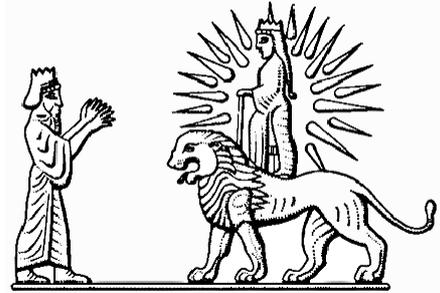


THE MELAMMU PROJECT

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>



“New Perspectives for an Intercultural Approach to the Sciences of Antiquity between East and West. Some Reflections on the Cultural Meaning of the Melammu Project”

ANTONIO PANAINO

Published in Melammu Symposia 3:

A. Panaino and G. Pettinato (eds.),

Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena.

Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the

Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project.

Held in Chicago, USA, October 27-31, 2000

(Milan: Università di Bologna & IsIao 2002), pp. 1-12.

Publisher: <http://www.mimesisedizioni.it/>

This article was downloaded from the website of the Melammu Project:

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>

The Melammu Project investigates the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian culture throughout the ancient world. A central objective of the project is to create an electronic database collecting the relevant textual, art-historical, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic evidence, which is available on the website, alongside bibliographies of relevant themes. In addition, the project organizes symposia focusing on different aspects of cultural continuity and evolution in the ancient world.

The Digital Library available at the website of the Melammu Project contains articles from the *Melammu Symposia* volumes, as well as related essays. All downloads at this website are freely available for personal, non-commercial use. Commercial use is strictly prohibited. For inquiries, please contact melammu-db@helsinki.fi.

ANTONIO PANAINO Ravenna

New Perspectives for an Intercultural Approach to the Sciences of Antiquity between East and West Some Reflections on the Cultural Meaning of the MELAMMU Project

With the present symposium, the third of the MELAMMU Project, we officially enter a new phase of our work; MELAMMU is in fact a scholarly reality within the current panorama of Ancient Studies. Many colleagues from different fields, various universities and countries join together not only around the organisation and the realisation of a database or, like today here, around a table, but – as I believe – around a seminal idea, i.e., that today it is necessary and possible to establish and activate a cultural network which could strengthen the exchange of scholarly competencies and the development of new research on the historical, religious, philosophical, political, linguistic and ideological patterns and concepts which distinguished the Mesopotamian world and linked it with other ancient civilisations without theoretical limits in time and space. This is also the inner meaning of the subtitle of the MELAMMU Project: “The Intellectual Heritage of Assyria and Babylonia in East and West.”

The main problem which in fact lay in the background of our preliminary efforts during our first symposium in Tvärminne

(Finland), October 1998¹ was the awareness and concern of a kind of impending and progressive “fragmented” character of our single disciplines and subjects. An influential trend – in my opinion only ostensibly justified by the complex evolution of any of our specialities – strongly compels many scholars to restrict their own area of study and research into a narrow field, where everything could be, of course, controlled and managed, but with the patent risk of forgetting or ignoring what is going on outside of the strict conspectus of some specific disciplinary limits. This very trend in fact uses (or abuses) as an *alibi* the following reason, i.e. that the overwhelming number of publications and activities produced in any field practically compels any modern scholar to avoid any broad view of the general situation and the development of other fields. Although this is true, I suspect that such a reason can also be used as a good argument in order to avoid unwelcome intrusions and to circumscribe the club, however, on the other hand I do not believe that it is a convincing and compelling scholarly reason. On the contrary,

¹ See the volume *The Heirs of Assyria*, Melammu Symposia I, edited by S. Aro and R.M. Whiting, A. Panaino & G. Pettinato (eds.) MELAMMU SYMPOSIA III (Milano 2002) ISBN 88-8483-107-5

Helsinki 2000.

the new discoveries in fields such as archaeology, philology, linguistics, history, etc., which are changing and have changed the current dimension of research, can be considered neither useful, nor pertinent for our single subjects. The problem, I think, is different and is mainly cultural or, if you prefer, ideological and probably also intercultural, but in a very negative sense, because this sort of limitation is commonly widespread across the academic world in East and West. Unfortunately there are not so many scholars who are ready to accept the consequences of the idea that what we call the “Oriental World” is part of a greater continent we can define as “Eurasia,” and who methodologically admit that a dialectic dynamic significantly links East and West. Or, if such a consideration is *oborto collo* accepted, it is often felt as a disturbing fact. Thus some of us can have had during their academic experience a lot of difficulties with colleagues who work, for instance, on typically Western subjects, such as Greek and Latin literature and religion, or with specialists of Greek and Roman history, who simply consider other disciplines of the Ancient and Oriental World as an exotic luxury and not as strategic partners; but we can also find substantial problems among the Orientalists, where the exchange of information and real collaboration generally work on personal bases and not as a normal dimension in the method of studying, even without mentioning the inner difficulties between

specialists of ancient Oriental studies and those of modern or contemporary subjects, who by forcing the general “political” and “economical” concerns would like to relegate the past into the rooms of a museum with the contemporary exhibition of scholars and archaeological remains.

The importance of the MELAMMU Project, in my opinion, lies in the evident opportunity we have, and we want to strengthen, in establishing direct and systematic links and contacts, focusing on different but crucial problems, which need a strict exchange of competencies, not only synchronically between scholars of Western or Eastern fields, but also diachronically from the remote antiquity to modern studies. For us the past is not dead, but lives in the present. Thus it is clear that the database we are preparing would be, like the “Proceedings” of our conferences, only one part of our work, a very important one of course, but which we would like to imagine as a stepping stone to a different way of studying and researching.

Candidly speaking it is difficult or impossible to work in a state of complete and blind independence; as Martin West² and Walter Burkert³ have forcefully shown, Greek culture was strongly influenced by the East; such an impact is for instance visible in poetry, in the arts and architecture, in some aspects of the cults and of philosophy,⁴ but also in the development of the idea of the Greek identity, in particular during the Persian wars;⁵ a

² See, for instance, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford 1971.

³ See in particular *The Orientalizing Revolution*. Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age, translated by M.E. Pinder and W. Burkert, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1992, or his freshly published cycle of lessons held at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari, in 1996, *Da Omero ai Magi*. La tradizione orientale nella cultura greca, Padova 1999.

⁴ See, for instance, the very wide conspectus dedicated to the intercultural interaction between the Greek world and the Orient in the third volume of *I Greci. Storia Cultura Arte Società. I Greci oltre la Grecia*, edited by S. Settis, Torino 2001.

⁵ See A. Panaino, Greci e Iranici: confronto e conflitti, in *I Greci*, vol. 3, pp. 78-136, in particular pp. 83-116 with literature.

part from these evident facts, we should not forget, however, the deep impact of Oriental, mostly Mesopotamian, exact sciences on the evolution of Greek and generally Western sciences, like early mathematics, astronomy and astrology.⁶ The role of the Egyptian medical schools, of Egyptian arithmetic has also to be remembered. But such a dialectic exchange with the East was not an isolated phenomenon in the early period of the Greek civilisation, as an ancient heritage that soon was superseded and expired without other consequences. We may show precisely many further mutual influences; for instance, the diffusion of Greek astrology, based on some Babylonian ideas, but modified according to the

Greek geometrical vision, entered India and many other oriental countries,⁷ but, during and after Sasanian times, we note an opposite wave, with the diffusion toward the West of new astrological techniques such as military⁸ and political astrology, the doctrine of the Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions, etc.,⁹ not to mention, with regard to the strictly astronomical sciences, the significant influence of Sasanian literature about the Astronomical tables.¹⁰ All these doctrines with their scientific or pseudo-scientific contributions were diffused in the West and entered the astronomical and astrological literature of the European Middle Age through the Islamic intermediation.¹¹ We may for instance offer a detailed example

⁶ I do not dare to venture myself in any attempt of bibliographical fullness on this subject; I would simply like to refer to as methodologically basic and seminal for the development of the history of ancient sciences only a few masterpieces of O. Neugebauer, *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*. 3 Vols. New York – Berlin 1975; *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*. Second Edition. Providence, Rhode Island 1957; *Astronomy and History*. Selected Essays. New York – London 1981, and the *Kleine Schriften* of W. Hartner, *Oriens – Occidens*. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Wissenschaft- und Kulturgeschichte. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1968 and *Oriens – Occidens*. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Wissenschaft- und Kulturgeschichte, Band II. Herausgegeben von Y. Maeyama und mit einem Geleitwort von M. Schramm, Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1984. To these works we should add the contributions of scholar such as E.S. Kennedy, D. Pingree, H. Hunger, P. Kunitzsch, F. Halton, and many others who have given to this research a significant impetus with great results.

⁷ For a first introduction into the problem of the Babylonian, Graeco-Babylonian and then solely Greek influences on the evolution of Indian astral sciences see D. Pingree, (1978b) History of Mathematical Astronomy in India, in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. Vol. XV. Supplement I. *Topical Essays*. New York 1978, pp. 533-633; *Jyotiḥśāstra*. Astral and Mathematical Literature, Wiesbaden 1981; *From Astral Omens to Astrology*. *From Babylon to Bīkāner*. S.O.R. LXXVIII, Rome 1997.

⁸ D. Pingree, Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 52, 1989, pp. 1-13, in particular p. 4; idem, Classical and Byzantine Astrology in Sas-

anian Persia, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 43, 1989, pp. 227-250, in particular p. 237.

⁹ See D. Pingree, Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran, *ISIS*, 54, part 2, No. 176, 1963, pp. 229-246; idem, s.v. Astronomy and Astrology in Iran, i. History of Astronomy in Iran; iii. Astrology in Islamic Times, pp. 868-871, in *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Ed by E. Yarshater, Vol. II, 9. London – New York 1987, pp. 858-862; idem, Classical and Byzantine Astrology in Sassanian Persia, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 43, 1989, pp. 227-239; E.S. Kennedy, Ramifications of the World-Year Concept in Islamic Astronomy, pp. 23-43, in *Actes du dixième Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences*, Ithaca 26 VIII 1962 – 2 IX 1962 (1964), Paris 1964; A. Panaino, Saturn, the Lord of the Seventh Millennium (with a contribution of D. Pingree), *East and West*, 46, 3-4, 1996, pp. 235-250.

¹⁰ See now A. Panaino, *Tessere il cielo*, Considerazioni sulle Tavole astronomiche, gli Oroscoopi e la Dottrina dei Legamenti tra Induismo, Manicheismo e Mandeismo. S.O.R. LXXXIX, Roma 1998. See also A. Panaino, La diffusione dell'astronomia e dell'astrologia mesopotamica in India attraverso la mediazione iranica, pp. 9-50, in *L'Astrologia e la sua influenza nella Filosofia, nella Letteratura e nell'Arte dall'Età Classica al Rinascimento*, Milano 1992; E.G. Raffaelli, *L'Oroscoopo del mondo*, Milano 2001.

¹¹ Apart from texts like the *Almagest* (P. Kunitzsch, *Der Almagest*. Die Syntaxis Mathematica des Claudius Ptolemäus in arabisch-lateinischer Überlieferung, Wiesbaden 1974) we can mention the diffusion of astronomico-astrological literature, which has been carefully catalogued by F. Sezgin, *Geschichte der arabischen Schrifttums*. Band VI. *Astronomie bis ca. 430 H.* Leiden 1978; Band VII.

of this two-way exchange between East and West throughout the centuries, by mentioning the Παρανατέλλοντα τοῖς δεκανοῖς of Teukros of Babylon (between the first century BC and the first AD) which were translated in Pahlavi for the first time about the third century or later.¹² Unfortunately the Pahlavi translation disappeared and only a number of fragments in Arabic still survive, although some of them, ascribed to Tīnkarūs or Tīnkalūs, seem to be a forgery.¹³ In any case Teukros' work was very important in the transmission of the astrological system of the Decans, i.e. the subdivision of the Zodiac into 36 Decans, each one of 10 degree, three per constellation, and also of the so-called *Paranatellonta* (i.e. the constellations rising on the horizon simultaneously with a certain Decan). A Middle Persian translation of Teukros was written or probably rearranged in the VIth century under Xusraw Anōšīrwān, more precisely

in the year 542, according to A. von Gutschmid,¹⁴ because Ṭabari noted that the book of Tinkalūšā (another form of the name of Teukros) about the Decans was written 80 years before the Hijra, as suggested also by Franz Boll in his famous book *Sphaera*.¹⁵ This very translation was used by Abū Maš'ar together with Indian sources about the iconography of the Decans deriving from the Indian astronomer Varāhamihira (VIth century A.D.), taken in its turn from the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujidhvaja (IIIrd century A.D.), a Sanskrit translation of a Greek-Alexandrian astrological text.¹⁶ Thus Boll assumed that some Pahlavi material from Teukros was embedded in the *Introductorium maius* of Abū Maš'ar,¹⁷ and via such a translation they returned to Byzantium and the West. It was Aby Warburg,¹⁸ then followed by his pupil Fritz Saxl,¹⁹ who clearly showed that the Egyptian iconography of the Decans intermingled with Indian and Sasanian

Astrologie – Meteorologie und Verwandtes bis ca. 430 H. Leiden 1979. See also the fresh work of Ch. Burnett and D. Pingree, *The Liber Aristotilis of Hugo of Sanctalla*. The Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, 26, London 1997 and the various works of P. Kunitzsch on the Hermetic astral sources in Arabic and Latin literature (see now *Hermetis Trismegisti Astrologica et Divinatoria. Liber de Stellis Bebeniis ...*, cura et studio G. Bos, Ch. Burnett, Th. Charmasson, P. Kunitzsch, F. Lelli, P. Lucentini, Turnhout 2001).

¹² See C.A. Nallino, Tracce di opere greche giunte agli arabi per trafila pehlevica, in *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Professor E.G. Browne*, Cambridge 1922, pp. 345-363.

¹³ On this problem see Nallino, *Tracce di opere greche ...*, pp. 356-360; Pingree, *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja*, 2 Vols. Cambridge (Mass.) 1978, vol. II, 442-443; see also F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*. Band VII. *Astrologie – Meteorologie und Verwandtes bis ca. 430 H.* Leiden 1979, pp. 38-41.

¹⁴ A. von Gutschmidt, Die nabatäische Landwirtschaft und ihre Geschwister, *ZDMG*, 15, 1861, pp. 1-110, in particular p. 88.

¹⁵ F. Boll, *Sphaera: neue griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder*,

Leipzig 1903.

¹⁶ D. Pingree, *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja*, 2 Voll. Cambridge (Mass.) 1978.

¹⁷ For the Arabic text with a translation and the *excerpta* from Abū Maš'ar in his *Mudḥal* see K. Dyroff in Boll, *Sphaera*, pp. 482-539. About Abū Maš'ar's works see in particular F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*. Band VII. *Astrologie – Meteorologie und Verwandtes bis ca. 430 H.* Leiden 1979, pp. 139-151.

¹⁸ A. Warburg, *La rinascita del paganesimo antico*, Firenze 1980; D. Pingree, The Indian Iconography of the Decans and Horās, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 36, 1963, pp. 223-254.

¹⁹ F. Saxl, *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters*. Band 2. *Die Handschriften der National-Bibliothek in Wien*. SHAW, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, N. 2. Heidelberg 1925-26. See also F. Saxl, *La fede negli astri*, Turin 1965 and Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Planetendarstellungen im Orient und Okzident, *Der Islam*, 3, 1912, pp. 151-177; D. Pingree, Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 52, 1989, pp. 1-13; Raffaelli, *L'Oroscopo del mondo*, pp. 36-40.

modifications was transferred through the Arabic *Introductorium maius* to Spain, then to France and finally was embedded in the *Astrolabium planum* of Pietro d'Abano, a contemporary of Dante and Giotto.²⁰ The *Sphaera barbarica*, as described in the work of Pietro d'Abano, actually played an important role in the program of decoration of the so-called Salone at the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua (1306) and in the Salone dei Mesi at the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara (1470).²¹

This is only one of an enormous number of examples which show that East and West cannot be separated, and that some artistic results of the Italian Renaissance need, for instance, to be traced back to a Graeco-Babylonian writer whose work was modified and expanded through Egyptian, Indian, Sasanian and Arabic hands.

Another example can be offered by the study of religions like Manichaeism, where it is impossible to conduct any serious research without paying attention to sources that can be alternatively not only in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, but also in Middle-Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, Arabic, Uigur, Chinese, all of which are necessary for a correct and complete un-

derstanding.²² Thus if Augustine cannot be read and commented without referring to, for instance, Sogdian or Chinese pertinent sources, Latin, Mediaeval and Christian studies²³ cannot be indifferent to the development of Oriental studies. On the other hand, Manichaeism doctrines show some influences that can be ultimately derived, as Geo Widengren tried to demonstrate in a seminal work titled *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism*,²⁴ from the Babylonian and Assyrian background. It is a pity, however, that it is very rare to see Assyriologists directly entering the debate on these general problems or considering the results of discussions about the Mesopotamian world produced outside their own field.²⁵ I have an impression, probably wrong or based on insufficient evidence, that in this respect some Assyriologists seem to react like the "Classicists" of the Oriental studies.

We have also to underline, however, that the common idea that the introduction of the concept of rational thought, the *λόγος*, and then that of "science," should be strictly ascribed to the Ionian school of philosophy, has been questioned by F.M. Cornford, as early as in 1912²⁶ and again in 1952,²⁷ in two books

²⁰ See Warburg, *La rinascita del paganesimo antico*, pp. 249-272. See also Pingree, The Indian Iconography of the Decans and Horās, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 26, 1963, pp. 223-254.

²¹ Warburg, *La rinascita del paganesimo antico*, pp. 249-272.

²² The special condition distinguishing Manichaeism studies as an obvious field of intercultural phenomena and interactions has positively developed strong scholarly co-operation, which is for instance visible in the activities of the IAMS (The International Association of Manichaeism Studies), organizing regular conferences and publishing books and a *Manichaean Studies Newsletter*.

²³ This is particularly true in the case of some Medieval Heresies, like that of the Bogomils and of the Cathars. See Y. Stoyanov, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, New

Heaven – London 2000 (revised edition of *The Hidden Tradition. The secret History of medieval Christian heresy*, London 1994).

²⁴ See, G. Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism (King and Saviour II)*. Studies in Manichaeism, Mandaean, and Syrian-Gnostic Religion, Uppsala – Leipzig 1946.

²⁵ See for instance, the problem of the impact on the Western and Oriental world of the story of Enkidu and Gilgamesh, which is discussed in my contribution Between Mesopotamia and India: Some Remarks about the Unicorn Cycle in Iran, in *Mythology and Mythologies*, Melammu Symposia II, edited by R.M. Whiting, Helsinki 2001, pp. 149-179.

²⁶ *From Religion to Philosophy: a study in the Origin of Western Speculation*, New York 1912.

²⁷ *Principium sapientiae. The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*, Cambridge 1952.

which show the mythical and ritual origin of the beginning of Greek philosophy, as J.-P. Vernant²⁸ has clearly summarised, not without reflections about Oriental parallels. This does not mean that the greatness of Classical thought is reduced, but that its origins and processes have to be historically located in a context without prejudices in which rational thought is seen only as western, or where only this thought is the valid thought, as again Vernant²⁹ has pointed out with extreme clarity. In its turn, furthermore the methodological approach to the history of sciences, in particular in the case of extra-European and non-Greek-oriented societies, has gained a fresh eminence, not in the sense of a bold confrontation or of an exaltation of medical, astronomical, mathematical, or physical doctrines born and evolved without any relation with the Greek world – a sort of approach which, in my opinion, would result, in a kind of reversed prejudice, both irrational and blind – but as a field deserving autonomous criteria of analysis and explanation, which cannot be subordinated to those fields which basically originated in the Greek world, as Pingree has tried to explain in a very significant article provocatively titled “Hellenophilia against History of Sciences.”³⁰

Similarly the idea of power, its evolution, ideology and the simple concept of royalty with its rituals and religious implications, born in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian worlds, played an enormous impact on other societies, starting with the Achaemenid Empire, but generating, throughout the struggles with the Greek world, many speculations which would be seminal for the origin of the politico-philosophical determination of concepts such as state, society, citizenship, nationality, and so on. The ideological battle around the ideas of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy, the so-called *Verfassungdebatte*, situated by Herodotus (III, 80-84), in the Persian atmosphere of a discussion between Darius, Otanes and Megabizos, reflects a controversial subject, which found the highest known speculations in Greece, but that was not without any echo or background in the East.³¹ Thus it is clear that we are not playing with words *à la mode*, like interculturalism and so on, which, like many “politically correct” expressions, can be used only as empty words; these are facts waiting for answers not only in the academic world but in the modern consciousness. It is not by chance that Hegel in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*³² considered the Iranian area as the place in which “nature” was

²⁸ *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*. Études de psychologie historique, Paris 1996, pp. 374-375 and *passim*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ D. Pingree, Hellenophilia versus History of Science, *ISIS*, 83, 1992, pp. 554-563.

³¹ On this problem see F. Gschnitzer, *Die sieben Perser und das Königtum des Dareios*, Heidelberg 1977; J. Wiesehöfer, *Der Aufstand Gaumätas und die Anfänge Dareios' I*, Bonn 1978; J.M. Balcer, *Herodotus and Bisutun. Problems in Ancient Persian Historiography*, Historia, Heft 49, Stuttgart 1987; M. Dandamayev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, Engl. tr. by W.J. Vogelsang, Leiden 1989, pp. 105-106; D. Asheri, L'ideale monarchico di Dario: Erodoto III 80-82 e DNb Kent, in *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica*, N.S. III, 1996, pp. 99-106; idem, Erodoto e Bisutun, in *Presentazione e scrittura della storia: Storiografia, Epigrafi, Monumenti. Atti del Convegno di Pontignano (aprile 1996)*, ed. by E. Gabba, Biblioteca di Athenaeum 42, Como 1999, pp. 101-116

³² G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Gans 1837, quoted according to the Suhrkamp edition, *Werke*, 12. Band. Auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845 neu edierte Ausgabe. Redaktion E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, Frankfurt am Main 1979, pp. 215-236. See also A. Panaino, La Persia nel pensiero e negli scritti di Hegel, *Paideia*, XLII, N. 4-6, 1987, pp. 193-213 and G.M. Cazzaniga, *La religione dei moderni*, Pisa 1999, p. 297.

actually separated from the “Spirit,” and the clash between the Persian Empire and the West as a seminal moment in the transition of the Spirit of History from East to West. If this very typical Hegelian pattern cannot be followed today, and without mentioning the various prejudices of Hegel concerning Indian and Chinese cultures,³³ it is interesting to note that already in his system the dialectic processes between East and West were not at all reduced to the wars opposing Persians and Greeks, but dwelled on many aspects of the multicultural and multiethnic Achaemenid Empire, which was considered very close to the modern idea of the State.

The MELAMMU project has necessarily to deal with problems as those I have now stressed, offering the clear perception that these represent data which cannot be neglected or relegated to a corner of exoticism. At the same time, our target, in particular when we enter subjects which in recent years have been mainly methodological, remains linked to the facts and the data, which imply the reconstruction of a *scenario*, not a simple list of questions and problems. The risk, in fact, by speaking only of methods is to pass over the facts, which at the end would be ridiculous and nonsensical. It is clear that our project represents a cultural position, of course with individual

points of view and free interpretations, as it commonly should happen in the academic world, but based on the general assumption that the ancient world, like the modern one, was in continuous evolution and open to different evolution and exchanges and that the oriental border was not a wall which produced only separated and diverging cultures with no mutual impact.³⁴ We start from the Mesopotamian background, as a chronological basic moment, but we try to focus on the changes and continuity in history and culture without prejudices against specific traditions, races or religions. In other words, I hope that our efforts will be able to enforce a new cultural perspective in which East and West could be considered as part of a unique Eurasiatic continent, without excluding some parts of the African world, and not as two impermeable walls. In this respect I would simply mention the great scientific and human example offered in this century by Giuseppe Tucci, who not only in his many studies on the Chinese, Indian and Tibetan worlds, or on Buddhist, Hindu or Zoroastrian problems but also during his many explorations in Central Asia continuously focused on the importance of such an intercultural dimension of Eurasian history.³⁵

We have also to take into consideration the actual cultural conditions of the

³³ On the other hand, we have to note that Hegel's attitude towards India changed progressively and that Hegel entered in a strong debate with A. von Humboldt specifically about the interpretation of some philosophical concepts contained in the *Bhagavadgītā*, as S. Marchignoli has clearly shown in *Che cos'è lo yoga?* Traduzione ed egemonia alle origini dell'indologia tedesca, in *Verso l'India. Oltre l'India. Scritti e ricerche sulle tradizioni intellettuali sudasiatiche*, ed. by F. Squarcini, Milano 2002, pp. 87-102.

³⁴ A very stimulating and intercultural approach to the historical dynamics of the border separating the Roman Empire from the East has been offered by F. Millar (*The Roman Near East. 31 BC – AD 337*,

Cambridge (Mass.) – London 1993) with a remarkable and wide-ranging view of facts, data and sources.

³⁵ See, for instance, *I segni di Roma nell'India e nell'Estremo Oriente*, *Nuova Antologia*, 378, 1935, pp. 3-14; *Le grandi vie di comunicazione Europa-Asia*, Torino 1958; A propos East and West; considerations of an historian, *East and West*, 8, 1957/57, pp. 343-349, and many others. In this perspective the extremely significant publications of K. Karttunen have to be carefully taken into consideration (*India in Early Greek Literature*, *Studia Orientalia* 65, Helsinki 1989; *India and the Hellenistic World*, *Studia Orientalia* 83, Helsinki 1997).

new generations of students who face many difficulties in anyone of our academic institutions, as they try to venture themselves in the field of the scholarly work in a domain which is not economically “thrilling” and that necessarily require a long and heavy training. Our students do not possess, or rarely possess, as was common in the past, a strong background in Classical studies, historical methodology, philosophy and literature. Perhaps the obvious differences with the past educational system also has some positive aspects; for instance the apparently more easier access to our studies to young people not necessarily, as it generally was on the past, belonging to the upper classes of society. We do not have the time, nor is this the right place, for a general consideration at the basic reasons for such a change; we can simply mention the collapse of some élite schools like the gymnasium and the lyceum, which in some countries still survive but in difficult conditions and with some restrictions, or – what is more important – the general misconception of studies which ordinary people believe to be out of date or simply a nonsensical waste of time, because they are expensive and without attracting a direct income and any apparently productive result, which is another “ideological” element to take into consideration. The market society is actually interested in our work only superficially and strictly for business reasons (the past and the Orient being a nice subject for movies, novels and so on; in other words as a hobby *à la page*), not because of a cultural choice and reflection on the meaning and importance of the past and its inner links with the present. *Die Welt von Gestern* thus is really surpassed by a number of social and structural transformations which will change also our lives and necessarily our

studies and our academic institutions. The problem now is not how to return to a “golden age,” which would be impossible and foolish, but how to prevent some dangerous and disastrous results. In fact in a situation in which the cultural backgrounds of our young students appear restricted and with a strong tendency in society to a limited specialisation and with scholars who, more than in the past, do not know anything about the different historical societies and cultures and think that is time to save themselves and their subject on a little boat, the final risk could be a sort of complete and reciprocal separation between fields which should be in close connection. The risk in few words would be that of producing “good” technicians, who, as parallel *rectae*, will never cross each other’s way *ad infinitum*. Notwithstanding some peculiar aspects of the century which will be over in two months, we have to consider again that the *Bildung* of the masters who, between the XIXth and XXth centuries, founded our disciplines, was very strong and came from many points of view; of course you can remark that they had, and fought for, philosophical and historical positions, which were very often politically oriented, a problem to which I would like to come back soon; on the other hand they started from a cultural dimension which was the highest possible and their interests were (or might have been) at the same time as wide-ranging as their cultural background. This, of course, was possible also because the specialist level of research, the basic literature was not so great and it was possible, or in any case more reasonable, for a single person to be really competent in various subjects without being a “monster.” On the other hand such an apparently favourable situation did not produce, without some

interesting exceptions, the basic idea that the different cultures in Antiquity were linked and reciprocally indispensable for a correct approach to the past, neither was this point of view current and common in our universities. On the other hand this soon-to-be ending century has seen the elaboration and then the explosion of racist and intolerant ideologies, which were closely linked to the ancient studies. The criminal *mirage* of Aryan superiority³⁶ was not only and simply the production of ignorant people, but was also scientifically justified and elaborated thanks to the direct collaboration and enthusiastic speculations of highly reputed scholars and academicians.³⁷ In a small world, as it is today, this risk is neither over nor we can assume it is definitely extinguished. The strong depression of the so-called South of the World, or if you prefer, the Third World, is producing a direct movement of migration, in particular towards European countries, which gives a fresh stimulus for intolerance and racism. We have then to reflect on these facts because there are some chauvinist trends which, as intercultural modern phenomena, could find a room also in our speculations on the past and could determine some dangerous attitudes in current non-scholarly (but perhaps also scholarly) society.

Now, if we have on one hand the need to defend the evolution of ancient and oriental studies, and in this I think we have necessarily to join our colleagues of Classical studies who sometimes do not realise that the progressive destruction of ancient studies will start with the exotic

side (i.e. in with more clear words with ancient Oriental studies, considered expensive and not useful) for infecting also the common subjects (as Ancient History, Classical Philology, Ancient Philosophy, etc.), we should also avoid any sub-cultural trend, which will isolate each scholar into his more or less beautiful box. MELAMMU is perhaps a drop in the ocean, but a drop can fill the vase, producing a significant impact on the scholarly world.

If some specialists of Oriental studies also ignore Greek and Latin, have no idea of modern patterns in historical research, have known only from newspapers something about Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, have never read a philosopher or do not have any idea of the great literature of the past, the risk is that our efforts could remain in a limbo of exoticism and esoteric knowledge, as a *turris eburnea* where the problems of the normal world would not arrive. Against this trend, I maintain a perhaps bizarre and peculiar idea that the study of the past, of civilisations and societies which are far from us in time and space is difficult in itself, but without a proper background, a strong education of the individual spirit, could be very risky and blind. In fact, strictly speaking about ideologies, we cannot avoid remarking that our scholarly work is not apart from our times; thus when we discuss past ideologies we necessarily see them throughout the lens of our modern culture and we cannot presume that current ideologies do not play a sort of direct or semi-direct influence on our opinions. I

³⁶ See, for instance, the discussion of the problem by L. Poliakov, *Le mythe arien*, Paris 1971.

³⁷ We can simply recall that the intolerant speculations of H. St. Chamberlain were based on the works of Paul De Lagarde, a famous and technically very good Orientalist; see G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der*

Vernunft, Berlin 1954 (*Destruction of reason*, Engl. translation by P. Palmer, Atlantic Highlands, N.Y., 1981), in particular the last chapter in the paragraph dedicated to H.St. Chamberlain as the founder of modern racism, and *passim*.

use to say to my students that when we try to reconstruct the past we have to realise that it is not an objective datum in front of our eyes, but that it appears modified by our culture, language, religion and experience. This does not signify that we have no hope for a correct comprehension of the past, but that we must venture in our studies with the consciousness that we have to know or we must suspect the more or less hidden distortions linked to our individual perception and then the risks that we have to focus on. We have to travel like Odysseus among the sirens, with the problem being that the sirens are inside our perceptions. If absolute objectivity would be impossible for a single person, we have to maintain the deep suspicion that we cannot see everything and for this we need the help of other insights and stimulating supports. The intercultural approach is thus based not only on the idea that ancient cultures played a reciprocal influence on each other, but also on the assumption that the specialists too of these fields accept such an idea too; in other words, if any research proceeds without the suspicion that other elements are involved, it would be more difficult to focus, to determine, or if necessary to limit and exclude the possible relations with other cultures and their significance. Our cultural options are clearly reflected in our methods of working and in the selection of the data and of the protagonists of the game we want to reconstruct. For this reason I still insist on

the need to regard the historical work as a strictly intellectual field, and that we cannot be simply technicians. Thus the limits in ours and in our students' cultural background could produce new distortions in research that necessarily implies open minds and a strong awareness of the difficulties we have to face.

This apparently dangerous situation does not signify that the time is over for Orientalism; in a changing world, the process of globalization,³⁸ as it has been now called, the web, the single market and business economy, will attract more and more interests on the Oriental World; consequently we will see, as it normally happens, a fresh interest in the past, superficial and economically motivated it may be, which, without a conscious scholarly community, could be used also for ideological operations,³⁹ or, as the contributions of Eric Hobsbawm have shown in other fields,⁴⁰ for the invention of seemingly old (but actually new) traditions. We cannot avoid realizing that by speaking of empires, of ancient ideologies, of religions, of conquest and related events of the past, we contribute, willingly or not, to building up an image of the past, which, in its turn, can be used for political reasons in the present world, as for instance for changing a border or for assuming a place as the original (quasi-mythological) birth-place of a nation. This is not an *exemplum fictum*; if you think for a moment of the recent Serbo-Albanian conflict, and the way in which its historical or pseudo-

³⁸ See, e.g., the chapter on the "Homo globalizzatus" of E.J. Hobsbawm, *Intervista sul nuovo secolo*, a cura di A. Polito, Roma-Bari 2001.

³⁹ A simple example of analysis of the ideological evaluations of historico-religious data, such as those represented by the interpretations of the so called Zoroastrian reform, is discussed in my article: Social and Economic Patterns in the Old Avesta. Reflections

on the History of a Problem, in *Matériaux pour l'histoire économique du monde iranien*, textes réunis par R. Gyselen et M. Szuppe, Paris 1999, pp. 13-33.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., E. Hobsbawm, *On History*, London 1997, in particular the last article originally published with the title: The Historian between the Quest for the Universal and the Quest for Identity, in *Diagnose*, 42/4, 1994.

historical reasons going back to the Middle Ages have been treated by the press and the media you would probably realise the danger the lies in history.

Of course any of us is free in his or her own choice and political options, but we cannot presume that, as scholars, we are neutral and not involved in the reality of our times.

Before closing these “short” introductory words, I would like to come back to the history of our studies by considering with all of you the strange destiny of two groups of scholars who were very significant between the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century. Perhaps it is only an impression, possibly wrong like some sensations, but I still wonder why the exaggerations and the methodological limits of schools, which now are ill-famed or to put it less harshly, not well-reputed in many academic clubs, like the *Panbabylonistische Schule*⁴¹ and the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*,⁴² have been radically erased with many and many suggestive and intriguing – I would add in some cases correct – suggestions and insights; the contribution of these scholars who tried to focus on the importance of Mesopotamian and Iranian

cultures in particular for the West have not been superseded by new and more precise and accurate methods of investigations, but simply subjected to a sort of *damnatio memoriae*. The damnation of course has infected also the same idea that a number of direct or indirect links and connections were possible and to be investigated. I believe that sometimes we should return to these works, not because they necessarily contain the true solutions, but because those researches represented an enormous effort to open the investigation of the Oriental world as well as Biblical and Christian studies beyond of their established limits.⁴³ In many respects their results, in particular in the case of the *Panbabylonismus* with its bold and overwhelming focus on the *Astralmythologie*, appear out of date or sometimes fantastically fancied and not pertinent. Then, if their spirit, after two world wars, has been completely lost, their contribution to the development of Oriental studies has not been seriously meditated and taken into consideration into the framework of more solid steps.⁴⁴

Ideologies as intercultural phenomena are the scholarly subject of our meeting, but anyone of us influences ideas and

⁴¹ On this very subject Simo Parpola will deal in detail in the forthcoming proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of the Melammu Project, “Schools of Oriental Studies and the Development of Modern Historiography,” held in Ravenna, 13th – 17th October 2001.

⁴² See, for instance, the defense of the main trends of this school in the field of Iranian religious studies by Gh. Gnoli, in *Universalismo e nazionalismo nell’Iran del III secolo*, published in *Incontro di Religioni in Asia tra il III e il X secolo d.C.*, a cura di L. Lanciotti, Firenze 1984, pp. 31-54. For an overview of this school see the article published by Kurt Rudolf, *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by M. Eliade, New York – London 1987, vol. 12, pp. 293-296.

⁴³ We have to underline the attention focused by this school on the problem of the plurality of the origin of Christian religion, or on the role of religious practices

and behaviours as well as on the dimension of the history of religious traditions with a very liberal insight derived from a Neokantian antimetaphysical general approach.

⁴⁴ An interesting and fitting example is offered, for instance, by scholars like Carol Clemen, who, as an important member of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, and a part from some of his works on the Greek sources concerning the Iranian world (*Fontes Historiae Religionis Persicae*, Gissae 1920; *Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion*, Giessen 1920), wrote a very seminal and stimulating book titled *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neuen Testaments: die Abhängigkeit des ältesten Christentums von nicht-jüdischen Religionen und philosophischen Systemen*, Giessen 1908 (reprints and new edition, Giessen 1924, 1939). This work, soon translated in English in an improved and enlarged version (*Primitive Christi-*

people, contributes to the education of new generations of students and young scholars. Thus we are part of society and its cultural development. For these reasons I hope that from this project new ideas and proposals for a strong collaboration among different fields, scholars and nations will emerge and it could

contribute to the enforcement of the studies into an Eurasian perspective, offering also a real occasion for the exchange of students programs, doctoral activities, and common education into a spirit of real tolerance and cultural consciousness.

anity and Its Non-Jewish Sources, translated by R.G. Nisbet, Edinburgh 1912), very widely entered into many intercultural problems making an extensive use of the existing bibliography and with a very "liberal" discussion of many subjects which in a few years would be, if not censured, at least hidden and abandoned. On the one hand, if the context in which this kind of researches was developed, in particular the attempt of focusing the Non-Jewish background of Christianity, was very interesting *in se* and with no hidden points in Clemen, it has on the other hand to be prudently evaluated because of the racist trends in which, following the work of De Lagarde, the complete independence of Christ from his Judaic origins was the object of heavy ideological interests. We know that the work of Clemen was free from these prejudices (nor actually the name of De Lagarde is

mentioned in this very work); but we can suspect that the third reprint of Clemen's book, in 1939, under the Nazi regime, could have been used for other purposes. Another interesting problem concerns the interpretation of the mutual influences between the Iranian and Judaic worlds, which reflects a lot of cultural and religious difficulties and prejudices, with which I have tried to deal in my contribution titled *L'Ecumene iranica e lo Zoroastrismo nel loro sviluppo storico*, published in *Atti del seminario invernale: Il popolo del ritorno: l'Epoca persiana e la Bibbia*, Lucca, 25-27 gennaio 2000, Biblia 2001, pp. 13-100, in particular in the chapter 5.2. "La questione delle mutue influenze tra mondo iranico e giudaico," pp. 69-83, which I will edit, in a new and enlarged version in the proceedings of the next Melammu Symposium.