

## **CFP Living under Empires: A View from Below**

### **Melammu Workshop**

*Helsinki, December 1-3 2020*

Organized by Caroline Wallis (University of Helsinki), Marta Lorenzon (University of Helsinki) Sebastian Fink (University of Innsbruck)

Organised by the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires

Key notes Speakers:

Marc Van De Mieroop, Columbia University

Claudia Glatz, University of Glasgow

Petri Ylikoski, University of Helsinki

*What have Mesopotamian Empires ever done for their people? Tracking the macro in the micro.*

All the successive Empires of the First Millennium BCE, in one form or another, claim to guarantee the collective well-being of the people living on their territory. Furthermore, providing this welfare to human beings is the main clause of the Kings contract with the gods, and hence, is the corner stone of the legitimation of their authority as rulers. What are we missing if we dismiss these claims as solely rhetorical and directed to an elite audience? Can we consider them as principles that guided concrete policies towards the population, as principles that were binding to the political elite itself?

In this workshop we aim to take the view from below, and investigate in what way imperial dynamics may have affected the lifeways of people in their territories. The basic questions of this workshop are: How did the empires of the Ancient Near East affect the life of ordinary people in their realm? To which extent was rural life and life in smaller towns permeated by imperial agents and policies, hence by imperial dynamics?

The investigation of textual and archaeological evidence can provide us with glimpses into everyday life. The publication of several relevant text corpora from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium has provided us with much new data concerning economic life in this period. New methods for the analysis of archaeological evidence provide us with detailed information concerning the nutrition and the health of ancient people. The workshop aims at combining textual and archaeological evidence with social theory to develop a clearer picture of living-circumstances and hope to “track the macro in the micro”.

We are inviting papers that focus on answering the following questions:

- What do textual and archaeological sources tell us about the life of non-elite people?
- Can recent developments in household archaeology help evaluate the permeability of the countryside to imperial dynamics (e.g. food, cults, taxation)? Does the analysis of archaeological remains demonstrate significant changes regarding nutrition or health?
- How did changing prices and incomes affect everyday life and how much control over prices could the imperial administration exert? Did the economic situation change and did places become richer or poorer due to changing political conditions?
- What role did empires play in managing local disasters (plagues, pandemics, droughts, famines)? How did imperial large-scale building projects affect local communities?
- What were the direct intervention of the imperial administration in the social structure of local societies? What fiscal policies can we observe and what were their social consequences?

- How often, why and when did ordinary people resort to imperial legal institutions? What do we know of the cohabitation of different normative principles for each Empire?

The period we want to cover is roughly the first Millennium BC, so we invite contributions on the Neo-Assyrian, the Neo-Babylonian, the Achaemenid and the Parthian Empires. We encourage comparative studies of living circumstances in areas in- and outside the empire as well as long-term studies of regions of cities.

As the effect of empires on populations in time of war, with sieges of cities and mass-deportations, has been studied rather well, we aim to focus on rather peaceful periods and look at living conditions in the Mesopotamian heartland. However, as waging war is most probably an essential feature of any empire, we completely acknowledge that continuous warfare also shaped the life of many people and also invite studies on the role of the imperial army and administration in people's life.

We invite Assyriologists, Archaeologists, Ancient Historians, and scholars of Social Sciences to send an abstract for a 30 minutes talk. Paper proposal should include a title, an abstract of 300-500 words and be submitted to [livingunderempires@gmail.com](mailto:livingunderempires@gmail.com) by 01.07.2020. The acceptance of paper will be announced by July 10. We hope that all participants are able to come to Helsinki in person, and will monitor the situation again in July and October. If travelling is not possible for everyone, talks may be given online.