is due particularly to its agency within the lively and relational cosmos of the ancient Mesopotamians.

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[60] Descola 2013a, 82; Rochberg 2016, 44; Harvey 2013b, passim.

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The Postmortem Agency of Tutankhamun (ca. 1336-1327 BCE)

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Abstract: The death of individual does not bring a loss of agency, but rather it develops into a new form that still has the ability to affect the living. The theoretical concept of postmortem agency is relatively new and has not been applied to the study of ancient Egyptian mortuary practices. However, the ancient Egyptians believed that the deceased as transformed entities could and would affect the living. The mummified human remains of Tutankhamun, the antepenultimate pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1550-1295 BCE), presents a unique case study in to examining the postmortem agency of an ancient Egyptian king. In 1922, Howard Carter uncovered the tomb of Tutankhamun and observed that the tomb reflected an intentional change of Tutankhamun's identity from mortal king into that of a god, Osiris, in attempt to return to normative mortuary practices after the Amarna period. This paper suggests that Tutankhamun's body was intentionally manipulated into a sacred image, a statue, of the chthonic gods in order to help with the restoration process, but more importantly to help with the legitimatization of his successor, Ay, to the throne of Egypt.

Introduction

Howard Carter and Douglas Derry examined the mummified remains of Tutankhamun's (ca. 1336-1327 BCE)[1] in November 1925 (fig. 1).[2] After a thorough examination of the mummy, the amulets and jewelry found amongst the linen wrappings, and the coffins in which it lay, Carter concluded that Tutankhamun was 'scrupulously fashioned to represent and symbolize the one great god of the dead, Osiris.'[3] Since Carter's initial observation, other scholars such as Salima Ikram, have reaffirmed his assessment.[4] Other mummified remains of kings from the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1550-1295 BCE), however, have not been designated as specifically representing Osiris in the physical form.[5] One explanation for the strong Osiris overtones with the mummified remains of Tutankhamun is that they were a result of the religious antecedents of the previous reign of Akhenaten.

Tutankhamun's father, Akhenaten, had altered the traditional Egyptian religion and pantheon during his tumultuous reign. Akhenaten promoted the worship of the solar disk, the Aten, to the supreme god, and declared that the only intermediaries were himself and his immediate family, his wife, Nefertiti and their six daughters;[6] essentially disbanding

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[1] The dates used in this paper are based on Shaw 2000.
[2] Carter 1927, 77.
[3] Carter 1927, 72.
[4] Ikram 2013.
[5] Smith 1912.

[6] Tutankhamun is most likely the son of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. His image was not recorded on any monument with his family, but the tradition of not showing the heir to the throne was not uncommon during the Eighteenth Dynasty. See Dodson 2009 for details.

the cults and priesthoods of Amun and Osiris. The attitude towards the afterlife during the Amarna period ignored the traditional mythology of Osiris especially in regard to the mortuary patterns of the royal family and elite members of court. Instead the Aten held a more prominent role for the Amarna afterlife.[7] The Amarna beliefs affected the funerary rituals of the royal family and elites during the Amarna period. Previously elite members of society relied on the traditional mythology that favored the deceased individual being identified as a follower of the cult of Osiris in the afterlife.[8] This greatly changed the funerary rituals of the New Kingdom, which relied heavily on the traditional mythology that favored the deceased being identified with Osiris.[9]

The accession of Tutankhamun continued the return to orthodoxy which had begun during the reign of his predecessor.[10] Tutankhamun reopened the cultic centers of Amun and other gods as found mentioned on his restoration stela.[11] Of particular importance is the revival of the cult Osiris.[12] Evidence is found at the temple of Osiris at Abydos where a small wooden chest, which was covered with gold foil and containing the cartouches of Tutankhamun and images of Tutankhamun performing ritual acts in front of a plethora of deities, was found in a ceramic vessel.[13] His subsequent death provided on the opportunity to restore the traditional afterlife beliefs and practices especially those that invoked the image of Osiris. One way in which this was attempted was in the mummification of Tutankhamun's body. It was purposefully manipulated to represent the statue form of Osiris in order to help with the legitimacy of his

Fig. 1: Mummified remains of Tutankhamun laying in the sand tray after the physical examination by Carter and Derry (Burton photograph p1566). Photo reproduce with the permission of the Griffith Institute, Oxford.

successor, Ay. The ancient Egyptians believed that the gods would judge the dead as well as the living and as a result the deceased

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[7] Smith 2017, 352.
[8] Smith 2008.
[9] Smith 2017, 285.
[10] Reeves 2005.
[11] Bennett 1939.

[12] In the Pyramid Texts from the Old Kingdom, the deceased king was not identified as a mere cult follower of Osiris but rather associated with Osiris, himself. See Faulkner 2007.
[13] Amélineau 1904, 348-350; Effland – Effland 2013, 32.

body could affect the living in a number of ways. Ay, the eventual successor[14] to Tutankhamun, needed to legitimize his succession to the throne, not just to the people of Egypt, but also in front of the gods. Ay purposefully manipulated Tutankhamun's body in order to strengthen his legitimacy to succeed Tutankhamun as king. The postmortem agency of Tutankhamun's body was used to promote specific cultural and religious identities that helped with the claims of inheritance and legitimacy for his successor, Ay.

The Material Body

In archaeology, the body is the intersection of biology, physical representation, and material components.[15] It also has influenced the development of the 'archaeology of death,' which views it as direct reflection of social status within society;[16] in addition, the body is perceived as part of the symbolic and structural makeup of society.[17] More recent scholarship views the corpse of a deceased individual as a material object or artifact.[18] The body and the identity that goes with it, are considered to be actively constructed during life and then deconstructed and reconstructed once again in death through different social relationships.[19] When bodies are seen as objects, they become active entities which 'engage, influence, confine, or structure other social agents.'[20]

Agency is then a topic that can be broached when examining the physical remains of an individual. It is a hotly debated topic in archaeology with little consensus, as there are numerous definitions.[21] Recently, in order to deal with agency in mortuary contexts, bioarchaeologists have introduced the term 'postmortem agency.'[22] John J. Crandall and Debra L. Martin define postmortem agency as 'the ability of dead bodies (in their new guises as objects, spirits, relics, or other symbols, forms, or identities) to engage, influence, confine, or structure the behavior of the living whether directly or indirectly.'[23] In other words, though the individual that once inhabited the body is gone, the dead body still is an integral part of society that can affect the living in some capacity.

Postmortem agency is influenced by the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu,[24] Anthony Giddens,[25] Bruno Latour,[26] Alfred Gell,[27] and John Robb.[28] The first two theorists define agency in terms of human agents. Bourdieu believed that agency occurred in individuals who had awoken to the fact that society was organized arbitrarily and then that individual chose to act, with intent, to change the society's organization outside of it.[29] Giddens' view of agency contrasts with that of Bourdieu. Giddens suggests that agency is due to the capability of an individual's choice to intervene or not in the world with the effect of influencing processes that provide agency, not intentionality.[30] The capacity of an individual to act or not is inherent in a structural

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[14] Tutankhamun had no children to succeed him and continue to the royal line. Two mummified fetuses were recovered in KV 62. Some have claimed them to be stillborn daughters of Tutankhamun, see Hawass – Saleem 2011; however, there remains doubts about the sex, see Charlier - Khung-Savatovsky - Huynh-Charlier 2012.
[15] Sofaer 2006, 11.
[16] Chapman − Kinnes − Randsborg. 1981; O'Shea 1984.
[17] Hodder 1982.
[18] Sofaer 2006.

[19] Arnold 2014, 525.
[20] Crandall − Martin 2014, 431.
[21] Dobres - Robb 2000.
[22] Crandall − Martin 2014; Tung 2014.
[23] Crandall − Martin 2014, 431.
[24] Bourdieu 1977.
[25] Giddens 1984.
[26] Latour 2005.
[27] Gell 1998.
[28] Robb 2004.
[29] Bourdieu 1977.
[30] Giddens 1984, 9.

system in which an individual's repetitive social practices keep producing social structures and those structures keep producing social practices.[31] Latour theorizes that even objects have agency.[32] He actively examines the associations and interactions between humans and objects and believes that objects plays significant roles in the forming, marking, and sustaining of social structures.[33]

Gell[34] and Robb[35] view agency in two distinct forms. Gell's two distinctions are primary, which is defined as individuals who can act on their own, and secondary agency, which are the objects or agents who only extend the agency of other agents.[36] Robb categorizes similar distinctions in agency but labels them as conscious agency and effective agency.[37] The nuanced difference between these two categories is important because it allows for the critical evaluation of 'how objects can be a nexus of social relations and have real impacts on social interactions, networks of power, and daily practices.'[38] Tiffany Tung takes their definitions further. Instead of relying on the categorical divide between human and non-human, Tung views agency based on sentient and non-sentient entities.[39] Sentient entities have primary/conscious agency; they act on their own volition. Non-sentient entities have secondary/effective agency in that they are deemed by individuals to not have volition, though they are still able to shape social interactions. The object-to-person interaction, therefore, is where identities are formed and power roles are determined.

The Body of Tutankhamun
Tutankhamun was the antepenultimate pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty (circa 1550-1295 BCE).[40] As stated above, he died at relatively young age: between sixteen and eighteen years old.[41] The cause of his death is still uncertain and greatly debated,[42] but evidence shows that he received many of the typical mortuary practices, including the mummification rituals, that were allotted to a king of Egypt. Tutankhamun was buried in a relatively small-chambered tomb on the floor of the Valley of the Kings across from modern day Luxor, Egypt.[43] In November 1925, the initial 'autopsy' on Tutankhamun's remains was performed.[44] Since Carter's examination, the physical remains have been examined only twice. The first occurred in 1968 when radiographic images were taken.[45] In 2005, a portable CT scanner was used to obtain computed tomography scans of the remains.[46]

The bioarchaeological evidence suggests a gracile individual with shrunken and attenuated soft tissues due to the embalming techniques employed during the mummification rituals.[47] The brittle nature of the long bones and the harsh examination techniques allowed for examination of the epiphyses unions of the humeri, radii, ulnas, femurs, and

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[31] Tung 2014, 439.
[32] Latour 2005, 63.
[33] Tung 2014, 441.
[34] Gell 1998.
[35] Robb 2004.
[36] Gell 1998; Crandall − Martin 2014, 432; Tung 2014, 441–442.
[37] Robb 2004.
[38] Tung 2014, 441.
[39] Tung 2014, 442.
[40] Reeves 1990.
[41] See footnote 4 above.
[42] For a quick summary of the debates of Tutankhamun's death see Rühli − Ikram 2014.

[43] Carter − Mace 1923.
[44] Carter 1927, 19; Derry 1927.
[45] Harrison − Connolly − Abdalla 1969; Harrison − Abdalla 1972; Harrison − Gray 1973; Harris − Wente 1980.
[46] Hawass − Shafik – Rühli – Selim – El-Sheikh – Abdel Fatah – Amer – Gaballa – Gamal Eldfin – Egarter −Vigel 2009; Hawass 2010; 2013; 2015.
[47] Hawass − Shafik – Rühli – Selim – El-Sheikh – Abdel Fatah – Amer – Gaballa – Gamal Eldfin – Egarter − Vigel 2009.

tibias to determine Tutankhamun's age at death.[48] The bioarchaeological information suggests that Tutankhamun was around eighteen years of age at the time of his death.[49]

Postmortem trauma is apparent in several locations: the head is decapitated from the rest of the body, the mummified erect penis is detached, the clavicles, sternum, and anterior ribcage are all missing, the trunk and limbs are separated from each other, and there is damage to both of the eye sockets.[50] Much of the trauma was due to the attempt to remove the body from the resinous material which had glued it to the innermost coffin.[51] Evidence of repairs of the postmortem trauma are apparent especially near the cranium and cervical vertebra.[52]

Mummification Anomalies

Tutankhamun's body displays several atypical mummification practices which have not been found applied to other kings of the New Kingdom.[53] These include the unusual positioning of his arm, the embalmers' incision cut mark, the amount of resin covering the remains, the resin found within the skull, missing elements from the chest area including the ribs, sternum, and clavicles, a lack of a heart, and an erect mummified penis.

The positioning of Tutankhamun's arms is very atypical.[54] The typical positioning of Eighteenth Dynasty kings' arms are flexed at the elbows with the forearms crossed and reaching towards the neck;[55] however, Tutankhamun's arms are flexed at the elbow with the right forearm laying on the upper part of the abdomen and the right hand cupped and covering the upper left hip.[56] The left arm is also slightly higher than the right and hovering over the lower right ribs and the hand covered the distal ends of the right humerus and the proximal ends of the right ulna and radius.[57] This positioning caused his elbows to jut out away from the body, instead of adhering to it.[58]

The embalmers' incision on the left side of the torso, which transverses from the navel to the anterior superior iliac crest, also does not follow standard Eighteenth Dynasty mummification practices: the cut is much larger than the normal practice.[59] Salima Ikram suggests that the large size and atypical positioning of the cut may have been the result of an inexperienced embalmer and that Tutankhamun may have been away from the Nile Valley at the time of his death.[60] In addition, Tutankhamun's entire body was covered in a massive amount of resinous material, which was another atypical practice.[61] Carter notes that the resin did not cover the head or feet of Tutankhamun's mummy or the innermost coffin, but it was poured liberally over everything else.[62] Resin is also observed in the cranial vault.[63] It is concluded that it was poured into the skull on two different occasions for unknown reasons.[64]

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[48] Derry 1927, 111–112.
[49] See footnotes 42 and 43.
[50] Harer 2006; Forbes – Ikram 2007; Harer 2007.
[51] Carter mentions using a chisel on the mummified remains to separate the limbs from the trunk in order to release it from the coffin, see Carter 1927, 62–63, 79.
[52] Leek 1972.
[53] Smith 1912; Harris – Wente 1980; Ikram – Dodson 1989.
[54] Derry 1927.
[55] Smith 1912; Rühli – Ikram – Bickel 2015, 8.

[56] Derry 1927. All of the observations are based on Derry's publication and his notes from the examination which were published by Leek 1972.
[57] Rings and bracelets had adorned each forearm prior to Carter and Derry disarticulating the mummy in order to remove the jewelry Carter 1927, 93.
[58] Ikram 2013, 293.
[59] Reeves 1990; Ikram 2013, 293.
[60] Ikram 2010, 294, Footnote 21.
[61] Ikram 2010; 2013.
[62] Carter 1927, 61.
[63] Harrison – Abdalla 1972, Hawass 2018, 224.
[64] Hawass – Saleem 2016, 100–102.

The missing elements from the chest region appear to have been lost during the initial examination since there is no mention of missing elements in any reports.[65] These elements may have been cut and removed in order to retrieve the amulets and other jewelry which were scattered throughout the linen wrappings. The results of the CT scans show that the missing ends of the ribs were clearly cut by a sharp instrument and conclude that it was a result of Carter's invasive autopsy techniques.[66] Others scholars have suggested the missing elements were stolen between 1925 and the second examination in 1968 by R.G. Harrison because several artifacts also went missing though they had been recorded during Carter's excavation.[67] Another theory suggests that the missing elements were the result of a kick or bite to the chest from an animal which had caused Tutankhamun's death.[68] It is clear that the missing elements were not removed during the mummification and embalming processes since the preservation of the entire royal body was necessary to be preserved to be a receptacle for the *ba* and *ka*.[69] The removal of any body part, except for the internal organs, was not officially sanctioned.[70]

The CT scans of Tutankhamun's mummy reveal a space in the chest where Tutankhamun's heart should be located.[71] The lack of a heart in a king's mummified body was of great concern for the ancient Egyptians. The heart was considered the epicenter of an individual: intelligence, feelings, and moral aspects resided in the heart, and not the brain.[72] It was also the element that was weighed against the feather of Maat during the initiation process into the cult of Osiris and the afterlife.[73] The ancient Egyptians therefore meticulously preserved the heart *in situ* during the mummification process or would at least have placed a substitute heart amulet or scarab in the body.[74] Tutankhamun had neither his physical heart nor a heart scarab.[75] A pendant scarab made of black resin was suspended on a gold wire and hung from Tutankhamun's funerary mask that may have stood in for the heart.[76]

The final anomaly concerns Tutankhamun's mummified phallus. Derry observed that the

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[65] Carter 1927; Derry 1927; Leek 1972. Tutankhamun's heart is also missing, which is highly unusual in Eighteenth Dynasty mummification rituals. The lack of heart and sternum suggests that an intense antemortem trauma caused significant damage to the chest area and resulted in the loss of the bones and organs. Though Harer 2007 posits that the trauma may have been a result of a hippopotamus attack, there would have been other attack marks found on other parts of the body.

[66] Shafik – Selim – el Sheikh – Hawass 2008. Hawass − Saleem 2016, 93 mention that fragments of ribs, clavicles, phalanges, and possibly the penis were recorded in the CT scans as laying in the sand box. However, some of the finger phalanges, sternum, both scapulae, and the pelvic bones are completely missing from Tutankhamun's tomb.

[67] Harrison − Abdalla 1972; Forbes 1998. Further evidence of a possible modern robbery includes the missing skull cap which was placed directly upon the cranium. The skull cap (No.256.4t), was beaded and made from a fine cambric linen, see Carter 1927, 82 for details. The worship of the Aten was initiated during the reign of Tutankhamun's father, Akhenaten. The majority of the gods were abandoned and only the solar disk, the Aten, was worshiped, especially by the royal court. The skull cap had the early form of the Aten's name and may either have been a memento from Akhenaten's reign or evidence of Tutankhamun's continuing affiliation with Atenism, in the form of an earlier variant the name, even after the return to orthodoxy.

[68] Harer 2011. However, this does not account for the missing artifacts.

[69] Taylor 2001.

[70] Morkot 2010.

[71] Hawass − Shafik – Rühli – Selim – El-Sheikh – Abdel Fatah – Amer – Gaballa – Gamal Eldfin – Egarter − Vigel 2009, fig. 13. However, the authors do not mention the absence of the heart organ at all.

[72] Taylor 2001, 17.

[73] Taylor 2001, 36; Ikram 2003, 23–25.

[74] Hawass - Saleem 2016, 239.

[75] Harer 2011.

[76] Carter 1927; Derry 1927.

phallus was embalmed erect and wrapped independently 'and then retained in the ithyphallic position by the perineal bandages.'[77] His erect phallus, which was mummified at angle of approximately 90° to the body, is the only known royal mummy preserved in that fashion, though it was broken postmortem.[78] Chthonic gods could be portrayed in a mummified form with an erect phallus which symbolized fecundity and resurrection ability such as Osiris and Min. The myth of Osiris was focused specifically on his ability to be resurrected and to have an offspring, Horus, who was associated with legitimacy and power. It was of great importance, therefore, to the agents who commissioned the mummification and interment processes to ensure that Tutankhamun, a young mortal king at the time of his death, would be identified with the chthonic gods through the physical manipulation of his body.

The Manipulation of Tutankhamun's Body

The question arises as to why Tutankhamun's physical remains do not completely follow the typical mummification practices typical in the Eighteenth Dynasty.[79] There are two possible explanations: a) Tutankhamun died in a location outside of the Nile Valley and away from the royal embalmer and embalming practices or b) as a reaction to the mortuary practices that occurred during the time of Akhenaten. The first explanation suggests that Tutankhamun actively participated in campaigns during his brief reign and may have died in one of them away from Egypt.[80] If Tutankhamun died in a skirmish away from the Nile Valley, the initial mummification processes would have had to be done on site such as the embalming rituals that involved the removal of the internal organs, desiccation of the body, and the copious amounts of resin.[81] These initial practices would have ensured that the king's mummified corpse would be preserved until he reached Thebes for interment. However this theory would not conform with the normative Egyptian mortuary practices. Evidence from the Theban tomb wall decoration suggests that there were sixteen steps to a proper funeral rituals,[82] which would not have been followed with a foreign death of Tutankhamun.

Others suggest that the anomalous elements observed on the body were intentional manifestations of theological and ideological concepts associated with the restored orthodox funerary rituals.[83] Carter emphatically stresses that Tutankhamun's mummy and coffins were manufactured to represent and

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[77] Derry 1927, 110.

[78] Ikram 2013, 294; Rühli – Ikram 2014.

[79] For a complete review of the mummification practices see Ikram and Dodson 1989; Ikram 2010.

[80] However, Hawass – Gad – Ismail – Khairat– Fathalla – Hasan – Ahmed – Elleithy – Ball – Gaballah – Wasef – Fateen – Amer – Gostner – Selim – Selim – Zink – Pusch 2010 suggest that the CT scans and DNA analysis of Tutankhamun's body indicate that he suffered from a variety of alignments and diseases which would have made participating in military campaigns, and even walking, difficult. More recent examination of the weaponry and armor found amongst the funerary assemblage in KV 63 suggests that Tutankhamun had utilized them in some form and they were not simply ritualistic outfits and weapons. See Johnson 2010; Spoors 2018 (March 23).

[81] Ikram – Dodson 1989; Ikram 2010, 2. Carter 1927, 78-79 commented that the linen coverings of the body were glued to the bottom of the innermost coffin due to the copious amount of resins. Hawass 2018, 223 also identified in the CT scans five types of embalming fluid that were poured into the coffin at various times.

[82] Altenmüller 1975; Hayes 2010.

[83] Carter 1927; Ikram 2013, 298. In Atenism, there was no judge or king to rule over the afterlife, a role filled by Osiris in the traditional funerary practices. Instead, the afterlife was just a continuation of life with the king being the most significant contributor to appease the solar disk. See van Dijk 1988, 41 for more information.

symbolize Osiris.[84] Even one of the decorated walls in the burial chamber show Tutankhamun as Osiris and not simply a mummified individual.[85] Salima Ikram furthers suggests that all of the anomalies observed on the mummified remains were intentionally used to promote the idea that Tutankhamun was in fact the god, Osiris.[86] This designation harkens back to the Old Kingdom concept of the deceased king being directly identified with Osiris as found in the Pyramid Texts.[87] Tutankhamun's body was no longer identified as that of a mortal king, but rather as Osiris in his final interment. The copious amount of resin alluded to Osiris' black skin which are symbols of his fertility and regeneration powers.[88] Tutankhamun's erect phallus could be another indicator of Osiris' rebirth and resurrection abilities.[89] The erect phallus at 90° is a crucial aspect of the Osirian myth since it was at this particular angle at which Osiris was able to postmortem impregnate Isis with Horus, thus securing his heir to the throne. E. Amélineau discovered a cult image of Osiris laying on a bed (JdE 32090) at Abydos near the temple of Osiris which represented the aforementioned Osiris myth.[90] A similar shaped cult image was found amongst Tutankhamun's funerary assemblage. It is identified as an Osiride recumbent figure of Tutankhamun (Carter No. 331a, JdE 60720) that was gifted by the general, Maya (fig. 2), though both of the cultic images lack the erect phallus found on the mummified remains of Tutankhamun. The positioning of Tutankhamun's arms, with his elbows jutting out from lower on his chest, also portrayed his body in

Fig. 2: Osiride recumbent figure of Tutankhamun laying on a funeral bier, gifted by the general, Maya (Carter No. 331a; Burton Photo p1051a). Photo reproduce with the permission of the Griffith Institute, Oxford.

a physical form of how Osiris was depicted in artistic representations.[91] Tutankhamun's mummified were intentionally manipulated to 'literally emphasize the divinity of the king and his identification with Osiris.'[92]

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[84] Carter 1927, 72.

[85] Ikram 2013, 298.

[86] Ikram 2013, 299–301.

[87] Faulkner 2007. However, Smith 2008, argues that the deceased kings were not identified as Osiris by the New Kingdom but rather as members of his cultic retinue.

[88] Wilkinson 2003, 118–122.

[89] Ikram 2013, 299. Tutankhamun's mummified remains share similarities with 'corn mummies,'

which are funerary objects associated with rebirth and resurrection and which gained popularity beginning in the Third Intermediate Period (1069–664 BCE). See M. C. Centrone 2009 for a monography about ancient Egyptian corn mummies.

[90] Amélineau 1904.

[91] Ikram 2013, 300.

[92] Ikram 2013, 301.

But what purposes would it serve to manipulate Tutankhamun's body into a physical manifestation of Osiris? Carter suggests that it was a traditional Egyptian funerary practice that allowed the Egyptians to gain closer acceptance and approval from Osiris at the time of death.[93] Ikram suggests that it was to safeguard the king's body from mortal to divine during the transition from Atenism to the restoration of orthodoxy.[94] However, an integral part of those explanations is missing: Tutankhamun did not bury himself –that ritual was left to his successor, a courtier named Ay.

Ay's Path to the Legitimacy

In Egyptian culture, the eldest son of an individual was expected to perform mortuary rituals that would help the deceased parent transform into a blessed ancestor, the *akh*.[95] The mortuary practices overseen by the children of the deceased also became a ritualistic formal transmission of power between generations.[96] In Tutankhamun's situation, there was no son, let alone any child, to perform the specific mortuary rituals that would ensure a proper burial for him and the continuation of the Thutmoside line. Instead, Ay, Tutankhamun's vizier and advisor, assumed the duties of the heir by performing the funerary rituals for Tutankhamun. This act ultimately secured the throne for Ay to become the next king.[97]

Ay (ca. 1327-1323 BCE) was one of the most prominent figures in the later part of the

Eighteenth Dynasty. He may have come from the town of *Khent-Min* [Fortress of Min],[98] the modern-day city of Akhmim. Ay's titles are first attested during the early part of Akhenaten's reign and his titles implied a close relationship with Akhenaten and the royal family. His most famous title was that of 'God's Father'; a term that could imply tutor, prince, or father-in-law.[99] He eventually gained the title and position of vizier during the reign of Tutankhamun. At Tutankhamun's death, Ay legitimized his succession to the throne in two ways: by associating himself with Tutankhamun's widow, Ankhesenamun,[100] and by preparing Tutankhamun's burial and funeral.

In Egyptian tradition, when a king died, it was necessary to have a successor ready to take the place as the living king. The deceased king was identified as Osiris, king of the afterlife and the legitimate heir would be identified as Horus, the king of the living, thus continuing the cycle of rulership as founded by the Osiris myth. However, the Osirian mortuary practices were interrupted during the Amarna period. Instead of using the Osirian mythology to assure an afterlife, the Amarna period emphasized the continuation of life, the deceased individuals never left the human sphere.[101] It was a doctrine placed the physical manifestation of the sun god, the so-

[93] Carter 1927, 72.

[94] Ikram 2013, 301.

[95] Harrington 2013, 29.

[96] Kitchen 1995, 333; Dodson 2009, 90. This transfer of power was not only relegated to familial hierarchy but also included official posts.

[97] See van Dijk 1996 for a hypothetical explanation of how Ay became king and Kawai 2010 for a slightly modified version of events.

[98] Faulkner 2002, 194.

[99] Dodson 2009, 95–97. Ay even incorporated this title into his royal cartouche. He may Amenhotep III's brother–in–law (Tiy's brother) and Nefertiti's father. If that is the case, Ay may have been Tutankhamun's maternal grandfather. By marrying

Ankhesenamun, Ay would have firmly claimed the right to the throne.

[100] Dodson 2009; Dodson – Hilton 2010. Ankhesen paaten, later known as Ankhesenamun, was the third daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. She was a number of years older than her husband, Tutankhamun (née Tutankhaten). Evidence of her marriage to Ay is represented by a glass finger ring that has the prenomen of Ay with the cartouche of Ankhesenamun, implying a marriage between the two. See Dodson 2009, 100–101 for more details. Kawai 2010 claims that Ay simply stressed his relationship with the royal family and did not marry Ankhesenamun.

[101] Smith 2017, 285.

lar disk, at the center of the religion and ignored or outlawed the cults of the rest of the pantheon, especially the cult of Osiris. There was simply not a need for Osiris since the deceased never left the mortal plane. After Tutankhamun ascended to the throne, he continued the process of restoring the cults of the pantheon, which had begun by his predecessor,[102] however he was not able to finish it. Ay inherited a country in the midst of restoring the traditional religious practices. Nowhere is this most clearly seen as in the tomb of Tutankhamun, KV 62, in the Valley of the Kings. The burial chamber walls are decorated with a plethora of gods welcoming Tutankhamun into the afterlife as well as Tutankhamun depicted as Osiris, and Ay, as the heir, performing the important Opening of the Mouth ritual at the interment.[103] But the paintings on the walls were not enough to secure Ay's claims to the throne. He needed the postmortem agency of Tutankhamun to act in his favor, especially in the mortuary sphere. As a result, he commissioned the embalmers to manipulate Tutankhamun's body into a mummified ithyphallic god that represented a variety of chthonic deities, especially Osiris and Min.

In the Egyptian funerary practices, two of the most important cults were that of Osiris and Min. They were both chthonic gods who shared similar attributes and were depicted in similar forms.[104] Both were fertility and virility gods and both eventually became associated with one another.[105] Osiris had his main cult at Abydos, where evidence of Tutankhamun has been found.[106] Min had several cult centers though the most famous one was at Akhmim. As mentioned previously, Ay may have come from Akhmim, which had produce other influential courtiers of the late Eighteenth Dynasty, including Yuya, who was buried in the Valley of the Kings and was father-in-law to Amenhotep III.[107] Ay even built a temple to Min at Akhmim during his reign.[108] The cult of Min would have then had importance to Ay since Min could be seen as an ancestral god, who could also help his claim to legitimacy. It was necessary then for Ay to stress his connections to the chthonic cults since both could legitimize his right to rule. One of the ways he did it was through the manipulation of Tutankhamun's remains.

The main goal of the deceased Egyptian was to reach the next state of existence called *akh* or 'a glorified departed one, who resides in the grave or the realm of the dead.'[109] It was a state of transformation into an entity who held similar attributes of the gods such as the powers of creation and regeneration. Individuals who were transformed into *akhs* were not

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[102] Tutankhamun's restoration of the old state religion is stated on the aptly named Restoration Stela that was usurped by Horemheb. See Bennett 1939 for details.

[103] Dodson 2009, 93–94. The Opening of the Mouth ritual was used to magically awaken a person's (in this case, Tutankhamun's) *ba* and *ka* and allow them the ability to enter the afterlife, see Roth 1992 for details. Reeves 2015 argues that it is Ankhkheperure Neferneferuaten who is shown in a mummified form and Tutankhamun who wears the priest's robes on the north wall of the burial chamber in KV 62.

[104] Wilkinson 2003, 115. Min was often shown in a mummified form with an erect phallus jutting between the linen wrappings. He was also depicted with black skin similar to Osiris.

[105] Gundlach 1982.

[106] Amélineau 1904, 348-350; Effland – Effland 2013, 30–32.

[107] Davis 2000.

[108] Davis 200, 103–104. Ay constructed a variety of temples and buildings throughout Egypt. He not only built the temple at Akhmim, but also continued to work on many of Tutankhamun's unfinished construction projects, including his Temple of Millions of Years near Malqata (see Dodson 2009, 100) and a Sphinx alley that connected Pylon X to the Mut precinct at Karnak Temple. See Eaton-Krauss and Murnane 1991 for more information.

[109] te Velde 1990, 93.

the full equals of the gods, but beings who enjoyed similar advantages as them such as eternal life and the ability to influence other beings both living and dead.[110] To transform into an *akh* required the specific spells and funerary rituals associated with the embalming and mummification practices. Through these processes, the body was transformed from a mortal container into a sacred image. The body was not preserved simply to be lifelike and recognizable by the spiritual elements in the afterlife, but rather as a sacred image, a 'magical mimesis'.[111] Tutankhamun's unusual mummification would then have been an intentional manipulation by the embalmers, overseen by Ay, to ensure that it represented the divine image, a statue of the chthonic gods, Osiris and Min.

Tutankhamun's transformation into an *akh* allowed him to interact with the gods on the behalf of the living heir, Ay. Tutankhamun's transformed mummified body into the sacred image of the chthonic gods served two purposes. First, it represented the restoration of the funerary cults that had been neglected by royalty and the elites during the Amarna period. Second, it helped in the legitimacy of his successor, Ay. It helped to serve as part of the Osiris myth showing the continuation of the cycle of ruling with the body being a sacred image of Osiris and Ay being living Horus.[112] It represented that the royal succession pattern via Osiris and Horus was restored by the death of Tutankhamun.

Tutankhamun's body is a secondary/effective/non-sentient agent who still could affect

society, especially in regard to Ay's claims of legitimacy. This postmortem agency is exemplified by the transformation powers of the mummification process which caused Tutankhamun to become an *akh* and interact with the gods on the behalf of the living. In order to solidify his claim to the throne, Ay needed to ensure that *all* of the gods saw that he was fulfilling his role as the rightful heir by preparing and overseeing the construction of his predecessor's funerary rituals. Tutankhamun's body represented the chance for Ay to not only honor Osiris, but also for him to honor Min and his ancestral roots. Ay started the veneration of his local god in addition to the national gods which allowed him to gain legitimacy to throne. This tact then set a precedent for later kings to follow.[113]

Conclusions

Death does not bring a loss of agency to an individual, rather it is transformed into a new form that has the ability to affect the living, either directly or indirectly. Tutankhamun's body became an object during the mummification process. The anomalies found in the mummification of Tutankhamun indicate an intentional manipulation of his body to transform it into a sacred image that represented chthonic gods. The manipulation occurred for two reasons. The first was to show the restoration of the traditional mortuary cults and practices. The second was to legitimize Ay's succession to the throne. In addition to proclaiming to the living his legitimacy to rule, Ay also had proclaimed his legitimacy to rule

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[110] Taylor 2001, 31–30.
[111] Riggs 2014, 89.
[112] It is of interest that there are no divine figures of Osiris or Min found amongst Tutankhamun's funerary assemblage. The divine figures are wooden figures referred as the 'divine ennead of the netherworld' and were wrapped in linen clothes, similar to the linen wrappings of Tutankhamun's mummified remains, see Reeves 1990, 130-131. It is possible

that Tutankhamun's remains represents the missing gods, especially Osiris, from the ennead.
[113] Dodson 2009, 112. Horemheb (ca. 1323-1295 BCE) was initially a general under Tutankhamun who eventually proclaimed himself king after Ay's death. In his coronation inscription, Horemheb honored the god, Horus of *Hnes*, a town from Middle Egypt, who had given him the divine right to ascend to the throne, see Baines 1995, 29.

to the gods, themselves, through the mortuary sphere.

Tutankhamun's body was intentionally manipulated into a statue that depicted multiple divine identities to help with Ay's legitimization as king. The ancient Egyptians believed that the body and its various spirits had direct access to the gods and could affect the lives of living. By actively manipulating Tutankhamun's body into a form that represented a plethora of gods, Ay was not only appeasing the gods and paying homage to the return to traditional religious practices, he was also asserting and legitimizing his succession to the throne. Tutankhamun's postmortem agency was a vital key in moving further away from the tumultuous Amarna period and securing Ay's claim to the throne.

Acknowledgements

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Sacred Landscape in Early Rome.
Preliminary Notes on the Relationship between Space, Religious Beliefs and Urbanisation

Vincenzo Timpano

Abstract: The relationship between strategies of territorial occupation and religious beliefs has been of great importance for ancient urbanisation, particularly during the early stages of the process. Strategies adopted during this more or less long period responded not only to economic considerations and functionality, but also to complex systems of religious beliefs, developed in correlation with the surrounding landscape. The position of public buildings, above all those of a sacred and/or sacred-political character, was never casual and has played an important role in creating a sacred-ritual landscape, a *fil rouge* which through processions and other forms of interaction connected different parts of a city.

With a specific regard to the city of Rome, this preliminary study highlights the formation of a sacred landscape at the beginning of the urbanisation process, between the end of the Iron Age and the Orientalising period.[1]

Introduction

The urbanisation processes that took place in the western part of the ancient Mediterranean world depended on a variety of diversified factors.[2] Between the final period of the Bronze Age and the early phases of the Iron Age, the Tyrrhenian region of the Italian peninsula experienced a series of long-lasting processes,[3] which resulted in the formation of large proto-urban centres – politically unified communities – located on large plateaus previously occupied by a series of villages.[4] By taking this development as a starting point, with a particular attention paid to the Orientalising period, one may note a progressive consolidation of the socio-political and sacred structure of these centres, a clear indication of the acquisition of the urban form,[5] i.e. more complex entities which may be defined as cities.

Starting from Fustel de Coulanges, researchers from different research areas have provided various definitions of what constitutes a city. Sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, historians of religions and economic development, archaeologists, etc. have tackled the issue from different angles and reached divergent conclusions.[6] Nevertheless, one may assume that a fundamental prerequisite for urban

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[1] The analysis of the dynamics that determined the establishment of the sacred within the urbanisation process of Rome is the main theme of the author's doctoral project.

[2] For a complete synthesis see Osborne – Cunliffe 2005.

[3] Pacciarelli 2001; Barbaro 2010; Pacciarelli 2009, 390–395; and Marino 2015, with references.

[4] About the reasons for this crucial change see Marino 2015, 100-103, with references.

[5] On the south Etruscan context cf. Marino 2015, 108–119; for Rome see Torelli 1989, Smith 2005, with references and Carafa 2014. On the formation of a new political structure promoted by aristocratic groups see Motta – Terrenato 2006, Terrenato 2011.

[6] An excellent summary of current research is the recent third volume of The Cambridge World History (Yoffee 2015), in which see in particular Yoffee – Terrenato 2015, with references.

development is a close interaction between po-
litical, religious and social factors,[7] and how
this conjunction has become associated with a
specific topography. In an effort to clarify the
relation between man, landscape and religious
beliefs, I intend to emphasize how the creation
of a sacred landscape has influenced early Ro-
man urbanisation. This involves the application
of a multidisciplinary approach, a combination
of anthropological, historic-religious and ar-
chaeological insights.

The city and its spaces – places

In the recent past, phenomena such as globali-
sation and the development of communications
have contributed to a breakdown of distances,
causing a progressive and inexorable shrinking
of the planet and, consequently, a redefinition
of the concept of space.[8] Space is relative and
varies according to the cultural context it is re-
ferring to. In order to avoid excessive specifi-
cations, researchers tend to distinguish space
from place. From an anthropological point of
view, "space" is simply a topographically lim-
ited area, defined by visible shapes and fea-
tures, while a "place" is defined as space trans-
formed by human interference – it has become
culturally animated.[9] Accordingly, place may
be defined as

- *identitary*, since it defines the identity
  of the individuals who inhabit it;

- *relational*, as it constitutes an area of
  social relationship in which members
  of a particular group live and interact;
- *historical*, since it is being shaped and
  transformed over time.

A place indicates the relationship individuals
maintain amongst themselves, with other hu-
man beings and with a shared, common past.[10]
The concept of place is thus related to culture,
which in its tangible aspect may be said to be
constituted by '*incisioni, tagli, pressioni, ab-
battimenti, scavi, perforazioni*' (incisions, cuts,
pressures, abatements, excavations, perfora-
tions), which concern humans and their behav-
iour and the places they inhabit.[11]

Furthermore, a distinction can be made be-
tween a profane and a sacred place. A sacred
place may thus be considered from an:
- (A) *autonomist perspective*,[12] meaning
  that the sacred place is not connected to
  any specific, social context, thus be-
  coming self-sufficient and trans-histor-
  ical;
- (B) *non-autonomist perspective*,[13] i.e.
  the sacred place is a result of the *sacral-
  isation* of a specific space, meaning that
  it is delimited, explained and venerated
  by humans;
  - (B₁), the sacred place may be
    considered as an illusion that

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[7] Such factors have been identified by different re-
searchers, e.g. Ampolo 1980, who refers to the defini-
tion of a city provided by ancient authors as well as to
the first modern attempt to define the issue, i.e. Fustel
de Coulanges. In his work *La Cité Antique* (1864), the
French historian stressed the idea that family struc-
tures and religious beliefs related to the ancestor cult
were fundamental elements for the development of an
ancient city. Starting from this situation more or less
extended family groups began to elaborate the idea of
private property to meet the need of burial grounds for
their dead. According to de Coulanges ancestral cults
were probably officiated by an adult male invested
with religious leadership. This basic structure was
eventually adopted on a larger scale, allowing for the
formation of larger settlement entities, i.e. cities where
the role and functions of a high priest were assumed
by a king. A re-examination of de Coulanges's

theories has been made by C. Ampolo (Ampolo 1980),
and by N. Terrenato in Yoffee - Terrenato 2015, 6–10.
For a critical analysis of de Coulanges's model see
also Momigliano 1984, as well as Finley 1977 and
Morris 1990.

[8] Augé 2007.

[9] See De Sanctis 2014, 143–146. Concerning the op-
position between place and space, and how a ritual
space is established see De Certeau 2001, 151 and
176–177.

[10] Augé 1993, 43–69.

[11] Remotti 1993, 47–48.

[12] Researchers referring to this perspective are for ex-
ample R. Hertz, J. Cassier, G. Van der Leeuw, M. Eli-
ade, M. Nilsson.

[13] Researchers referring to this perspective are for ex-
ample W. Robertson Smith, E. Durkheim, M.
Halbwachs, C. Geertz, F. Remotti, and I. Malkin.

has been rationalized through scientific analysis;

- (B₂), the sacred place is an illusion, which has become endowed with social consistency, thus assuming a great importance in the lives of individuals and of the society in which they live.

Scholars generally refer to perspective A by stating that a sacred place is not designated by humans, only discovered by them.[14] However, such a sacred place has certain features, topographic or otherwise, which connote it as such.

Scholars referring to perspective B affirm that a sacred place is created by humans and therefore a cultural product. For members of a specific social group a sacred place thus becomes a collective expression of their society. They need to believe in, and more specifically, localise specific beliefs that produce a spatial organisation that, according to E. Durkheim, corresponds to their social organisation.[15] A further development of this assumption was made by M. Halbwachs, who explained a sacred place by using the *cadres sociaux* theory,[16] describing how visible and lasting features of a such a place tend to secure the permanence of the collective memory of a social group. Accordingly, it is the durability of sacred places which contributes to preserving memory and tradition. Greek colonies of the Western Mediterranean apparently established sacred areas as signs of their permanence, something that appears to be demonstrated by the fact that several such places have been localised within areas previously destined for private housing.[17] With regard to sacred places it is important to establish dynamics defining them as such. Were they discovered and defined as natural abodes of divine presence, or were certain areas deliberately

established as, or transformed into sacred places? Or did the process combine both notions/strategies?

In accordance with the perspective B₂ mentioned above, a bilateral relationship apparently exists between the characteristics of a certain area and the religious beliefs that eventually were attached to it. The construction of a given building in a specific place transforms it into a defied space and may furthermore be considered as the ultimate result of the veneration of a locality that previously functioned as a place of interaction with the divine.[18]

The urbanisation of Rome: archaeological research and theories

The identification and construction of sacred places within a specific part of a city, or a landscape, especially in the ancient world, involved several, different factors. Due to the availability of various sources an endeavour to determine some of these factors may be done while investigating the urbanisation process of Rome and
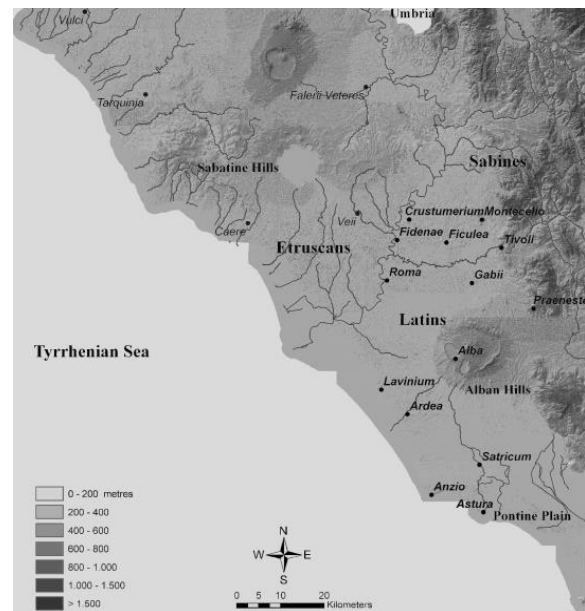

Fig. 1: Map of southern Etruria and *Latium Vetus* (after Fulminante – Stoddart 2010, 12 fig. 1).

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[14] Eliade 2001, 334–335, adhering to the theories of G. Van Der Leeuw.
[15] Durkheim 2005.
[16] Halbwachs 1997.

[17] Malkin 1987.
[18] De Sanctis 2014, 150-151, also for a perfect summary of the perspectives mentioned above.

the territorial context of central Tyrrhenian Italy.[19] (**fig. 1**)

Two main theories have so far dominated research into the origins of Rome's urbanisation. The *exogenous* theory considers the Palatine Hill to be the first inhabited nucleus which, through a linear process, gradually included the seven Roman hills. By the end of the 7th century BCE this process is assumed to have resulted in the formation of a city, which through influences from Greek culture developed into a fairly advanced political entity. Initially introduced by M. Pallottino,[20] this theory was soon accepted by many scholars.[21]

The *endogenous* theory considers the Palatine Hill to be part of a larger original settlement which, through the juridical-sacral acts connected to it, becomes a city. The first exponent of this theory was H. Müller Karpe, who suggested that Rome's urbanisation process was already completed by the second half of the 8th century BCE;[22] R. Peroni[23] and G. Colonna,[24] who also refer to this theory, assumed that Rome became a city after the assimilation of two independent settlements that previously existed on the Palatine and Quirinal hills. These two researchers assumed that the formation of the city can be dated to the second half of the 7th century BCE. G. Colonna has reconstructed the urbanisation process in different steps: by the end of the 9th century BCE the inhabited areas of the Palatine and *Velia* had extended, including the *Fagutal*, *Oppio* and *Cispio* mountains. At the same time an independent settlement system had developed at Capitoline and Quirinal hills, called *collino*. These two distinct areas merged gradually, something that is evidenced by the common renunciation of the future area of the *Forum* as a burial ground. From

that period onwards, new burial grounds emerged on the Esquiline and at the edges of the Quirinal hills.
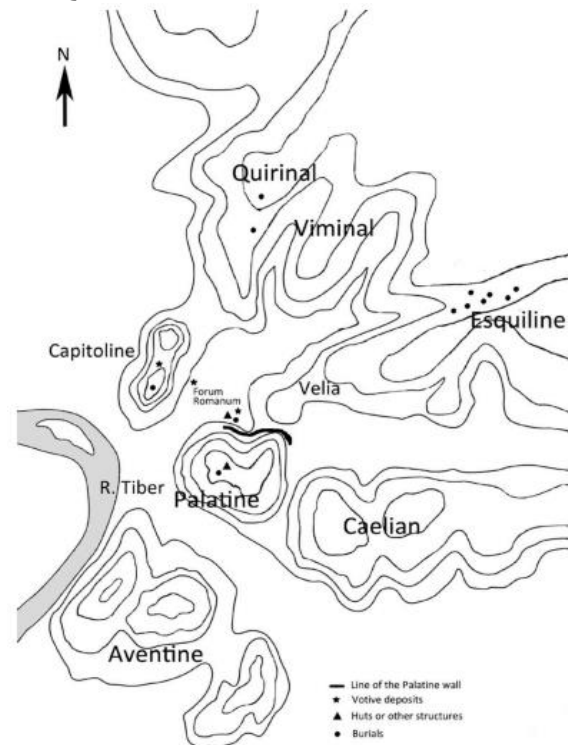

Fig. 2: Rome, schematic map with key areas of development by late 8th century BCE (after Lomas 2017, fig. 7).

At the same time, constructions began on the slopes of the Palatine and Capitoline hills, as well as in the valley between them. (**fig. 2**).

In the early stages of this gradual and long-lasting process, as well as in other areas of southern *Etruria*[25] and *Latium Vetus*,[26] graves of adults were removed from residential areas, while infant burials seem to have remained. Infant burials have been discovered in the area of the *Regia*[27] and of the *Domus regis Sacrorum*,[28] within huts in villages on Caesar's *Forum* and in the area of the temple of *Antoninus* and *Faustina*, as well as in villages located on the Palatine and the Capitoline hills.[29] The process was finished during the first half of the 7th

[19] For a complete synthesis cf. Fulminante 2014. See also Fulminante – Stoddart 2010.
[20] Pallottino 1960.
[21] Ampolo 2013, with references.
[22] Müller Karpe 1959; Müller Karpe 1962.
[23] Peroni 1960.
[24] Colonna 1964; Colonna 1974; Colonna 1976.
[25] Bartoloni – Benedettini 2008.
[26] De Santis – Fenelli – Salvadei 2008.
[27] Cf. Brocato 2016.
[28] Filippi 2008.
[29] Gusberti 2008.

century BCE; shortly after that the area of the *Forum* was paved and between the end of the 7th and early 6th century BCE, sacred and political buildings were erected, which was of crucial importance for the completion of the urban complex. All adherents to the *endogenous* theory trace the early stages of the urbanisation process of Rome and, thanks to a reconstruction made first by G. Colonna,[30] of the central Tyrrhenian Italy, back to the crucial passage from Bronze Age villages to the proto-urban centres of the Iron Age.[31]

The debate regarding the urban formation of Rome has involved several generations of researchers and continues in the light of recent discoveries.[32] Still on-going archaeological investigations along the North Slope of the Palatine (between *Porta Romanula* and *Clivo Palatino*) (fig. 3), initiated by the team of A. Carandini in the 1980s, have revealed new data which is highly relevant for any discussion concerning the issue.[33]
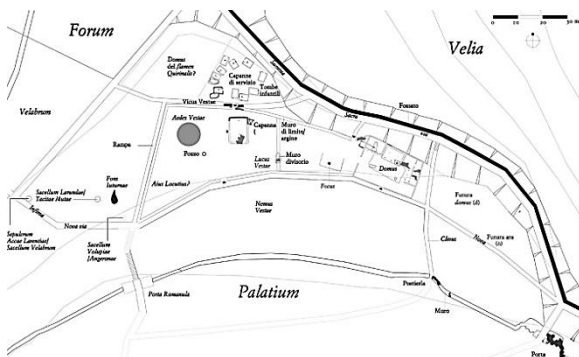

Fig. 3: Rome, *Forum – Palatium* between *Porta Romanula* and *Clivo Palatino* (after Carafa – Bruno 2013, 726 fig. 4).

Of particular interest are:
- the remains of a wall and a door located on the northern slopes of the Palatine,[34] which on

several occasions have been renovated between the middle of the 8th and the third quarter of the 6th century BCE. These structures have been related to rituals concerning the *inauguratio* of the Palatine Hill. In close association with them are different burials interpreted as sacrifices connected with several types of rituals. Related to the walls and the door is a road of crumbled tufa and pebbles;
- the remains of two walls in raw clay found in the area of the sanctuary of *Vesta*[35] have been stratigraphically dated to the third quarter of the 8th century BCE, preserving the same orientation even during subsequent renovations. Of these walls, one has been interpreted as constituting the outer boundary of the first sanctuary, while the other appears to be part of a 60 m^2 hut, which has been interpreted as the first residence of the Vestals;
- a rectangular building located to the east of the Vestal hut,[36] which has been rebuilt several times from the middle of the 8th century BCE. This building has been interpreted as a royal residence and a place for common meals. In connection with reconstruction activities, infant burials within *dolia* have been found, something that may indicate ritual activities connected to the recurrent changes of the structures;
- a sanctuary in *Summa Sacra Via*,[37] of which the first phase dates back to the middle of the 8th century BCE, was discovered in an area previously occupied by structures referable to an Iron Age village.

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[30] Colonna 1974.

[31] See the introduction of this paper. For an exhaustive discussion on the topic cf. Marino 2015.

[32] The first comprehensive picture of the ruins of archaic Rome dates back to a little over a century ago and is due to G. Pinza, who at that time proposed that the city of Rome was the result of a process that involved distinct settlements: Pinza 1905. More recent exhaustive syntheses, with different points of view and

goals, are Holloway 1994; Cornell 1995, Forsythe 2005, and Lomas 2017. Cf. also Coarelli 1983 and Hopkins 2016.

[33] Cf. Carandini – Carafa – D'Alessio – Filippi 2017.

[34] Carandini – Carafa 2000.

[35] For a complete edition of the excavation activities see Arvanitis 2010.

[36] Filippi 2008.

[37] Carafa – Arvanitis – Ippoliti 2013.

In addition to this new and important data, a complete review of some monuments and/or key contexts of the city was carried out. One of the most significant findings is documented on the western summit of the Palatine, the *Cermalus*. A large hut, dating back to the early Iron Age, was replaced by two smaller huts at around the mid-8th century BCE. Soon afterwards one of the huts was transformed into a larger hut with two rooms. On the basis of literary tradition, one of these structures has been interpreted as the *Casa-aedes Romuli* and the other as the seat of the cult of *Mars* and *Ops*.[38] Of great importance is also data related to refurbishment works in the area of the future *Forum*. Reviews of the stratigraphic sequence of the Boni – Gjerstad excavation have allowed for the documentation of the presence of a pebble floor dating back to the end of the 8th century BCE, well before what until now has been considered to be the first floor of the area.[39] More specifically the context consists of a considerable earth discharge of tufa and gravel flakes (layers 25-28 of the Boni – Gjerstad excavation) and another layer with a surface made by *ciottoli* (layer 24). These interventions were probably intended to be a first attempt to solve, at least temporarily, the problem of frequent flooding of the Tiber by raising the level of the area with about 1.40 m, also functioning as the first paving of the *Forum* (**fig. 4**).

The most ancient layers of the *Comitium*[40] have also been dated to the second half of the 8th century BCE;[41] the same date has been given to some artefacts found in the annexed stipe, perhaps connected to the cult of *Vulcan*. Other important findings connected with the most ancient phases of Rome's urbanisation have been
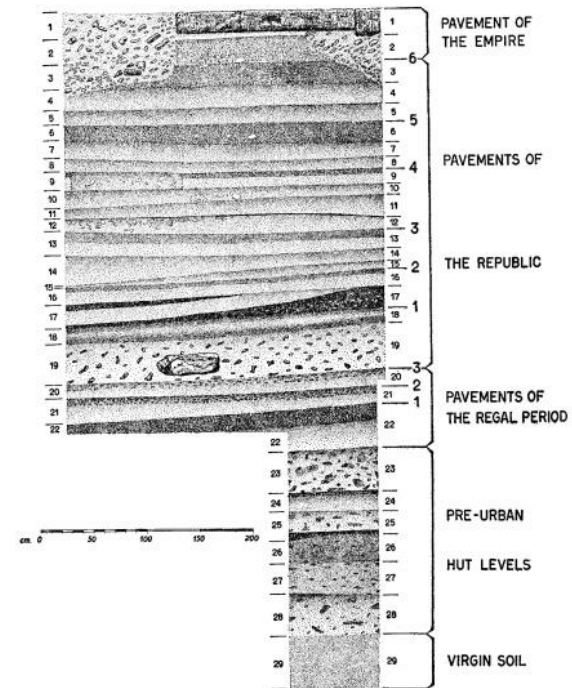

Fig. 4: Stratigraphic section of Boni – Gjerstad excavation in the *Forum Romanum* (after Gjerstad 1952, 61 fig. 1).

obtained during excavations in the area of the *Curiae Veteres*,[42] along the north-eastern slopes of the Palatine. The documented structures cover a period from the second half of the 7th century BCE to the late-antique period. However, findings and ritual activities make it possible to establish a first sacred frequentation of the area by the end of the 8th century BCE. A fragment of a ring-shaped *kernos*[43] made in *impasto bruno*, unparalleled among Roman findings, indicates that such ritual activities were already taking place during such an ancient period (**fig. 5**).

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[38] For the entire context cf. Brocato 2000, 284–287.
[39] For a stratigraphical reexamination see Filippi 2005.
[40] Carafa 1998; Carafa 2005, and Carafa 2017, where are summarized the recent discoveries.
[41] Specifically a hearth and a pavement delimited by a wall made of red tuff splinters. Structures dating back to the Latial period IIIB period, and two other reconstructions of the same paving connected to remains of steps, the latter structures dating back to the Latial

period IVA: Carafa 2017, 54–55. This increase in the chronology of the *Comitium* has been recently accepted by M. Torelli, who emphasizes that some ritual performances dating back to the 8th century BCE are in perfect analogy with the function of the *Comitium* of historical age, as place for penal *iudicia*: Torelli 2008, 69–72.
[42] Panella – Zeggio 2017.
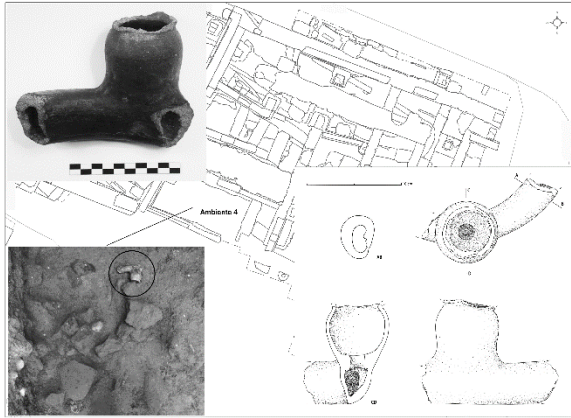[43] Panella – Zeggio 2017, 349–352.

Fig. 5: Rome, Curiae Veteres – Area II: fragment of a ring-shaped kernos (after Panella – Zeggio 2017, 352 fig. 8).

Other interesting data concern the road network. Several beaten roads have been found, indicating a route leading to the *Forum* area as early as by the end of the 8th century BCE.[44] Significantly, even the votive deposit of the *Promoteca Capitolina* on the Capitoline hill refers to the 8th century BCE;[45] this deposit has been interpreted as being connected to rituals carried out as part of the *inauguratio* of a sacred building, maybe that of *Jupiter Feretrius*.[46] Another important votive deposit is the one found on the Quirinal hill,[47] dating back to the 8th century BCE and possibly related to a structure recently found nearby.[48]

New data has been obtained through geomorphological studies. Recent investigations in the area of the Velabro have revealed that during the 8th century BCE the entire area was not a swamp, something that had generally been assumed. It was only a limited part of the area that had been marshy.[49] More specifically, stagnant waters have certainly been documented at the south-western corner of the Palatine, under the *Lupercal* (*Faunus/Lupercus*), and perhaps in the northwest corner, also in topographical continuity with the Palatine hill, where several liminal deities were located since the proto-urban

phase (*Tacita Muta*, *Acca Larentia*).[50] The presence of the cult of *Janus* near the brook could be an indication that the Velabro separated two settlements systems, the *collino* and the *montano*.[51] (**fig. 6**).
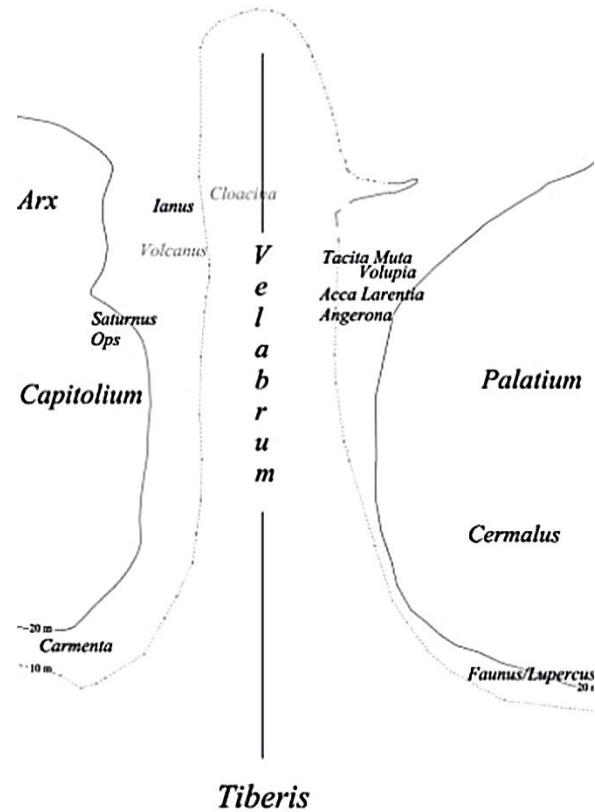

Fig. 6: Topographical scheme of the cults of the Velabro (after Filippi 2005, 97, fig. 2).

Lastly, waiting for unequivocal archaeological data, it is necessary to remember what literary sources refer to some ancient cults. Interesting observations have been made regarding the position of the *Ara Saturni* and of the *Ara Carmentis*: these *arae* were both located to the slopes of the Capitoline hill, and have been related to the proto-urban settlement located on

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[44] Zeggio 2013, 27.
[45] Gusberti 2005, 153.
[46] Carafa 2000, 69; contra Ampolo 1988, 158.
[47] Magagnini 2005, with references.
[48] Arizza 2015, 67–68.

[49] Ammermann – Filippi 2004, 14–19; Filippi 2005, 94–96.
[50] On the meaning of the swampy north-western corner of the Velabro see Filippi 2005, 96–99.
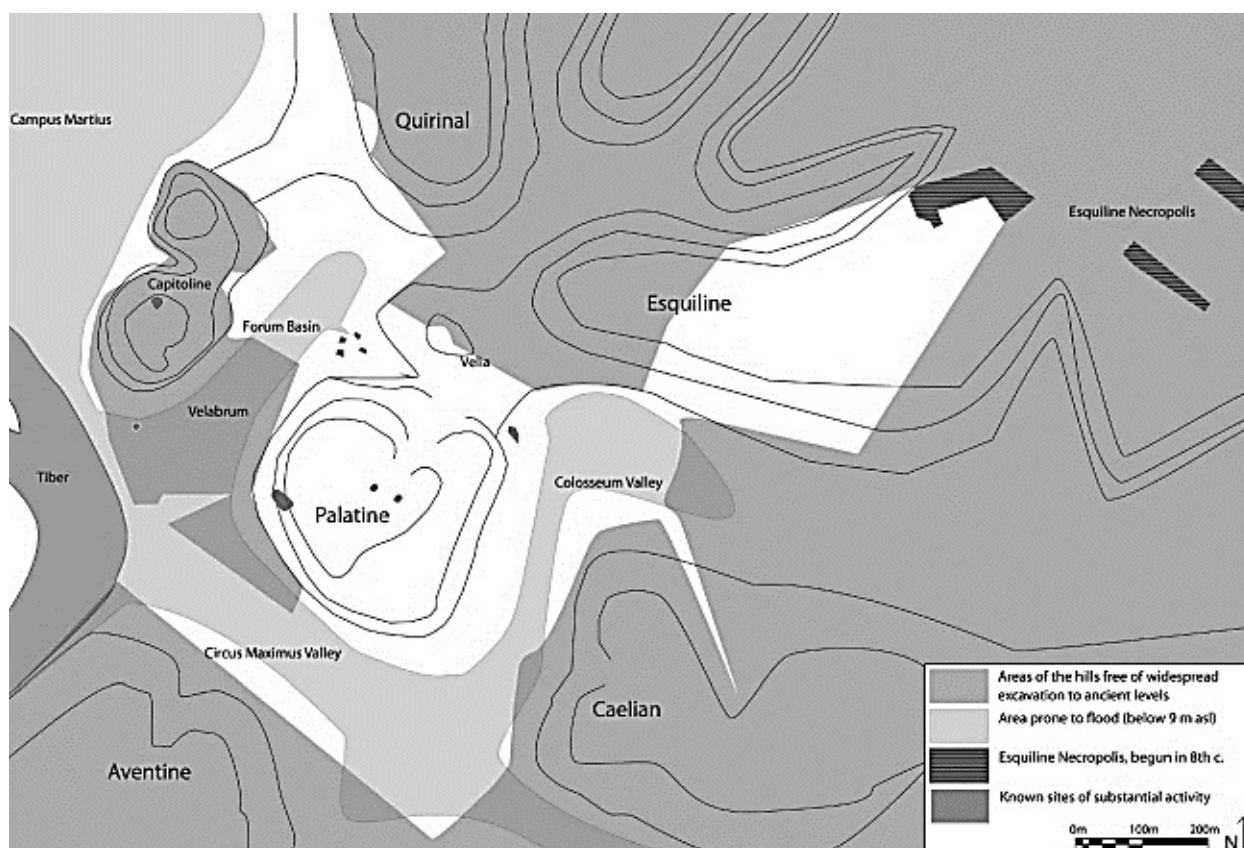[51] Filippi 2005, 96–98.

Fig. 7: Rome, schematic map with key areas of development by middle 7th century BCE (author after Hopkins 2016, 29 fig. 7).

the nearby hill.[52] The *Ara* of *Acca Larentia*, located at the north-western slopes of the Palatine hill, has likewise been connected to the proto-urban settlement on the nearby hill.[53] While taking into consideration these cults, as well as those of the *Ara Maxima Herculis* at the *Forum Boarium*, the *Ara Consi* in Circo Maximo and the *Ara Evandri* at the south-western slopes of the Aventine, it may be assumed that during the immediately following urban phase they constituted a system of cults related to the distinction between the urban area and the surrounding agricultural context.[54] As already stated, almost all these examples are documented only

by literary sources; nevertheless they have to be kept in due consideration.

Crucial urban features

Considering the archaeological features mentioned above it is easy to understand that recent data are of fundamental importance for a better understanding of the urbanisation of Rome.[55] In fact, all features date back to between the mid-8th and the beginning of the 7th century BCE, and document the development of an urban formation process already during this period.[56] Furthermore, archaeological data co-

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[52] Mazzei 2005, 69.
[53] Aronen 1989, 80–82.
[54] Rodriguez Almeida 1991, 44; see also Mazzei 2005, 67–73.
[55] Recent excavations have interested the *Comitium* (still unpublished they were presented at the conference "Il Comizio dei Re", held at the British School of Rome, on January 17th, 2017), the area of the *Curiae Veteres* (Panella – Zeggio 2017), as well as the sacred area of *S. Omobono* in the ancient *Forum Boarium*

(Diffendale *et al.* 2016, Brocato 2017), the Capitoline hill (Cazzella 2001), and the Quirinal hill (Arizza – Serlorenzi 2015). Important results have been obtained with a series of geological surveys carried out more or less recently at different points in the *Forum* Valley (Ammermann – Filippi 2004) and in the *Forum Boarium* (Brock – Terrenato 2016).
[56] For a complete reexamination of these data and of the entire debate on the urban formation of Rome see Carafa 2014. See also Terrenato 2011 and Cifani 2014.

incide with what is already known from literary-mythological sources.[57]

Accordingly, it is already now possible to substantiate in more detail than before the 'complexity and development around the *Forum*, Palatine and Capitoline'[58] and present 'evidence of political authority, communal cult activity, and the organization of public space.'[59] (**fig. 7**).

The process can be summarized as follows:
- sectors destroyed and replaced by new and different features (the Palatine);
- new structures emerged within spaces with a not particularly dense or a completely absent previous occupation (the area between Palatine and Capitoline);
- not much change occurs compared to previous periods (different sectors);
- areas featuring a special status (on the top of the Capitoline).

Apart from the particular situation of the Capitoline hill (cults places, production workshops, private housing), two general trends may be detected. Thanks to the recent excavations, we are now able to find areas with no continuity to what was previously attested, as well as areas where no change has been detected. P. Carafa has interpreted the first group as an indication of changes connected with the foundation/formation of the city, while discoveries connected with the other group may be considered as individual cases and may be interpreted within a more general framework.[60] C. Ampolo has considered the second group to indications of a delay in the completion of an urban formation

process, which was finalized by the end of the 7th century BCE.[61]

Differences cannot be random, they may rather be indications of well-defined strategies for the organization and definition of space, private and above all public. Features dating back from the end of the 8th to the first half of the 7th century BCE are of crucial importance:
- reorganization of the *Forum* valley which now includes interconnected sacred (*Vesta* sanctuary, *Volcanal*) and socio/political buildings (*Domus Regia*, *Comitium*);
- *inauguratio* of the Palatine Hill (wall), with the subsequent creation of a well-defined path around it, probably related to the *Lupercii* procession;[62]
- Capitoline Hill to be understood as a place with an increased sacred *status*, the principal seat of the city's political cults (*Iupiter Feretrius*);
- new development documented in the *Velabro* area (several chthonic cults);
- new configuration of the *Forum Boarium,* indicating a continuity with already more ancient commercial activities and cults related to them (*Carmenta*, *Ara Maxima Herculis*);
- continuity documented in other areas, which still are used as private spaces (Caesar's *Forum*);
- discontinuity documented on the Esquiline Hill (new burial grounds);
- existence of different paths connecting all territorial sectors.[63]

Since this evidence involves a wider territorial context it must also be linked to changes of the political/institutional situation. [64] These

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[57] Carandini 2006a; Carandini 2012.
[58] Smith 2012, 22.
[59] Cornell 2012, 20.
[60] Carafa 2014, 323–324.
[61] The continuity of use detected in some sectors such as the area where the *Forum* of Caesar eventually will be established and of the *Giardino Romano* on the Capitoline hill indicates a process constituted by different phases and in different districts of the inhabited aresa, cf. Ampolo 2013. Within both sectors, settlements are documented starting from the recent Bronze

Age: for the excavation at the Ceasar's *Forum* see De Santis *et al.* 2010, for those at the *Giardino Romano* see Cazzella 2001.
[62] For a re-examination of the *Lupercii* procession see Vuković 2017.
[63] On the ritual processions in archaic Rome see Coarelli 2005, with references. For a recent re-examination of the Argei procession see now Palombi 2017.
[64] On the ability of the Roman aristocratic groups to control a considerable amount of land see Terrenato 2011, 233–234.

characteristics could suggest the presence of a centralized authority, able to define territorial sectors of an entity that is no longer rural but may be considered as urban, i.e. a united, politically controlled entity.[65]

Unusual territorial context – well defined sacred landscape

The geomorphological characteristics of the territory provide a better understanding of the efforts made at this stage.

The environmental context of Rome is quite unique if compared to that of other cities in central Tyrrhenian Italy. Rome does not occupy a vast and naturally defended plateau, but developed on several hills, separated by valleys affected by seasonal flooding.[66] During the late Bronze Age and still during the Iron Age these natural characteristics were elements of a separation between the two villages *montano* and *collino*.[67] As stated above, in the proto-urban phase both villages demarcated their borders through the establishment of sacred places, i.e. *arae*, usually located on the extreme slopes of the hills. These sacred places can be understood as not only delimitations, but also as mediation zones.[68] More specifically, the valley between the two villages, used as a burial ground until the end of period IIA of the Latial culture (mid-9th century BCE), gained importance during the following urban phase, starting from the second half of the 8th century BCE. The abandonment of the funerary use of this area indicated the first step of a gradual process that transformed the valley into an important connecting sphere, i.e. the *Forum*. This district flanked by the Palatine and the Capitoline hills became an area in which political and religious spheres became explicit. Accordingly, Roman culture has been defined as a context where: '*il sacro primeggia*

sul politico, lo precede e lo fonda, tracciando la forma in cui il "politico" si dischiude' (the sacred prevails over the political, precedes and founds it, tracing the form in which the "political" opens up).[69] Buildings such as the *Comitium*, with the related cult of *Vulcan*, the *Domus Regia*, and the sanctuary of *Vesta* are representative examples of this typical Roman way of thinking.

As far as the Velabro, it is easy to understand its role of hinge element between the *Forum* and the fort by the Tiber,[70] more specifically the *Forum Boarium*. Through the development of this area, we may recognize a political program aimed at creating a large-scale, sacred entity. The foreign cult of *Herculis* at the *Ara Maxima*, located within a nearby extra-urban position, more precisely in an area connected with the mythical tale of *Herculis* and *Caco*, allows us to document a new feature of the use of space. In continuity with the ancient commercial vocation, the area between the ford and the north-western slopes of the Aventine hill can be understood as the first Roman emporium. This theme deserves further investigation, here it may already be emphasized that the development of such a site has enabled the interchange between different ethnic groups and an involvement with commercial traffic on a Mediterranean scale. The presence of sacred spheres indicates the fact that economic/political activities were often carried out under the auspices of religion.

The territorial reorganization involved the sacred places of the previous villages in a new wider system that, through the *Ara Consi* in *Circo Maximo* and the *Ara Evandri* on the south-western slopes of the Aventine, now include the areas between the Palatine and

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[65] See Hölscher 2005, 224–230.
[66] On the original morphology of Rome cf. Terrenato 1997.
[67] Cf. Cazzella 2001.
[68] On the notion of border in the Roman world and implications deriving from it, cf. De Sanctis 2015.

[69] Scheid 2004, 58.
[70] On the role of Rome as the main hub of the trade linked to salt as early as the Bronze Age see Giovannini 1985; Torelli 1993. For a synthesis on the importance of the Velabro cf. Filippi 2005, with references.

Aventine. An equally clear distinction of space is that related to the *Lupercii* procession; i.e. the so-called *Pomerium Romuli*,[71] described in literary sources, which furthermore implied the *inauguratio* of the Palatine hill.

Accordingly, from the second half of the 8th century BCE, a distinction of space may be detected within the urban context and also between the urban and the extra-urban territorial context. This distinction was obtained through the establishment of several sacred places located at strategic points.

Cultural time and spatial significance

While considering the urbanisation processes of the Greek *poleis* it has been observed that improved abilities to articulate space 'imply three aspects of cultural time: (1) the unstable political present in the agora; (2) the timeless eternity of the gods in the sanctuaries; and (3) the normative memory of the past in the burial grounds'.[72] While relating these insights to Rome's urbanisation process it appears as if they all may be applied. A connection between the present of the politics and the eternity of the gods is documented through a strong relationship that allow to unite (*Comitium* and *Volcanal*) and to approach (*Domus Regia* and the *Vesta* sanctuary) these two concepts of time, which evidently were perceived as being closely related to each other. It is furthermore possible to discern a connection to the memory of the past, evidenced by some liminal/chthonic sacred places located in the area between the Velabro and the slopes of the Palatine, which were probably not only related to the swampy liminal context in which they were located,[73] but also to memories of the previous use of the area as a burial ground.[74] As we have seen, it would seem that there was in fact a sort of principle of attraction between space and divinities

according to which every divinity was located in a space, or rather in a place, congenial to its sphere of competence.

A historical-religious approach makes it furthermore possible to identify the complex process of definition of space, which seems to be connected to, and sanctioned by, religious beliefs contextualized within the places connected to them.

Sacred places were considered by the Romans as proof of the authenticity of the type of narratives, which by Latin authors were defined as *fabulae*.[75] These are tales that when referring to specific places explain the origin and the formation of the city. Accordingly, there is a close relationship between actual places and *fabulae*. The topography of Rome is constituted by places connected with the *fabulae*, as well as the significance/credibility of the *fabulae* is confirmed by the actual presence of such places.[76]

Literary sources have transmitted different stories dealing not only with the foundation of Rome, but also with the establishment of sacred places, which have been archaeologically documented. The subject is far too complex for the scope of this paper, and it may suffice to mention that some scholars have recently addressed the issue.[77]

However, in the context of recent archaeological discoveries related to urban development and sacred space, some deserve to be mentioned. The discoveries on the western summit of the Palatine, the so-called *Cermalus,* which have been dated to mid-8th century BCE, may be related to written sources. The findings constitute a foundation pit and an *ara*, interpreted by some scholars to be the *Roma Quadrata*,

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[71] Cf. De Sanctis 2007, with references.

[72] Hölscher 2012, 175.

[73] Filippi 2005, 96–98, fig. 2.

[74] These cults were also connected to the previous situation of the area when it was used as a burial ground: Hölscher 2005, 226.

[75] On the meaning of the term see Bettini 2014, with references.

[76] Of fundamental importance Bettini 2014, 101–106.

[77] Carafa 2006a, 153–243, Carafa 2006b, 373–452, Bettini 2014, 94–106.

mentioned by Ovid,[78] as well as two small huts nearby. One of these has been assumed to be the *Casa-aedes Romuli*, while the other one, which later expanded into a larger hut with two rooms, might have been the seat of the royal cult of *Mars* and *Ops*, which is also mentioned in antique sources.[79] Another important archaeological discovery that appears to be confirmed by written sources is the sanctuary of the *Curiae Veteres*, by *Tacitus* mentioned as a vertex of the *Pomerium Romuli*.[80] Recent archaeological excavations have also identified the first establishment of the *Comitium* and, consequentially, the adjacent seat of the cult of *Vulcan*, erected shortly after the mid-8th century, confirms what has been known from the literary sources.[81]

The establishment of another sacred place of particular importance has been dated to the third quarter of the 8th century BCE. It is a sanctuary erected near a gate of the Palatine walls, perhaps the *Porta Mugonia*, and it has reasonably been identified as the temple of *Jupiter Stator*.[82]

The assumption of a close relationship between sacred places and *fabulae* has contributed to an understanding of how a religious notion is created and preserved. Religious notions become fixed in the collective memory[83] of a group through visible and lasting features of places that, through their static nature contribute to preserve it.[84] As well as they make narratives, like the Roman *fabulae*, credible at least at the level of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*).

Conclusions

Between the Final Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age, long-lasting processes have allowed several villages of central Tyrrhenian Italy to reach the urban form, through a gradual establishment of socio-political, economic, and religious structures.

Taking into account specific contextual differences, a similar development has been documented for Rome. From the 9th century BCE onwards, one may follow the various steps of this process. The shared renouncing of a funerary use of the valley in the future *Forum* constituted a first indicator of this development. The process continued from the half of the 8th century BCE with the establishment of a well-defined sacred and socio-political topography. The royal residence and the two related *sacraria* of *Mars* and *Ops* on the Palatine hill and the *Curiae Veteres* on its north-eastern slopes, as well as the *Vesta* Sanctuary and the *Comitium/Volcanal* in the area of the future *Forum*, the possible temple of *Jupiter Feretrius* on the Capitoline hill, and a ritual activity on the Quirinal hill, are all indications of an important phase in the urbanisation process. The portions of walls documented at various points at the base of the Palatine hill, dating back to the same period, are also part of this process. This reorganization was followed by other additions and modifications, like the sanctuary of *Jupiter Stator*, which was built one generation later close to one of the city gates. The first paving of the area of the *Forum*, can also be documented to the end 8th century BCE.

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[78] Ov. fast. 4, 817-836. Bruno 2010a, 287–296.

[79] Dion. Hal. ant. 1 79, 10-11. Carafa 2006b, 429–430; Bruno 2010b, 297–302.

[80] Tacitus, ann. 12, 24. De Sanctis 2007.

[81] Plut. Rom 19, 7. For a summary of the recent discoveries cf. Carafa 2017, 54–55.

[82] Liv. 1 12, 3–6; Dion. Hal. ant. 2, 50, 3; Carafa – Arvanitis – Ippoliti 2013.

[83] According to H. Cancik, the collective memory of the early Roman community was represented by the knowledge of a system of connected signs such as

monuments, spaces and rites, which constituted a sacred landscape: Cancik 1985. That monuments of Republican and Imperial Rome may be understood as places of memory see also Beard 2000; Hölkeschamp 2014; Hölscher 2014; Wiseman 2014. On the relationship between archaic monuments and collective memory in mid-republican Rome cf. Cifani 2018, with references.

[84] On the socio-constructive character of memory, identified by Halbwachs, cf. Assmann 1997; Bettini 2012, 55–59.

To sum up, urbanisation progressed step by step, whit the creation of different cultural markers through which it has been possible to characterize the space. In other words, a space was transformed into a place, or better, into many anthropological places that for the ancient Romans became aspects of society, identity, relations and historical consciousness. These distinct places were never understood as isolated entities, but had always been connected to each other, often through ritual processions that forged the contact between different territorial sectors. These well-defined sacred connections were perfectly contextualized in the particular natural landscape of Rome, a larger territorial entity, which from this period onwards may be considered as urban.

An understanding of early urbanisation processes may gain a lot from a consideration of the establishment of sacred places and their connection to politics, communication and socialization. As we have seen, the thoughts and considerations on sacred and profane spaces have in fact, strictly interacted with and contributed to urban development.[85]

Acknowledgements

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[85] During the publication process of this paper the exhibition catalogue "La Roma dei Re. Il racconto dell'archeologia" has been published. The interesting articles contained therein have therefore not been considered.

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Kurzes Editorial zum Thema „Mensch und Gesellschaft"

Hannelore Agnethler, Nina Gschwind, Anahita Mittertrainer

Nahezu alle akademischen Fachbereiche befassen sich mit dem Thema „Mensch und Gesellschaft". Die Herausgeberinnen der Ausgabe des *Distant Worlds Journals* von 2018 griffen das Thema mit der Intention auf, um aufzuzeigen, wie komplex der Sachverhalt ist und dass verschiedene andere Gebiete damit zur Sprache kommen. Der Anspruch bestand darin, die ganze Bandbreite menschlichen Lebens und Handelns zur Sprache zu bringen. Deshalb wurde der Rahmen bewusst offen gehalten. Die, von den Herausgeberinnen forcierte, Spannweite des Themas führte jedoch nicht zu der erhofften Vielfalt an Einsendungen. Auf den *Call for Papers* kam eine überschaubare Anzahl an Artikeln zurück und davon haben es, bis auf einen, sämtliche Artikel nicht durch den Review-Prozess geschafft.

Obwohl wir bedauern, dass die Ausgabe „Mensch und Gesellschaft" nicht auf die Art und Weise, die wir uns gewünscht hätten, erscheint, freuen wir uns, dass der Artikel von Nicholas D. Cross in der neuen Ausgabe des DWJs publiziert wird.

Die Studie von Nicholas D. Cross beleuchtet einen ökonomischen Aspekt der übergeordneten Thematik von „Mensch und Gesellschaft" und widmet sich dem Sachverhalt der Münzprägung in Byzanz sowie ihrer chronologischen Datierungsproblematik ins 5. bzw. 4. vorchristliche Jahrhundert. Im Fokus liegen die Beziehungen zwischen den Stadtstaaten Athen und Byzanz.

Die Herausgeberinnen gehen davon aus, dass das Thema „Mensch und Gesellschaft" in einer der nächsten Ausgaben von DWJ wieder zur Sprache kommt und wünschen den Lesern und Leserinnen eine anregende und fruchtbare Lektüre.

Silver Coinage, Symmachia, and Interstate Society. Byzantion and Athens in the Classical Age

Nicholas D. Cross

Abstract: Byzantion was one of the few Greek cities that did not issue its own silver coinage until late into the Classical period. There is considerable debate over the dating of the first issues (late fifth century or early fourth century BCE), a debate with consequences for the interpretation of the politico-economic relationship between Byzantion and Athens. The first section of the article reviews the conditions under which Byzantion was an ally of Athens before the appearance of its silver coinage. The second section examines the numismatic evidence which points to an early fourth-century BCE context for the coinage. This later date is supported by epigraphic and literary evidence for the reestablishment of alliance (symmachia) ties with Athens, the subject of the final sections of the article. This historical context for Byzantion's silver coinage suggests a period of close relations with Athens. This case study generates material for the interpretation of the Classical Greek interstate society.

How was it that autonomous political entities collaborated in the interstate affairs of ancient Greece? Without a regulatory institution to oversee and manage the activity between states, why would one independent community choose to align its foreign policy with that of another? In the case of asymmetrical partnerships, what were the determining factors for the smaller powers to cooperate with larger? In those situations during the Classical period when hegemonic powers directed interstate affairs according to their own geopolitical goals, was interstate relations reduced to the aphorism, "the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must"? In response to such questions, one might reply that ancient Greece was an agonistic society, in which individuals and states approached all manner of life activities as though they were in constant competition. This view, however, is a generalization. Although competition was a permeable influence, the ancient Greek ethos was not entirely combative. To a significant degree, the Greeks also engaged in collaborative efforts that brought mutual benefits for the parties involved.[1] How, then, can these two forces – competitive and cooperative – be harmonized in the study of Classical Greek interstate relations? This article seeks to do this with a reexamination of the relationships between Byzantion and Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

During the Classical period, Byzantion, situated at an economically favorable position on the Bosporus Strait, often found itself as a pawn in the designs of the larger powers (Athens, Sparta, Thebes, and Macedon). This article opens with a brief review of the history of Athens's exploitation of Byzantion, a subordinate ally within the Delian League structure in the fifth century BCE, a situation that lasted until Byzantion's successful revolt from Athenian control in 411 BCE. Byzantion makes only occasional appearances in the literary record for this time but, fortunately for the modern scholar, there is material evidence that can amplify the understanding of Byzantion's new position as a player in interstate affairs after its revolt. The second section of the arti-

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[1] Giovannini 2007; Lebow 2007, 349-412; Low 2007; Ober 2015, 45-70.

cle explores Byzantion's first issues of silver coinage. There is considerable debate over the dating of these coins. Many, following Edith Schönert-Geiss, position them close to the revolt in 411 BCE. Others, following Georges Le Rider, think they appeared in the early fourth century BCE. It is argued here that the date for these coins has consequential implications for the interpretation of the relations between the two states. Although unequal in terms of geopolitical status and power, they came to establish connections of mutuality. For example, as the final sections of the article explain, there is documentary evidence for official alliance (*symmachia*) ties between Byzantion and Athens in the early fourth century BCE. This evidence confirms that the context for Byzantion's first silver coinage is one of *autonomia* and of alliance renewal with Athens in the early fourth century BCE and not of revolt in the late fifth century BCE.

Since one's theoretical preconceptions about the nature of interstate relations can have an impact on the interpretation of this first series of silver coinage, it is important at this point to make a few prefatory comments on the interstate society model. Until recently, historians and political scientists interpreted interstate relations –ancient and modern – through the lens of Realism, a model which holds that genuine collaboration is impossible because the world is in a condition of endemic conflict and competition. Dismissing ideological or moral concerns as irrelevant to the actual operation of interstate affairs, Realists assert that states view every other state as a potential rival and therefore not to be trusted. In this atomistic scenario, states, acting according to pragmatism and self-interest, only reluctantly cooperate with other states.[2] Of course, theoretical models are by nature simplifying, and not all scholars are convinced that states invariably conduct their affairs according to these zero-sum conditions. One such alternative perspective is the interstate society model (of the so-called English School of international relations theory) which calls for as much attention to cooperation as to competition between states. This model affirms the possibility of true collective interstate action. Whereas material concerns undoubtedly play a role in the direction of foreign affairs policies, ideology also figures into these complex processes. Rather than a static structure of states whose activities are systemically predetermined, this model depicts a dynamic society of states, in which members cooperate with as well as compete against one another. Through regular collaboration and intercommunication, the states of this macro-society develop common norms, institutions, and interests, which in turn stimulate further cooperation.[3] In fact, at an etymological level, 'society,' derived from the Latin *socius* (companion, ally) and *societas* (community, alliance), extends the connotation beyond the domestic community to global social networks. When applied to the subject of this article, therefore, the interstate society model offers a more comprehensive view than those of other models of the political and monetary relationships between Byzantion and Athens in the Classical period.

Fifth Century BCE: Exploitation and Revolt

Byzantion, a Greek colony founded on the Bosporus Strait in the mid-seventh century BCE, was positioned advantageously to play an important role in the interstate society of ancient Greece.[4] This role, however, turned out to be an exploitative one and not in the

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[2] Examples of the various views under the school of Realism are Gilpin 1987; Mearsheimer 2001; Morgenthau 1948; Walt 1987; Waltz 1979. An explicit attempt to apply Realism to ancient Greek (and Mediterranean) interstate relations is Eckstein 2008.

[3] Bull 1977; Buzan 2004; Watson 1992; cf. Dunne 1998.

[4] Foundation: Hdt. 4.144.2; Strabo 7.6.2; Tac. *Ann*. 12.63; Robu 2014, 248-292. Russell 2017, 205-241 disccusses the Megarian colonization of Byzantium along with other foundation narratives. Geography: Polyb. 4.38. 43-44; Archibald 2013, 237-245; Russell 2017, 19-51.

colony's favor. Its location attracted more and more settlers from other areas until the original colonists – from Megara but possibly from elsewhere as well – were fighting the newcomers as well as neighboring peoples. In the first quarter of the fifth century BCE, Byzantion came under brief periods of occupation by foreigners – Histiaios of Miletus, the Persians, and the Spartan Pausanias – who recognized the commercial advantages of seizing ships sailing in and out of the straits.[5] Sometime after the Greek victory over the Persians in 479 BCE and Athens's subsequent increased involvement in the north Aegean, Byzantion became one of the first members of the Delian League. Thucydides reports, with deliberate overstatement, that the initial arrangements between Athens and its allies (*symmachoi*) were on an equal basis.[6] As for Byzantion, it first contributed ships to the League but later switched to paying tribute (*phoros*), as the Athenian Tribute Lists reveal payments from Byzantion of as much as 15 talents annually throughout the 450s and 440s BCE. The collection of *phoros* was done by Athenian authorities and permitted the Athenians to interfere in local Byzantine matters.[7] Consequently, *phoros* became a symbol of Athenian imperialism, and there is no doubt that in the mid-fifth century BCE Byzantion stood in a position of subordination to Athens. The structure of the interstate society at the time was restrictive and in the favor of Athens. Thus, in 440 BCE, along with Samos, Byzantion made an unsuccessful attempt to revolt.[8] Thereafter, the Athenians increased Byzantion's *phoros* payments to as much as 21 talents annually, one of the highest rates among the allies. Athens also stationed a garrison at the straits to protect the flow of traffic and revenue. Vincent Gabriel-

sen estimates that at this time the profit to Athens reached 40 to 50 talents each year, raising the total annual contribution from Byzantion to nearly 70 talents.[9] By the last quarter of the fifth century BCE, Athens prospered greatly and began to use its control of the straits to ensure a reliable access to Black Sea grain for its large population.[10] The importance of Byzantion to Athens was considerable, and when Byzantion finally succeeded in defecting, it was a great loss to the Athenians.

The next opportunity to break free came in 411 BCE. When it became known that the Athenian fleet had been destroyed in Sicily, Byzantion revolted and joined the Spartans.[11] It is precisely at this point that many scholars, following Edith Schönert-Geiss's important 1970 study of Byzantion's earliest coinage, place the origins of the city's silver coins.[12] In this dating schema, even though Byzantion accepted the equally harsh rule of the Spartans, the act of minting the new coinage was, *inter alia*, a strong assertion of political sovereignty and liberation from the economic domination inherent in an alliance with Athens. Yet, even though the relationship between Athens and Byzantion thus far was characterized as one of subordination and exploitation of the latter, the numismatic evidence, on its own, does not substantiate Schönert-Geiss's dating. One must also accept that political *autonomia* and minting coins were inextricable and that Athenian allies were never permitted to mint their own coins – two notions that have been discredited by the works of Thomas Martin and Thomas Figueira.[13] The 411 BCE context fits

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[5] Early conflicts: Arist. *Pol.* 1303a33-34; Polyb. 4.45.1. Histiaios: Hdt. 6.5.3. 26.1. Persians: *ibid.* 6.33.2. Pausanias: Thuc. 1.94-95.4. 128.5-131.1; Demir 2009, 59-68.
[6] Thuc. 1.96-99.
[7] Nixon – Price 1990, 152-158. *Phoros*: Meiggs 1972, 234-254.
[8] Thuc. 1.115.5. 117.3.

[9] Gabrielsen 2007, 296.
[10] In 411 BCE the Spartan King Agis, after noticing ships from the Black Sea sailing into the Piraeus, ordered Clearchus to the Bosporus to sever Athens's connection with northern grain route (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.35-36). On the importation of Black Sea grain into Athens during the fifth century BCE, see Braund 2007, 39-68; Moreno 2007, 144-208.
[11] Thuc. 8.80.3; Diod. Sic. 13.34.2.
[12] Nixon – Price 1990, 153-154; Russell 2017, 72. 207. 221; Schönert-Geiss 1970, 3-55.
[13] Figueira 1998; Martin 1985.

when one accepts, *prima facie*, that power politics is the primary determiner in foreign policy decisions. The interstate society model, however, would question whether the context of revolt is the only available option. Admittedly, there was resentment against Athens among certain segments of the Byzantine citizenry, but collaboration continued between the two peoples into the fourth century BCE (see below). A closer inspection of the coins and the proposed dates of their minting sheds further light on the nature of the politico-economic relationship between Byzantion and Athens in the Classical period and on the changes which the Greek interstate society underwent in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE.

Byzantion's Silver Coinage

Although nearby cities minted coins, in various metals and denominations, from the Archaic period, Byzantion was a late-comer in the region to the practice of minting silver coinage. According to Aristophanes, Byzantion was still using iron for its domestic economic transactions even as late as the end of the fifth century BCE.[14] Throughout the fifth century BCE ships had paid tolls at the straits, and Byzantion had paid *phoros* to Athens, yet the city possessed no silver coinage of its own. It is unlikely that this is because of a prohibition against Athenian allies minting their own silver coinage, since this does not account for the nonexistence of silver coinage even before Byzantion's membership in the Delian League. Rather than the constraints of the fifth-century BCE interstate society, one likely explanation for the late appearance of Byzantine silver coinage lies in geography. There were no local silver resources available to Byzantion, with the closest being Astyra, about 250 miles to the southwest. More importantly, on account of taxes on goods passing through the straits, there was a steady flow of foreign silver, gold, and electrum coinage that came into the city

and which could be employed in internal economic transactions.[15] And if this is the case, then it may be, as Thomas Figueira suggests, that Byzantion would not mint its own silver coins until the Peloponnesian War, when the combatants moved their fighting into the north Aegean, disrupted the traffic through the strait and made it necessary for Byzantion to mint its own autonomous issues.[16] But how long after that disruption would it take for the city, possessing foreign metals in reserve and remaining occupied with the vicissitudes of the prolonged war, to do that: immediately after the revolt in 411 BCE or even later? A close inspection of the coins themselves can provide more evidence upon which to pinpoint the initial date of minting.

Fig. 1: Early Byzantine Silver Drachm (5.09g) (ANS 1966.75.53).

The typology of the earliest issues **(Fig. 1)** corresponds to the city's location and history. The obverse invariably depicts a cow (or ox) standing above a dolphin, the significance of which has been a source of some disagreement. Many consider the cow to represent the wealth of the territory surrounding Byzantion, and the dolphin its maritime activity.[17] Thomas Russell, however, has recently revived the nineteenth-century view that the imagery alludes to the mythic crossing of the Bosporus (lit. 'cow crossing') by Io, who was transformed into a cow and later became the grandmother of Byzas, the legendary founder

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[14] Ar. *Nub.* 249; cf. Crawford 1982, 276; Oeconomides 1993, 77.

[15] Kyzikene staters circulated widely in the region during the fifth century BCE (Laloux 1971, 31-69; Newskaja 1955, 51). On the import of metals to Byzantion and elsewhere in ancient Greece, see Bissa 2009, 67-96.

[16] Figueira 1998, 62. See note 11.

[17] Schönert-Geiss 1966, 174-182.

of the city.[18] The obverse is also often accompanied with the archaic legend BY, the first two Greek letters of Byzantion. This archaizing is continued onto the reverse with the incuse square of mill-sail pattern, with a few that are also accompanied with a trident.[19]

Scholarly debate over the dating of the earliest autonomous silver issues revolves around the sequence of the weight standards upon which the coins were minted. They were struck on either the Persian weight standard (siglos of 5.55 g) or the Chian (tetradrachm of 15.3 g). In terms of the general chronology of Greek coinage, the former appeared first, derived from the coinage of the Lydian empire, and became common throughout western Asia Minor during the Classical age. The Chian weight came later but by the early fourth century BCE it was circulating widely among Aegean cities.[20] It is noticeable that the coins were not struck on the Attic standard. It is also true that a decision to mint on a particular standard might have reflected a political or economic preference of the minting authority,

much as the process of dollarization does in the modern world. Aligning the weight standard of a city's coinage with that of other cities facilitated the circulation of money; it reduced or eliminated fees and delays from currency conversion.[21] And this was the case in the choice of weight for Byzantion's ΣYN coinage (discussed below). But for the autonomous issues, the key question is chronology: which came first, the Persian or Chian weight coins? The evidence for coins on both standards comes from six hoards (**Fig. 2**).

Four hoards contain Persian weight coins. The first, *IGCH* 1259, a hoard found in Cilicia sometime before 1914, contains 141 silver coins, five of which are Byzantine. The weight of each of the Byzantine coins, 5.35 g, equals a Persian siglos. Their typology is regular with the cow-dolphin type on the obverse and an incuse square on the reverse. Numismatist E.T. Newell supposed that they were minted before 394 BCE on the basis of comparison with the Chalcedonian coins that were in the same hoard.[22] This year – seventeen years after the

Hoard	Date of Deposition	Number of Coins	Standard	Denominations
IGCH 1259; CH 9.391	380 BCE	5	Persian	hemidrachms
IGCH 724	340-335 BCE	5	Persian	drachms
IGCH 725	340-335 BCE	84	Persian	drachms, triobols, and diobols
CH 1.31	mid-4th century BCE	15+	Persian	staters, drachms, hemidrachms
IGCH 716	mid-350s BCE	1	Chian	tetradrachm
IGCH 723	340-335 BCE	38	Chian	drachms, hemidrachms

Fig. 2: Hoards Containing Early Byzantine Silver Coinage.

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[18] Russell 2012, 133-138; 2017, 48-51.
[19] Schönert-Geiss 1970 is the most complete collection of early Byzantine coins.
[20] Meadows 2011, 273-295. Kraay 1976, 329-330 lists the weight standards used by Greeks in the Archaic and Classical periods.

[21] For examples of joint monetary arrangements among Greek cities, see Mackil – van Alfen 2006; van Alfen 2014, 631-652.
[22] Newell 1914, 7-8.

411 BCE revolt and eleven years after Byzantion welcomed the Spartan Lysander – is also when Byzantion and Athens were enemies, supporting the notion that the impetus for this coinage was liberation from Athenian domination. As mentioned earlier, Schönert-Geiss dated the first coins, which she believed were on the Persian weight, to 411 BCE. But either date – Newell's 394 BCE or Schönert-Geiss's 411 BCE – supposes that Byzantion was prohibited from minting its own silver coinage while it was an Athenian ally and that the new coinage was emblematic of Byzantion's liberation from Athenian control.

Georges Le Rider, however, argued that the content of *IGCH* 1259 hoard was unreliable because some coins were missing and perhaps some were added before Newell inspected it. It is also possible that *IGCH* 1259 is two hoards mixed together.[23] Accordingly, Le Rider was led to dismiss this hoard's authenticity and its reliability for dating the Persian weight coins. Le Rider preferred two other hoards containing Byzantine coins on the Persian weight: *IGCH* 724 and *IGCH* 725. The first, buried in Asia Minor around the year 340 BCE, is a large hoard with about 500 silver coins. Of the five which are Byzantine, four are on the Persian weight and in excellent condition, indicating that their minting was not as far back as 394 BCE (Newell) or 411 BCE (Schönert-Geiss), but much closer to the date of deposition (i.e., the mid-fourth century BCE). Moreover, one of the five coins, a hemidrachm on the Chian weight, was significantly more worn than the others, which suggested to Le Rider that the Chian weight standard was older than the Persian for Byzantine coinage.[24] Le Rider could also point to evidence from *IGCH* 725, a hoard with the same date of deposition as *IGCH* 724, and to *CH* 1.31, a hoard of at least 15 coins of different denominations on the Persian weight,

neither of which contradicts his sequence of the Chian weight coins coming before the Persian ones.[25]

But when did Byzantion first mint on the Chian weight? Examples of these coins are in two hoards: *IGCH* 716 and *IGCH* 723. Of a total of 41 silver coins in *IGCH* 716, there is one Byzantine tetradrachm (15.27 g). Its obverse has the cow-dolphin type with the unique addition of a trident under the cow's front leg, and an incuse square on the reverse. Numismatist E.S.G. Robinson established that this hoard, which was from either Thrace or Thasos, was buried in the mid-350s BCE, when Philip II of Macedon was campaigning in the north.[26] He also suggested that the origin of this issue comes just after 386 BCE and the conclusion of the King's Peace, a treaty that provided autonomy to most Aegean Greek cities and thus greatly influenced the shape of the new interstate society of the fourth century BCE. The post-386 BCE date for the Chian weight coins is most probable, though it must be pointed out that Robinson derives it from the supposition that the operation of a mint was prohibited without political autonomy – thus, Robinson concluded, the coins could not appear before the peace in 386 BCE. The second hoard, *IGCH* 723, contains 134 coins, of which 3 drachms and 35 hemidrachms are Byzantine coins on the Chian weight.[27] The obverse imagery is regular, except one drachm has the trident under the cow's front legs. The reverse of the drachms contains an incuse square, and the hemidrachms the trident (**Fig. 3**). This hoard was buried in Thasos around 340 BCE, the year of Philip II's failed attack on Byzantion. There is nothing in this last hoard that contradicts the proposed date for the

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[23] Davesne 1989, 162-165; Le Rider 1963, 46-47.
[24] Le Rider 1963, 11-15. 46-47. Schönert-Geiss 1970, 39 disputes Le Rider's attribution of the Persian weight standard.

[25] Le Rider 1971, 149 also based much of his case on the evidence of *IGCH* 1365, a hoard of 219 Byzantine hemidrachms, but its date of deposition is much later in the fourth century BCE to have bearing on the present argument.
[26] Robinson 1934 251. 253; cf. Figueira 1998, 58-59; Le Rider 1963, 47-48.
[27] Le Rider 1956, 2-4.

beginning of the Chian weight issues falling sometime after 386 BCE, before the Persian weight issues that came later in the mid-fourth century BCE. In short, the numismatic evidence strongly suggests that the first issues emerged within the context of general autonomy in the fourth-century BCE interstate society and are not specifically symbolic of the revolt from Athens.

Fig. 3: Byzantine Silver hemidrachm (1.93 g) (CNT 1664).

Early Fourth Century BCE: Rapprochement

Le Rider, whose chronology for the weight standards was the inverse of Schönert-Geiss's, did not use historical evidence, which would have reinforced his dating and have offered an explanation for the context of the coins. This section adds that historical support and seeks to broaden the implications of the numismatic evidence to an understanding of the interstate society of the early fourth century. If the revolt during the Peloponnesian War is not the correct context, then under what circumstances did Byzantion make the decision to mint their first silver coins? After the 411 BCE revolt, the Spartan Clearchus administered affairs in Byzantion for three years until pro-Athenian citizens turned the city over to Alcibiades. Athenian control lasted until the end of the Peloponnesian War.[28] In 405 BCE the Spartan Lysander recaptured the city, installed a harmost, and imposed an oligarchic constitution. The pro-Athenians fled the city, and Lysander allowed the Athenians to return to Athens and

experience the sufferings confronting their city at the end of the war. Those remaining in Byzantion grew dissatisfied with the Spartan administration, especially during Clearchus's second period of tyrannical rule in 403 BCE.[29]

The situation remained thus into the next century. But the structure and character of the interstate society was undergoing a significant change which brought a greater level of cooperation between Byzantion and Athens. In 389 BCE, during the so-called Corinthian War, when the Athenian Thrasybulus of Steiria sailed into the region, the leading Byzantines expelled the Spartans and welcomed the Athenian general. Thrasybulus restored democracy to the Byzantines and reestablished a customs house (*dekateuterion*) for the collection of a tax on ships sailing in and out of the straits.[30] A number of scholars are convinced that Thrasybulus (and the Athenians generally) was interested in reviving the fifth-century BCE empire.[31] His return to the Aegean, it is argued, was an opportunity to restore the old alliance network, under the same oppressive terms as under the empire, and to profit from exploiting those ties. Thrasybulus was certainly motivated by personal political aggrandizement, but the interpretation of his actions in Byzantion as revanchism is based more on the theory that interstate affairs is essentially a matter of power politics. In a speech delivered ca. 388 BCE, the orator Lysias spreads the rumor that Thrasybulus considered establishing a tyranny at Byzantion.[32] But that is all it was: a rumor. Thrasybulus did no such thing. He continued his expedition and died in Pam-

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[28] Xen. *Hell*. 1.3.14-20; Diod. Sic. 13.64.2-3. 66.3-6; Plut. *Alc*. 31.

[29] Lysander: Xen. *Hell*. 2.2.1-2. Clearchus in 403 BCE: Diod. Sic. 14.12.2-3; cf. Xen. *An*. 6.2.13. 7.2.5-12.

[30] Xen. *Hell*. 4.8.27; Dem. 20.60. *Dekateuterion*: Figueira 2005, 111-117; Rubel 2001, 39-51. Democracy: Robinson 2011, 146-149.

[31] Badian 1995, 80-86; Buck 1998, 115-118; Cawkwell 1976, 270-277; Harding 2015, 27-30; Pébarthe 2000, 57; Russell 2017, 65. But see Accame 1951; Asmonti 2015, 155-178; Cargill 1981; Griffith 1978, 127-144.

[32] Lys. 28.5.

phylia. Nevertheless, the Athenians were not displeased with what he had accomplished in the north: the assembly approved his arrangements and inscribed them on *stelai* for public display.[33]

Furthermore, the institution of a *dekateuterion* and the establishment of democracy are not incompatible. In restoring these, it is significant that Thrasybulus reached back to fifth-century BCE practices but without the oppressive measures associated with the old empire. Instead, the collection was not of tribute (*phoros*) but of a ten percent tax (*dekate*), of which Thrasybulus farmed out the collection to the Byzantines, an arrangement that significantly curtailed Athenian interference in Byzantion's internal affairs. Xenophon even says that the common people of Byzantion, at least, were not burdened by the presence of Athenians in their city again.[34] When seen through the lens of the interstate society model, Thrasybulus's activities in Byzantion are both political, in the context of the Corinthian War, as well as social, in terms of (re)constructing ties with the Byzantines. Rather than a return to the exploitation of the fifth century BCE, the situation now between Byzantion and Athens – in economic, military, and political affairs – was more equitable.

This restored relationship transcended the exigencies of the Corinthian War. Isocrates adds that even after the signing of the King's Peace in 386 BCE, which brought an end to the war, Byzantion, along with Chios and Mytilene, remained aligned with Athens.[35] Their ties, therefore, persisted even after the peace ensured general autonomy in the Greek interstate society. It is very likely that it was within this context, the guarantee of *autonomia kai eleutheria*, that Byzantion minted its first autonomous silver coins, the ones on the Chian

weight standard. The historical evidence reinforces Le Rider's position on the coinage. It also underscores the mutual association existing between Byzantion and Athens.

This conclusion is further confirmed by the subsequent official alliances (*symmachiai*) between Byzantion and Athens. Demosthenes says that in about 385 BCE, after a brief oligarchic revolt in Byzantion, the Athenians provided refuge to the exiled Byzantine democrats.[36] Then, sometime after their restoration – which probably came about with Athenian backing – the democrats solicited a *symmachia* with their benefactors. The Byzantine embassy to Athens was led by the pro-Athenian Cydon, who had collaborated with Alcibiades in 408 BCE, and who during Lysander's occupation had fled to Athens, perhaps receiving citizenship there.[37] The extant inscription for this *symmachia* (*IG* II² 41) is fragmentary. It mentions only an unrecorded oath, an invitation for the Byzantine ambassadors to enjoy a meal of hospitality (*xenia*) in the Prytaneion, instructions for the erection of the alliance *stele*, and the selection of Athenian ambassadors to go to Byzantion and confirm the alliance terms. The restoration of *kathaper Chiois* on line seven indicates that the *symmachia* would operate under the same conditions as the recent one concluded in 384 BCE between Athens and Chios. This one, the first since the King's Peace, was a mutual defense *symmachia* that explicitly upheld the provisions of *autonomia kai eleutheria*.[38] One might suspect that after observing firsthand the formation of the alliance with Chios, the exiled Byzantine democrats proposed to the Athenians a similar *symmachia* if they were returned to power at home. Seen in this way, the new *symmachiai* reflected the new shape of the interstate society. It also represented Athenian support for the

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[33] *IG* II² 21, 22, 24.
[34] Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.27. *Dekate*: Figueira 2005, 120-129; Gabrielsen 2007, 293-296; Kallet 2001, 200; Kellogg 2004/2005, 65-68; Russell 2017, 81-88.
[35] Isoc. 14.28.

[36] Dem. 20.60.
[37] *IG* II² 41, line 23; Xen. *Hell*. 1.3.18. 2.2.1. Another Byzantine ambassador, Philinos, was a *proxenos* and benefactor of the Athenians (*IG* II² 76).
[38] *IG* II² 34; cf. Dušanić 2000, 21-30; Occhipinti 2010, 24-44.

restored Byzantine democracy and was a manifestation of their recent cooperation in military, political, social, and economic activities.

In 377 BCE Byzantion and Athens made a second bilateral *symmachia*, or rather reaffirmed the previous one as a part of Byzantion's membership in the Second Athenian League.[39] This renewed organization of the Aegean Greeks had a different character from the Athenian empire in the previous century. It was not a matter of imperialistic recrudescence. Its *raison d'être*, at its inception, was to aggregate the capabilities of its members to effectively block Spartan encroachments on Greek freedom. There is no evidence of Spartan interference in Byzantine affairs at this time, although it would come as no surprise if the Spartans orchestrated the oligarchic coup there in 385 BCE.[40] The *symmachiai* between Byzantion and Athens, therefore, appear to rest more on the strength of their military, political, social and economic ties established since the Corinthian War. These Athenian *symmachiai*, with Byzantion, Chios, and others, became the model for the Second Athenian League, an association of Greeks joined together by the observance of the principles of the King's Peace and in opposition to Spartan imperialism. It was in this environment, an interstate society founded upon *autonomia kai eleutheria*, that Byzantion minted its first autonomous silver coinage.[41]

ΣΥΝ coinage and Autonomous Issues

Finally, one may ask, even if the first autonomous issues originated after 386 BCE, within the context of the *autonomia kai eleutheria* of the King's Peace, how does this harmonize with the famous ΣΥΝ coinage? About eight Greek cities, including Byzantion, minted silver coins following the new Chian weight standard (tridrachm of slightly over 11 g). Each coin had a common type on the obverse: an infant Heracles strangling snakes (*Herakliskos Drakonopnigon*) with the legend ΣΥΝ (short for *symmachia*). The reverse of the two extant examples of Byzantion's ΣΥΝ coins contains the cow-dolphin type, recognizable from the obverse of the autonomous issues **(Fig. 4)**. Typological correspondence such as this was nothing new for the Greeks. During the age of colonization, new colonies often continued to place on their coinage the familiar types of their *metropoleis*. Throughout the fifth century BCE, members of new confederacies adopted common types for their federal coinage. A contemporary example with the ΣΥΝ coinage is the common coinage that symbolized the Rhodian synoecism of Camirus, Ialysus, and Lindus in 408 BCE.[42] But the ΣΥΝ coinage is unique in that the participating cities did not have shared origins nor, as far as can be known, were they organized around a central federal institution.

Fig. 4: Byzantion's ΣΥΝ Silver Tridrachm (11.29 g) (CNT 1410).

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[39] *IG* II² 43, line 83; Diod. Sic. 15.28.3.
[40] As suggested by Stylianou 1998, 174.
[41] Byzantion eventually abandoned Athens when the latter returned to its imperialistic policies in mid-century. In 364 BCE Byzantion offered a warm welcome to the Theban general Epaminondas (Isoc. 5.53; Diod. Sic. 15.78.4-79.2) and may have concluded a *symmachia* with him (Lewis 1990, 72; Russell 2016, 65-79; Ruzicka 1998, 60-69; Stylianou 1998, 412-413). In 357 BCE Byzantion joined the so-called Social War against Athens and at the end of the war seceded from the Second Athenian League (Dem. 15.26; Isoc. 15.63-64; Diod. Sic. 16.22.2; Ruzicka 1998, 60-69). Byzantion seems to have collaborated with Thebes in the coming years (*IG* VII 2418, lines

11-12. 24) before briefly rejoining Athens against Philip (Dem. 18.87-89. 244; Aeschin. 3.256).
[42] Common coinage: Mackil 2013, 247-255; Mackil – van Alfen 2006. Rhodian coinage: Ashton 2001, 79-115.

There have been different dates proposed for the ΣΥΝ coins, with interpretations that they were either pro-Spartan or pro-Athenian. Since a unified Rhodes participated in the coinage, a date of 408 BCE, when the three cities united, is a *terminus post quem*. Stefan Karwiese and Andrew Meadows think the coins were minted in 405 BCE and that the *Herakliskos Drakonopnigon* type symbolizes Lysander (Heracles) liberating the Greeks from the fetters (snakes) of Athenian economic and political oppression. John Manuel Cook and Roberta Fabiani, too, consider the coins to be pro-Spartan but they advance the date of minting to 395 and 394 BCE, during the Spartan king Agesilaus's short expedition to Asia Minor against the Persians.[43] On the other hand, Fabrice Delrieux has revived George Cawkwell's idea that the coins were pro-Athenian, appearing after the Athenian victory at Cnidus in 394 BCE, and thus represent solidarity against Spartan imperialism.[44] Finally, both Schönert-Geiss and Le Rider are agreed that the ΣΥΝ coins were minted c. 386 BCE, and that for Byzantion these coins were its first issues on the Chian standard.[45] No attempt will be made here to settle this complicated issue, which perplexes even the brightest of numismatists, but for the purposes of this essay, no matter which date one follows, it is clear that Byzantion's ΣΥΝ coinage falls after the revolt in 411 BCE and predates its civic coinage. That is, Byzantion's ΣΥΝ coins, a sign of autonomy in some sense, should be seen as precursors to the autonomous issues minted after the King's Peace rather than descendants of a putative coinage influenced by revolt. This coinage, too, therefore, reflects the dynamics of cooperation emphasized by the interstate society model.

This chronology is consistent with the numismatic evidence and with the historical narrative. When Lysander sailed into Byzantion in 405 BCE, the Athenians abandoned the city as did the pro-Athenian Byzantine citizens. During the next two decades, leadership in the city fluctuated between the pro-Spartan oligarchs and the pro-Spartan democrats, both of whom would have been amenable to joining a monetary collective that filled an economic need for the postwar Aegean. After the pro-Athenians returned to power and restored the alliance with Athens, they minted autonomous issues that signified Byzantion's *autonomia* as well as its close connections with Athens. The relationship between Byzantion and Athens, and indeed the larger Greek interstate society, had drastically changed from the fifth century BCE. Byzantion's first silver coinage, therefore, emerged at a period when the city was engaged to a much greater extent in interstate cooperation.In conclusion, this article has explored the politico-economic relationship between Byzantion and Athens in the Classical age through an approach that integrates literary and material evidence, along with the lens of the interstate society model. Ever since the Archaic age, Byzantion relied on foreign currency and did not mint its own silver coinage, until the latter stages of the Peloponnesian War disrupted traffic through the Bosporus straits. At the end of the war, Byzantion aligned with other Aegean Greeks and minted silver coins (the ΣΥΝ coinage) on a common weight (the new Chian standard). Renewed war in the 390s BCE, however, disrupted the ΣΥΝ collective. In 389 BCE Byzantion welcomed the Athenian Thrasybulus and merged its military, political, and economic interests with those of the Athenians. Their new association was unlike the exploitation which Byzantion had previously experienced at the hands of Athens. In the early fourth century BCE, the two had formed something closer to a square deal. This is further substantiated by the *sym-*

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[43] Cook 1961, 66-72; Fabiani 1999, 118-123; Karwiese 1980; Meadows 2011, 286-293. Russell 2017, 218-221 discusses Lysander's position in Byzantion.
[44] Cawkwell 1956, Delrieux 2000, 185-211. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for calling attention to the latter article.
[45] Le Rider 1971, 147-148; Schönert-Geiss 1970, 36.

machia that the two concluded in the late 380s and 370s BCE and by the appearance of Byzantion's first autonomous issues of coinage at some time after the King's Peace. This coinage, therefore, was tied to its newly confirmed position of *autonomia* in the interstate society. This conclusion removes the origins of Byzantine silver coinage from the context of revolt from Athenian domination to a context of alliance renewal with Athens.[46]

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Abbreviations

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