Introduction

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The aim of this volume, and of the conference in which it originated, is to encourage a more profound dialogue between scholars of early Greek and ancient Near Eastern literature, two areas of research that are usually separated by institutional boundaries in universities today but that nevertheless share a long history of fruitful interaction. It is well known, to take an early example relating to Homeric scholarship, that a foundational work of modern philology, the *Prolegomena ad Homerum* published in 1795 by the Hellenist Friedrich August Wolf, derived important inspiration from the text-critical approach to the Old Testament developed by the Orientalist Johann Gottfried Eichhorn.[1] In the case of Hesiod, it was to another follower of Eichhorn, the Biblical scholar Christian Schnurrer, that the young Friedrich Hölderlin dedicated his comparative study of the proverbs of Solomon and the *Works and Days*, submitted in 1790 as part of his MA examination at the Tübinger Stift.[2] The various degrees of previous and subsequent interaction between Hellenists and scholars of the ancient Near East, which naturally received a major impetus from the decipherment of the cuneiform script in the latter half of the nineteenth century, have been expertly documented and discussed, up to the late twentieth century, by Walter Burkert.[3] This was the time that saw the publication of the best-known and most influential works of current scholarship (at least in the field of Classics), Burkert's own studies of archaic Greece in the so-called Orientalising period, and Martin West's detailed comparative survey of archaic Greek poetry from Homer to Aeschylus.[4]

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[1] Wolf 1795. On Eichhorn's influence, see Grafton, Most and Zetzel 1985: 18–26, 227–31.

[2] *Parallele zwischen Salomons Sprüchwörtern und Hesiods Werken und Tagen*, available, e.g., in the edition of Beissner 1961: 176–88. On Hölderlin, Schnurrer and the Stift, see Franz 2002.

[3] Burkert 1991a. Further important critical surveys are offered by Dowden 2001, Casadio 2009, Bremmer 2016, Yakubovich 2018 and Stevens 2019: 16–22.

[4] Burkert 1984, translated and revised as Burkert 1992; West 1997.

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The efforts of these two scholars above all represented nothing less than a revolution: it is no longer possible nor desirable, in the twenty-first century CE, to write about the earliest period of Greek literary and cultural history without considering the contributions and impact of the civilisations we tend to subsume under the title of the 'ancient Near East'.[5] Whilst the study of Hesiod had long been inflected along these lines,[6] perhaps the biggest change wrought in the post-Burkert/West world is that no aspect of early Greek literature has remained unaffected, and that the change in our analytical habits has proven to be deep and lasting. Indeed, Robin Osborne astutely pointed out that the search for parallels between early Greek epic and the texts of the ancient Near East, and their deployment in an interpretative setting, had changed the game for good: 'What is really at stake is my ability to understand the *Iliad*'.[7]

Inevitably this initial comparative drive was met with some caution, or even opposed by outright scepticism,[8] with scholars calling for a method that goes beyond juxtaposing literary works without considering their *Sitz im Leben*, and that addresses the difficult literary-historical questions raised by the complexities of cultural interaction and transmission. All the while, greater methodological sophistication was being brought to bear in several studies, as – amongst many others – Johannes Haubold wrote of the need to get away from drawing straight lines between far-flung texts,[9] Mary Bachvarova sought a common poetic language across the Mediterranean,[10] Christopher Metcalf stressed local sources and traditions as better explanations for apparent similarities,[11] and Carolina López-Ruiz addressed the manifold possibilities for exchange across a wide temporal and spatial range.[12] Scholarly interest in improving our understanding of the Near Eastern contribution to early Greek poetry and culture, particularly on the part of Hellenists, continues unabated,[13] and it is one purpose of this volume to offer a snapshot of this dynamic and thriving field as it stands.

[5] On the terminology, see van Dongen 2014.   [6] See, e.g., Walcot 1962, West 1966: 18–31.
[7] Osborne 1993: 232. For a comparative study of hymnic poetry, such as the *Homeric Hymns*, see Metcalf 2015a (with earlier literature). On the Greek lyric poets, see West 1997: 495–543.
[8] See, e.g., Mondi 1990, Most 1998, Koenen 1994, Haubold 2002, Kelly 2008, Kelly 2014.
[9] Haubold 2013a.
[10] Bachvarova 2005; more recent contributions (e.g., 2016) have tended towards seeing the relationship in a more genealogical manner.
[11] Metcalf 2015a.   [12] López-Ruiz 2010.
[13] To mention only some of the most recently published contributions on the relationship between the Homeric epics and the *Epic of Gilgameš*: West 2018, Meijer 2018, Matijević 2018, R. B. Rutherford 2019: 231–6 (the latter pair being more sceptical than the former); and now Clarke 2019. Rowe 2018 emphasises the general lack of interest that specialists of the Near East appear to have taken in the debate ('Assyriologists are true heirs to the Babylonian indifference towards

Indeed, the discussion has come to something of a watershed moment, as we move our attention generally from mapping similarities and differences to a more nuanced consideration of what each tradition can tell us in its own voice, reading through analogy rather than genealogy (alone). As with any change in scholarly direction, this is not universal, and interesting and fruitful work is still being done through more traditionally genealogical and source-critical means, as Classicists continue to map out a literary narrative history with one author consciously developing from and reacting to another, this time with the early Greek canvas massively expanded by the literature of the Sumerians, Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and Phoenicians.[14]

The papers gathered in the present volume are written by a collection of some of the most active contributors to the discussion, and they document a variety of new approaches and insights, as well as critical engagement with – and exemplifications of – the methods of previous scholarship. The chapters themselves have been drawn up into three parts, corresponding to the intellectual and methodological emphasis of each author, but these parts do not stand apart from one another in a mutually preclusive manner. The chapters of Part I ('Contexts') reflect a growing scholarly concern with elucidating the individual setting of each work of literature as a preliminary to any reliable comparative work. Those of Part II ('Influence') are not unaware of this precondition, but concern themselves more directly with the task of tracing the journey of narrative and literary features across several traditions, while the chapters in Part III ('Difference') – though, in their turn, not unconcerned with contexts or influence – place more critical emphasis on problematising that latter process, showing how common patterns, whatever the precise mechanics of their transmission, are declined in their individual settings and traditions.

Ideally, of course, all these lines of enquiry should be linked, and most of the papers could have been placed in more than one category. Thus, for example, Mark Weeden's discussion of the scribal context behind *Gilgameš* elucidates a particular setting for the production of Babylonian literature (and so is placed in Part I), but it does so as part of a wider argument seeking to problematise the case which some have made for a connection

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non-Babylonian traditions', Rowe 2018: 370), though his own contribution overlooks the substantial critical discussion by George 2003: 54–7.

[14] See, e.g., Currie 2016, though his contribution to this volume is closer in spirit to the new direction, and Lardinois 2018, and his contribution to this volume. Clarke 2019 represents a very sophisticated version of an intertextual reading between Greek and non-Greek traditions.

between that poem and an episode from the *Iliad* (and so could have been located in Part III). Similarly, Christopher Metcalf's contribution on the figure of the royal cup-bearer across several traditions traces the journey of these stories (hence its placement in Part II) but is also concerned not to opt for genealogy as the best explanation of their evolution (and so, once more, could have been placed in Part III).

Yet the conceptual integrity of the tripartition remains, since it was one of the main conclusions of the conference on which this book was based that much greater levels of dialogue are required on questions of context, influence and difference in future comparative study, and almost all of the chapters engage with this need more or less explicitly, and more or less positively.

Part I: Context

To begin in the Near East: an enviable feature of the literatures of its several cultures, from the perspective of the Hellenist, is that the abundant and diverse cuneiform textual record can at times provide contextual historical evidence for literary composition and performance – evidence of a kind that is generally unavailable to scholars of early Greek poetry. Knowledge of ancient performance contexts can, in turn, inform the question of historical transmission of Near Eastern material to Greece. The contribution by the Hittitologist Amir Gilan ('"Let Those Important Primeval Deities Listen": The Social Setting of the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Emergence*') thus revisits the case of the Hurro-Hittite poem formerly referred to (among other titles) as the *Song of Kumarbi*, now known under its recently recovered ancient title as the *Song of Emergence*, which narrates the early history of divine kingship and the birth of the Storm God. Since its decipherment, this Hittite adaptation of an earlier, now lost but probably Hurrian composition has been recognised as the clearest evidence for the Greek reception of Near Eastern mythology, as proven by numerous aspects, of both general structure and narrative detail, that the *Song of Emergence* shares with Hesiod's *Theogony*, especially the Succession Myth, which traces the sequence from the earliest divine kings to Zeus's birth and rise to power.[15] Yet the recent interest that Hittitology has taken in the rich corpus of Hittite ritual texts has yielded important information on the

[15] The parallels between the *Song of Emergence* and the *Theogony* (and related sources) have been enumerated and analysed many times: see most recently Rutherford 2018, and his contribution to this volume.

likely ritual contexts of the wider mythological cycle to which the *Song of Emergence* belongs, and possibly indeed of the *Song* itself: Gilan therefore assesses not only the Hittite cuneiform tablet on which the *Song* is preserved, as well as the family and scholarly background of the scribe responsible for copying it, but also discusses new progress made in more specialised studies, in particular by Carlo Corti, on the possible performance of the *Song* in festivals at Mount Hazzi (Jebel al-Aqra), the Greek Kasios, on the Mediterranean coast. As previous scholarship has seen, such performance offers what is currently the most attractive historical context for the transfer of the Storm God narrative to Greece, given the likely presence of Greek traders in the vicinity.[16]

This historical aspect is elaborated by Carolina López-Ruiz ('Siting the Gods: Narrative, Cult, and Hybrid Communities in the Iron Age Mediterranean'), who traces a path across the Mediterranean in locating the sites where Greek, Semitic (in particular Phoenician) and native populations interacted, her premise being that 'the literary and mythological entanglements, for the most part, followed the human entanglements'. Starting from the same Mount Hazzi or Jebel al-Aqra (here called Mount Saphon, its Semitic name) and crossing first to Crete and from there to Iberia, López-Ruiz draws attention to Near Eastern Storm God narratives that are less well known than the *Song of Emergence* but that similarly shaped Greek mythological and cultic conceptions of Zeus: these historically less successful narratives tend to furnish the Storm God with a fuller life cycle, including birth, journeys in maturity, and even death.

To turn to Mesopotamia, the contributions by Frances Reynolds and Mark Weeden further illustrate the recent preoccupations of specialised research on ancient Near Eastern literature with the ritual performances of mythological texts and the scholarly contexts of literary production. Reynolds' contribution ('Politics, Cult, and Scholarship: Aspects of the Transmission History of Marduk and Ti'amat's Battle') presents some results of her long-term research on an important source for several papers in this volume, the Babylonian Creation Epic *Enūma eliš*, with a focus on its complex relationship with Babylon's New Year festival as well as on its scholarly exegesis in Babylonian academic treatises. Both aspects, ritual and scholarly, provide important historical contextualisation for Hellenists interested in the affinities between the battle of Marduk and Ti'amat and Greek theomachies.

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[16] See now Lane Fox 2018: xlii–iv, and Rutherford in this volume.

Weeden's chapter ('The Scholar and the Poet: Standard Babylonian *Gilgameš* VI vs. *Iliad* 5') directly addresses a popular literary-historical comparison between two well-known scenes, the encounter of Gilgameš and Ištar in the *Epic of Gilgameš* VI, and the encounter of Diomedes and Aphrodite in *Iliad* 5, but draws attention to possible links between the *Gilgameš*-episode and the Mesopotamian lexical tradition. These links lead Weeden to suggest that the episode may have emerged from a specifically Mesopotamian scholarly or didactic background, which, he argues, makes scenarios of oral transmission of *Gilgameš* to the Greek world seem questionable. As in the case of *Enūma eliš*, the immediate Mesopotamian context that Weeden provides to *Gilgameš* will have to be taken into account in any comparative effort to situate the literary texts in an even broader context.

Part II: Influence

Naturally, many contributions focus on particular literary comparisons in an attempt to trace historical influence from Near Eastern models on early Greek poets – and vice versa. Apart from identifying and assessing points of comparison that were previously overlooked or insufficiently appreciated, these contributions are united by their endeavour to reflect on the methods of cross-cultural comparison: by what means can historical influence be successfully demonstrated?

André Lardinois' contribution ('Playing with Traditions: Deliberate Allusions to Near Eastern Myth in Hesiod's Story of the Five Human Races') revisits the arguments for and against a Near Eastern inspiration of Hesiod's well-known Myth of the Ages (or Races), and takes this opportunity to reflect on the criteria that are available to us in assessing the plausibility of literary-historical influence. The degree of similarity between the literary comparanda will naturally remain the first and most obvious criterion, but Lardinois also postulates that 'the story or theme' should not also be 'part of an Indo-European or other tradition, or attributable to common human experience', and further, that the story or theme be 'quite unique and therefore unlikely to have been fashioned independently in Greece and the Near East'. Both considerations naturally oblige the scholar to cast the net more widely, beyond the two standard corpora of Greek and ancient Near Eastern literature, in order to gain an impression of how significant a given parallel is likely to be: to this end, Lardinois considers further evidence, ranging from Mesoamerica to the *Mahābhārata*. While the strength of the Near Eastern parallels nevertheless

lead him to conclude that the Myth of the Ages is indeed likely to have been inspired by Near Eastern sources, Lardinois is also careful to explain how it came to be anchored in existing and more familiar Greek tales of gods and heroes.

Bruno Currie ('*Etana* in Greece') then investigates the links between the Akkadian poem *Etana*, the fragmentary Lykambes epode of the archaic Greek poet Archilochus, and the Aesopic fable of *The Eagle and the Fox*, carefully assessing both similarities and differences in these sources as well as in further, related Greek material, and also considering the possibility of further versions of *Etana* in India, Egypt and the folklore of the Baltic region. Taken together, these reflections lead Currie to distinguish, in particular, between a 'floating motif model' and a 'fixed text model' of transmission, both of which are, he concludes, discernible in the various manifestations of *Etana* in Greece and beyond.

A second important aspect of intercultural transmission is then emphasised by Yoram Cohen and Christopher Metcalf. Like Currie, Cohen is concerned with the fable ('The World of Gods and Men: Animal and Plant Disputation Poems and Fables in Babylonia, Persia, and Greece'), in this case the Akkadian fable of *The Date Palm and the Tamarisk*, which travelled eastward to Persia and westward to Greece: in both places, Cohen argues, the fable retained its 'deep structure' but underwent adaptations on the surface to suit the new localities. The fable posed a fundamental question to its audiences – is the cult of the gods more important than preservation of humans? – and provided, in Cohen's words, 'a platform on which views and beliefs of other cultures could be built, with the change of scene or characters as needed'.

Metcalf ('Tales of Kings and Cup-Bearers in History and Myth') presents a similarly flexible example that spans Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Greek sources on Persia. His argument is that a motif in the mythological prologue to the Hurro-Hittite *Song of Emergence*, according to which the early divine rulers Anu and Kumarbi are each said to have served as cup-bearer to the previous ruler before taking power, is likely to derive from older Mesopotamian legends revolving around the historical king Sargon of Akkad. While the *Song of Emergence* adapts the Sargonic motif to a narrative on the earliest divine kings, the same motif later emerges in connection with a human ruler, Cyrus the Great, in Persian legends that were known to the Greek writer Ctesias; Herodotus avoided the motif in his account of Cyrus, perhaps because he appears to have adopted it at an earlier point of the *Histories*, in the Lydian tale of Candaules and Gyges. In all instances the motif of the cup-bearer served to explain the emergence of

a powerful human or divine dynasty seemingly from nowhere, but as in Cohen's case studies there was much scope for local adaptation.

Finally, the contributions of Ruth Scodel and Andrew George offer a reminder that just as Near Eastern sources can illuminate early Greek literature, so the latter can help us to interpret the former (this aspect is also discussed, more briefly, by Metcalf and Rutherford [below]). Scodel ('There Were Nephilim') examines *Genesis* 6:1–4, a difficult passage in which divine beings are said to have taken mortal wives, who bore them offspring described as 'the heroes of old, the men with a name'. Scodel supports the view that this reflects Greek influence on the Old Testament, and offers thoughts on the ways in which the Greek material was transmitted, and how the comparison can enhance our understanding of both the Greek and the Biblical narratives.[17]

George ('Mythical Time in Mesopotamia') offers some insights into a long-term research project that seeks to distinguish between myths and their various manifestations in literary sources, and thus approaches Mesopotamian mythology as a body of sacred, oral stories that lie in the background both of texts and of other forms of cultural expression. In this instance, George considers the work of the Babylonian priest and historian Berossus, in particular book I of his *Babyloniaca*, in which Berossus summarised Babylonian cosmogonic beliefs for a Greek readership.[18] While the links between this part of the *Babyloniaca* and the Akkadian poem *Enūma eliš* are well known, George shows that Berossus combined knowledge of that text with a Mesopotamian myth of origins on the primeval pair 'Father Sky and Mother Earth' that was never fixed in writing. Taken together with sporadic evidence from Sumero-Akkadian sources collected by George, the *Babyloniaca* of Berossus emerge as an important source on this influential but elusive myth, which, according to George, was overshadowed without being fully supplanted by the Marduk-centred theology of *Enūma eliš*.

Part III: Difference

The previous contributions have taken issues of historical context as the starting point from which to approach the interpretation of literary

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[17] For a sustained (but problematic) argument for Greek influence on the Old and New Testaments, see now Louden 2018.
[18] See now Stevens 2019: 94–119 for a detailed critical analysis of Berossus as a 'scholar between two worlds'.

sources, and/or used literary comparisons as the basis on which to build arguments for (or against) historical influence. The chapters in this third part concentrate on differences between early Greek and Near Eastern literature, and the interpretative space this opens up to the scholar. Here the purpose of comparison is to reflect on the ways in which texts from different cultures engage with fundamental issues of common interest, while less attention is paid to the question of their historical relationships.[19]

Ian Rutherford ('Borrowing, Dialogue and Rejection: Intertextual Interfaces in the Late Bronze Age') engages explicitly with the challenges faced by any kind of comparative analysis: while the question of historical influence remains an attractive topic for discussion, Rutherford draws attention to the interpretative potential of differences, as opposed to the similarities on which comparative studies tend to focus. As he writes, an appreciation of differences may help us to see how one culture 'may be "receptive" to some aspects of other tradition, while blocking others, perhaps because they are not in line with its established norms'. Rutherford thus examines those aspects of Anatolian and Syrian Storm God mythology that, unlike the central elements of the *Song of Emergence*, seem not to have been adopted in early Greek sources, in particular the myth of the Storm God's conflict with the Sea, and reflects on the likely reasons that explain this apparent 'blocking'.

Building on his past research on early Greek and Mesopotamian epic poetry, Johannes Haubold's contribution ('Divine Labour') examines a peculiar theme in divine narratives, according to which human beings at one time replaced the gods as workers. Haubold considers the occurrence of this theme in the Akkadian poem *Atraḥasīs*, the opening of the Biblical book of *Genesis* and early Greek epic, especially the *Iliad*. The comparison illustrates, in his words, that 'authors and audiences in the ancient world shared not just stories about the gods but also some of the larger questions that made them important. We cannot always tell how the stories travelled but we can certainly understand better how the texts work by considering the narrative resources they share.' In particular, the theme of divine labour allows us to appreciate how the Mesopotamian, Israelite and Greek traditions created important, and distinctively *different*, transitions in the shared history of gods and humans, and how the very concept of the gods at work gave rise, within each tradition, to implicit or explicit criticism and to

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[19] See Haubold 2013: esp. 71–2 on this approach.

consequent attempts to rewrite the story, or at least to contain its suppos-
edly undesirable theological implications.

Addressing the same literary-historical issue from a linguistic perspec-
tive, Sylvie Vanséveren ('Comparison: Relevance and Significance of
Linguistic Features') takes a close look at the Homeric phrase 'hand of
god', used in the *Iliad* in connection with a divinely ordained plague.
While past scholarship has identified this phrase as a straightforwardly
Near Eastern idiom, on the basis of analogies in several Semitic languages,
Vanséveren broadens the horizon by juxtaposing Near Eastern and Indo-
European perspectives, and, in a linguistic analogy to the literary studies of
Lardinois and Ballesteros Petrella (see below), devotes special attention to
the context of the phrase within the Greek epic-formulaic system. Her
conclusion is sceptical of the explanatory value of the Near Eastern
parallels in this particular instance.

Angus Bowie ('Fate and Authority in Mesopotamian Literature and the
Iliad') considers another important topic in the rich body of early Greek
and ancient Near Eastern divine narratives: the issue of fate and divine
authority. In his analysis, Sumerian and Akkadian sources tend to describe
fate as being under the control of the gods, who employ it as a tool in
governing the universe; fate can be said to take physical shape, such as an
inscribed tablet. In early Greek literature, on the other hand, fate is not a
matter of divine decrees: here fate is mainly regarded as something assigned
to individuals, and the Greek epic tradition is less explicit on the nature
and physical shape of fate. Comparison of the theme of divine authority,
which is a concern to both Mesopotamian and early Greek epic poetry,
illustrates 'the wisdom of the use by the leading god or gods of consulta-
tion and tactical response to the demands of other deities': if autocracy
leads to disaster, diplomacy is the tool by which the respective chief gods
can preserve their authority.

The final two papers return to Hesiod, an author particularly familiar to
Classicists seeking to deploy Near Eastern material. Firstly, Bernardo
Ballesteros Petrella ('Fashioning Pandora: Ancient Near Eastern Creation
Scenes and Hesiod') offers a detailed analysis of a(nother) famous Hesiodic
narrative, the creation of Woman, that considers Mesopotamian, Egyptian
and Biblical comparanda but also looks further, to Nordic mythology,
ethnography and the study of folklore. Coupled with an understanding of
the Pandora-scene's connections to episodes of adornment in other early
Greek hexameter poetry, Ballesteros Petrella's analysis avoids simplistic
notions of direct derivation from this or that Near Eastern source, and
concludes that the tale of Pandora represents, instead, 'a Greek poet's