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“The Mesopotamian Heritage of Achaemenian Kingship”

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Published in Melammu Symposia 1:

Sanno Aro and R. M. Whiting (eds.),

The Heirs of Assyria.

*Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and
Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Tvärminne,
Finland, October 8-11, 1998* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian
Text Corpus Project 2000), pp. 35-49.

Publisher: <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/>

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The Mesopotamian Heritage of Achaemenian Kingship

In a few pages I cannot take up many of the items I should and would discuss today, but, if my interpretation of what all of us expect from the present seminar is correct, I want to present you in brief with the main problems of Irano-Mesopotamian relationships in order to focus the core of the subject, in particular, with the hope of outlining at least some perspectives for future research.

As Gherardo Gnoli underlined in a basic and seminal article published in 1974 (“Politica religiosa e concezione della regalità sotto gli Achemenidi,” appeared in *Gurarā-jamañjarikā, Studi in onore di G. Tucci*, Napoli, pp. 23-88 and republished in a French version translated by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Politique religieuse et conception de la royauté sous les Achéménides,” in *Commémoration Cyrus*, Acta Iranica 2, Téhéran - Liège 1974, pp. 117-90), a traditional approach to the Achaemenian Kingship (but more generally to the Old Persian and Iranian heritage and cultural history) has mainly stressed and investigated its so-called Indo-Iranian or Indo-European background. Acknowledgement of the Mesopotamian influence on Iranian civilisation did not prevent scholars such as, for instance, Geo Widengren,¹ who certainly had no aversions to investigations into Semitic studies, from a hyper-evaluation of the risky method of the “Tripartite Ideology” in the analysis of Iranian culture and history;

consequently we can note in the strictly Indo-European approach shared by many scholars a strong limitation in the understanding of the cultural interconnections and mutual influences which distinguished the seminal history of the Persian οἰκουμένη. One of the most striking examples, which can be shown here as a sort of paradigmatic case of a restricted Indo-European approach, is given by the frequent interpretation of the Old Persian divine triad represented by A(h)uramazdā, Anāhitā and Mithra. The grouping of these three divinities, mentioned together in the Achaemenid inscription only from the time of Artaxerxes II, 404-359 BC, (and later in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes III), where Mithra and Anāhitā are mentioned besides A(h)uramazdā, has frequently been explained as another testimony to the supposed Indo-Iranian and Indo-European tripartite ideology; A(h)uramazdā as an expression of the priestly function, Mithra of the warrior function and Anāhitā (warlike goddess of fecundity) with her multifunctional values. But without denying the old background of this divine group and the clear parallels with the Vedic world (in particular with Mithra and Sarasvatī, while the direct comparison between Ahura Mazdā and Varuṇa is more problematic), we have, on the contrary, a great number of elements which testify to the impact on these Achaemenid divinities of the models and functions played by gods

¹ Cf. the objections of Gnoli (1974: 25-26) to some

points of the article of G. Widengren, 1959: 244-55.

like Marduk, Šamaš and by the goddess Ištar/Nanā. For instance, and in only a few words, because it is not useful to repeat here all the arguments already collected by Gnoli (1974: 31ff) but noted by some other scholars, pairs of gods like Enlil-Ininna (Ninlil), Aššur-Ninlil (Ištar) and Marduk-Zarpanitu were closely connected with the royalty in Mesopotamia. As the Mesopotamian kings used to attribute their royal power and investiture to the supreme god, Aššur or Marduk, and to the highest goddess, Ninlil, Zarpanitu or Ištar, the Iranian kings in the Achaemenid period, and again in the Sasanian, used to derive the origin and source of their own power from Ahura Mazdā (Pahl. Ohrmazd) and Anāhitā (Pahl. Anāhīd). The increasing importance assumed by the goddess Anāhitā in Achaemenid Iran deserves the closest attention, which will be instructive.

The special consideration given to her in the official inscriptions of Artaxerxes II is confirmed by a report of Berossos (FGRH 680 F11), preserved through a quotation of Clement of Alexandria, who stated in his *Protrepticon*, 5. 3:

μετὰ πολλὰς μὲντοι ὕστερον περιόδους ἐτῶν ἀνθρωποειδῆ ἀγάλματα σέβειν αὐτοῦς Βῆρωσος ἐν τρίτῃ Χαλδαϊκῶν παρίστησι, τοῦτο Ἀρταξέρξου τοῦ Δαρείου τοῦ Ὠχοῦ εἰσηγησαμένου, ὅς πρῶτος τῆς Ἀφροδίτης Ἀναΐτιδος τὸ ἀγαλμα ἀναστήσας ἐν Βαβυλῶνι καὶ Σούσοις καὶ Ἐκβατάνοις Πέρσαις καὶ Βάκτροις καὶ Δαμασκῶ καὶ Σάρδεσιν ὑπέδειξε σέβειν (see Clemen, 1920a: 67).

Berossos shows, however, in the third volume of his work on Chaldea, that after a long period of time they (i.e. the Persians) began to adore anthropomorphic statues, this practice having been introduced by Artaxerxes the son of Darius and grandson of Ochus,²

who was the first to set up statues of Aphrodite Anaitis, which he did at Babylon, Susa, the two Ecbatanas (in Persia and Bactria),³ Damascus, and Sardis, thus suggesting to those communities the duty of worshipping them (Sherwood Fox - Pemberton, 1928: 72-73).

We have to remember that Herodotus (*Historiae*, I, 131), in a very famous chapter on the Persian religion, expressly noted:

Πέρσας δὲ οἶδα νόμοισι τοιοῦσιδε χρωμένους, ἀγάλματα μὲν καὶ νηοὺς καὶ βωμοὺς οὐκ ἐν νόμῳ ποιευμένους ἰδρῦσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖσι ποιεῦσι μωρίην ἐπιφέρουσι, ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκέειν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρωποφυέας ἐνόμισαν τοὺς θεοὺς κατὰ περ οἱ Ἕλληνας εἶναι (Clemen, 1920a: 5; see ed. Hude, 1927, vol. I).

I am aware that the Persians observe the following customs: so far from being in the habit of setting up statues, temples, and altars, they regard those who do so as fools; the reason being, in my opinion, that, unlike the Greeks, they never considered the gods to be of the same nature as man (Sherwood Fox - Pemberton, 1928: 3).

In the same chapter Herodotus precisely stated that part of a series of original Iranian divinities (Zeus, Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Water, and Winds):

... ἐπιμεμαθήκασι δὲ καὶ τῇ Οὐρανίῃ θύειν, παρά τε Ἀσσυρίων μαθόντες καὶ Ἀραβίων. καλέουσι δὲ Ἀσσύριοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην Μύλιττα, Ἀράβιοι δὲ Ἀλιλάτ, Πέρσαι δὲ Μίτραν (Clemen, 1920a: 5; see ed. Hude, 1927, vol. I).

... They have acquired from the Assyrians and Arabians the habit of sacrificing also to Urania. Now the Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alilat, and the Persians Mitras⁴ (Sherwood Fox - Pemberton, 1928: 3).

² This is clearly a mistake for Mnemon, as noted by Gray, 1929: 57.

³ See Wikander, 1946: 75-95; Widengren, 1968: 144-45.

⁴ See Clemen, 1920b: 103-104; Gershevitch, 1967: 24 and in particular 35-36.

It is obvious that these Greek reports do not signify that the cult of Mithra and in particular of Anāhitā were derived from the Mesopotamian area, because we know some Indo-Iranian (and in particular Vedic and Avestan) traditions on these gods, but that their cult assumed a political value and some official aspects which were strongly infected by syncretistic phenomena. The custom of worshipping (or in any case the presence of) anthropomorphic statues of divinities, and in particular of Anāhitā seems to be a direct witness of a Mesopotamian influence, which probably started around the time of Artaxerxes;⁵ à propos of which I do not think, as Briant supposes (1996: 696), that the reference of Dinon (340 BC)⁶ *apud* Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.*, 4, 65, 1) to the adoration offered by Medes, Persians and Mages to the ἀγάλματα of Fire and of Water can be assumed as evidence of an Iranian habit of worshipping statues already in the 4th century BC, but it simply attests to the fact that these peoples considered the Fire and Water as images of gods [θύειν ἐν ὑπάθρῳ τούτους ὁ Δίνων, λέγει θεῶν ἀγάλματα μόνα τὸ πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ νομίζοντας “Dino says that they (i.e. Persians, Medes and Mages) sacrifice in the open air, believing that only Fire and Water are images of the gods”].⁷ In any case, influence of the Mesopotamian iconography of Ištar on the Persian Anāhitā is evident in some seals, rings and tablets.⁸ The different temples and sanctuaries of Anāhitā show many relationships and cultural and religious associations, not only with Ištar, but with Artemis (e.g., Xenophon, *Anabasis*, I, 6, 7; Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 8, 4; 14, 16)⁹

and other female divinities; in particular the impact of Semitic traditions, not strictly connected with Ištar (Briant, 1996: 698), can be assumed in the case of some classical references, as that of Strabo [*Geography*, XI, 16, 532 (chapter 33)] to slaves of both sexes consecrated to her service in the region of Acilisene [ἐν τῇ Ἀκιλισσηνῇ], or to “virgin daughters of the noblest families who were given in marriage after they had prostituted their bodies for a long period in the precincts of the goddess.” Strabo states that: “no one disdains to take them to wife”¹⁰ [ἀνατιθέασι δ’ ἐνταῦθα δούλους καὶ δούλας· καὶ τοῦτο μὲν οὐ θαυμαστόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ θυγατέρας οἱ ἐπιφανέστατοι τοῦ ἔθνους ἀνιεροῦσι παρθένους, αἷς νόμος ἐστὶ καταπορνευθείσας πολὺν χρόνον παρὰ τῇ θεῷ μετὰ ταῦτα δίδοσθαι πρὸς γάμον, οὐκ ἀπαξιούντος τῇ τοιαύτῃ συννοικεῖν οὐδενός].¹¹

In addition it should be stressed that the text of the Avestan hymn to Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā “the lofty, mighty, undefiled (Lady)” (*Yašt* 5) presents in stanzas 126-129 a description of the goddess (in particular of her dress), which seems to be based on a statue or something similar. This element has often been noted¹² and, notwithstanding the differences in dress between the Iranian goddess and Ištar, it is quite probable that we have here another witness of Mesopotamian influence on the Iranian tradition; we know in fact that Ištar was specifically dressed for the sacrificial ritual dedicated to her.¹³ Without having to accept such extreme and far-fetched hypotheses as those suggested by James Hope Moulton (1913: 114-5, 238-240, 394) and Cornelius

⁵ See Lommel, 1927: 31; Boyce, 1982: 201-204.

⁶ See FRrH 690 F28; Clemen, 1920a: 67; 1920b: 86.

⁷ See also Sherwood Fox - Pemberton, 1928: 72.

⁸ See Briant, 1996: 264-265; 697.

⁹ See also Strabo, XV, 3, 14; XVI, 1, 4; Wikander, 1946: 77-78, 83; Widengren, 1968: 202; on the other hand, with reference to the separate cults of Anāhid and Artemis in

Susa and Elymais, cf. Boyce - Grenet, 1991: 37-38, 46-49.

¹⁰ See Sherwood Fox - Pemberton, 1928: 35.

¹¹ See Clemen, 1920a: 33.

¹² See e.g., Malandra, 1983: 118-119; see also Olmstead, 1948: 471-72.

¹³ See Leemans, 1952.

Petrus Tiele (1903: 255, in note), the former suggesting that Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā was a Semitic goddess, the latter that by the epithets Arədvī Sūrā the Zoroastrians attempted to translate the Babylonian title *rubat bēlit* “exalted lady,” often given to Ištar,¹⁴ we may recall that both the warlike and fertility functions of Ištar are present in the Avestan goddess, who, in her turn, possibly had assumed the characteristics of an old Iranian divinity (the Heavenly River; i.e., Ir. **Harahvatī*)¹⁵ but appears also as a syncretic figure, which perhaps was under the influence of the Mesopotamian cults. The image of Anāhitā in *Yt.* 5, 128, wearing “above (the head) a diadem (studded) with one hundred stars, golden, having eight towers, made like a chariot body, adorned with ribbons, beautiful (and) well-made,” (*upairi pusqam baṇdaiiata arəduuī sūra anāhita satō.straṇḥqam zaranaēnīm ašta.kaošdaqm*¹⁶ *raθa.kairiiqam drafšakauuaitīm srīrqam anu.pōiθβaitīm hukərətqam*), immediately recalls that of Ištar with her high hat and the eight-pointed star behind.¹⁷ In any case, as already noted by Malandra (1983: 119), if Ištar rides upon a lion, as a goddess

of war, the Kušān coins show the goddess NANA (or NANAIA) on a lion¹⁸ or, on the other hand, dressed as a Greek Artemis,¹⁹ with a bow and quiver. However, if the identification of this Nanaia with Anāhitā in the Iranian context of the Kušān culture is possible, there are some elements which support more directly the comparison with the Avestan goddess Aši.²⁰ Thus, the iconography of an “Artemis Huntress with her head surrounded by a nimbus of long rays,” as she appears on the coins of Demetrius I (c. 200-190 BC), could only hypothetically be connected with that of Anāhitā, because, as Boyce and Grenet suggest (1991: 162), “her rays could just as well be owed to a development proper to the character of the Greek goddess herself.” It is necessary, however, to point out that in any case the later attested Sasanian denomination of the planet Venus as Anāhīd was fixed in the Achaemenid period and this is another witness to the same syncretistic process.²¹ Another element which I want to stress is that the evolution of the Old Persian cult of Anāhitā shows a progressively increasing influence of the Mesopotamian world²² on

¹⁴ Cf. Gray, 1929: 58.

¹⁵ Av. *Haraxʷaitī*-, which is the name of the “Arachosia”; see also the Vedic river goddess Sarasvatī; see in particular Lommel, 1954: 412-13. Malandra (1983: 120) suggests a similar situation of cultural syncretism; see also Benveniste (1929: 27-28, 38-39). In contrast, Benveniste (1929: 62-64) assumed that Av. *arəduuī*- was the original name of the goddess.

¹⁶ Rightly Boyce - Grenet (1991: 162, n. 42) with reference to the Av. compound *ašta.kaošda*- note that the translation “having eight rays” was suggested *ad sensum* by Darmesteter (1892, II: 396 “aux huit rayons,” n. 160), and uncritically accepted by many scholars. But already Bartholomae (1904: 216) translated: “achtteilig, achtfach geteilt,” while Bailey (1979: 63b, s.v. *kūšda*- “mansion, palace”), proposed “with eight tiers,” a meaning formally acceptable and assumed also by Boyce and Grenet. I wonder if the literal translation “having eight palaces” refers to the image of seven towers on the crown, which is closer to the Mesopotamian iconography.

¹⁷ Also stanza 85 of *Yt.* 5 [where Ahura Mazda says: “Come, descend, O Arədvī Sūrā Anāhitā, from those stars to the earth created by Ahura. The brave lords, the mas-

ters of the countries, the sons of the masters of the countries will sacrifice (or ‘want to sacrifice’) to you” (*ādi paiti. auua. jasa arəduuī sūre anāhite haca auuatbiiō stərəbiiō aoi zqam ahuraδātqam. θβqam yazānte auruuāṅhō ahurāṅhō daijhpataiō pūθrāṅhō daijhpaitinam*); see Kellens, 1984: 262], deserves closest attention. See also Benveniste, 1929: 61-62.

¹⁸ See Mukherjee, 1969; Rosenfield, 1967: 84, 102.

¹⁹ See Rosenfield, 1967: 83-91; Gnoli, 1974: 42; Al-louche-Le Page, 1956: 112-17, in particular p. 113.

²⁰ See Boyce - Grenet, 1991: 187-88. For a possible explanation of some similarities between the Avestan hymn to Anāhitā and that to Aši, see Boyce, 1975: 73; 1982: 203; Rosenfield, 1967: 74-75, 87.

²¹ It is possible that originally Anāhitā was, as a celestial river, associated with the Milky Way according to a fresh explanation suggested by Witzel 1984: 226 (but cf. Lommel, 1954: 407, n. 6, against the same statement advanced by Alfred Hillebrandt, 1891: 359 = 1927: 383 = Engl. tr. 1980: 239).

²² I would like to emphasize in particular the Assyrian role played by Ištar as mother of the King, which has been analysed by Nissinen (1993: 246), who has emphasised

Iranian culture. Generally scholars assume a completely different pattern; the Mesopotamian influence was stronger at the beginning and progressively weaker after the Achaemenid conquest. My impression is that this scheme is superficial, and the case of Anāhitā attests to an evolution which was not accepted at the beginning but after a long period of Irano-Mesopotamian contacts.

Following this brief excursus on Anāhitā I want to emphasise that another example of clear Mesopotamian impact on the royal ideology and on the related cults of the Achaemenid society appears in the image of the symbol of A(h)uramazdā, which reproduces that of the god Aššur,²³ “depicted on Late Assyrian cylinder seals in the form of the figure of a king between two outspread wings in a solar disk, while on the Elamite cylinder seals the depiction of him was almost the same as that of the Achaemenids later – in an indented crown” (Dandamayev - Lukonin, 1989: 342).

If, from only these few examples, the Mesopotamian heritage in Iran appears to be very significant and an approach which is too “Indo-European” very blind, I have unfortunately to note that sometimes also in Mesopotamian studies parallel forces cause some damage. I know that the richness of the Mesopotamian world, the never-ending discoveries (Ebla, e.g.) prevent some scholars from a useful exchange of information with colleagues in close fields, such as the Classical Philologists, the Iranologists, or the Indologists. In this case I want to stress

one example: the well-known story of Enkidu not only has many elements in common with that of the ascetic R̥ṣyaśṛṅga “(he) who has the horns of a gazelle” or Ekaśṛṅga “the unicorn” in Hindu and Buddhist texts (see in particular the various versions of the *Mahāvastu*, attested not only in Sanskrit, but also in Pāli, Prakrit, Tibetan, Chinese),²⁴ but also with some scattered references concerning a white three-legged unicorn ass²⁵ (Pahl. *xar ī se pāy*), mentioned in the Avestan literature [(only in *Y.* 42, 4) as a *xara-*, who lives in the middle of the Sea Vouru. kaša] and in the Pahlavi texts like the Indian and Iranian *Bundahišn* (ch. XIX = XIV and *passim*) and the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, LXII, 26-27. Another case is represented, for instance, by the role played by the Achaemenid Empire in the diversification and diffusion in India and Greece of many astronomical and proto-astrological ideas born in Mesopotamia, a subject which has been studied by D. Pingree,²⁶ who has shown, for instance, that the *Atharvaveda* list of the *nakṣatras* (the 27/28 lunar mansions) like the calendrical system attested in the same Vedic collection was based on Mesopotamian patterns, such as the first position given to the Pleiades (MUL.MUL) in the MUL.APIN list. Among the various influences of the Mesopotamian world upon the surrounding civilisations I have tried to analyse the case of the doctrine of three superposed heavens,²⁷ a tradition which appears in Vedic India, in the Zoroastrian texts and in some fragments attributed to the Presocratic philosophers Anaximander, Metrodoros of

as the basic purpose of this tradition its legitimising function, and by Parpola (1997: XXVI-XLIV), who, in contrast, underlines the ontological and mystical meaning of the king as god’s son and chosen one.

²³ See also the discussion with additional bibliography in Root 1979: 169-76, and *passim*; new considerations in Dandamayev, 1997: 43, with reference to the possible Urartian intermediation as assumed by Seidel, 1994: 122.

²⁴ See Della Casa, 1986: 11-24; very useful and important is the work of M. Restelli, 1992, with a general

bibliography on the subject.

²⁵ See Panaino, “Il mito dell’unicorno nella tradizione iranica antica,” in 1990b: 3-25.

²⁶ See e.g., Pingree, 1981: 10; 1987a: 614-16.

²⁷ On the subject see Kingsley, 1992: 339-46, in particular pp. 341-42). A tripartition of the universe and a tripartite heaven are well attested also in India (Gonda: 1966, *passim*) and Indo-Iranian connections with Babylonian culture were stressed already by Bousset (1901: 155ff) and Kirfel (1920, pp. 31*-32*). See Panaino, 1995a.

Chios and Crates. Most interesting is the direct comparison between Iranian and Greek sources,²⁸ where, starting from the lowest level, the peculiar order stars - moon - sun is attested. À propos we can note that the tripartition of the heaven is already attested in some Babylonian texts freshly studied by Livingstone (1986: 82-83; 1989: 24, 99), where we find not only three heavens made of different stones, but that the lowest sky was that of the stars. It is quite probable that the Iranians took this subdivision from the Babylonians, but rearranged it by placing in the other two heavens the moon and the sun according to a sort of theological progression from the less luminous object to the most splendid and bright according to the idea of the ascension of the soul from earth to the Paradise of Ahura Mazdā. My impression is that this concept was simply known and assumed by certain Greek philosophers, who introduced the spherical and geometrical model which is absent²⁹ in the Mesopotamian and Iranian texts.

I have to note that it is quite difficult to find knowledge of these problems in the recent Assyriological literature, as what is not strictly Assyrian or Babylonian can be simply dismissed as unimportant. For these reasons I have greatly appreciated the text of the letter sent me by Prof. Simo Parpola about this meeting, because he clearly stressed the fact that this project was meant to have a wide range and that it was not to be restricted to a closed club. What I find great in the present programme of the State Archives of Assyria Project of the Univer-

sity of Helsinki is in fact closely related to the new perspectives it can develop, offering a basis for a real network, where different competencies might finally be harmonised and more easily shared. This need is, for instance, very strong in Iranian studies, where a new trend in scholarly works fully recognises the importance of the intercultural relations of the Iranian area, as is clearly visible, for instance, in the books of M.A. Dandamayev (*Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia*, Costa Mesa – New York, 1992),³⁰ V.G. Lukonin (again with Dandamayev, in their book *The culture and social institutions of ancient Iran*, Cambridge 1989), Josef Wiesehöfer *Ancient Persia*, London – New York 1996) and Pierre Briant (*Histoire de l'empire perse*, Paris 1996), and some others. The main risk to avoid is a sort of hooliganism within our fields; sometimes I have the impression, and this impression was very strong when I was studying Greek and Roman history, that some scholars identify themselves with the peoples and civilisations which are the subject of their own work; thus with the *Nachlaß* of the ancient cultures they become heirs to all the old enemies. In this way you can have the opportunity to read a book on the so called “Persian Wars” without a mention of the Iranian sources, or an edition of Ammianus Marcellinus without any reference to the original documents of the Parthians and of the Sasanians (did they write?). These problems, unfortunately are frequent between Classicists and Orientalists, at least in some countries, and some-

²⁸ See Burkert: 1963: 104, n. 21; 110-11; West: 1971: 90-91; general bibliography and discussion in Panaino, 1995a: 215-17.

²⁹ In my opinion the existence of astrolabes in the oldest Mesopotamian tradition, as the knowledge of the circumference of 360 degrees, are not elements sufficient to attest to the real introduction of a spherical model in the Akkadian and Babylonian astronomical tablets; this statement does not imply any negative evaluation with

respect to the Greek world, but simply is a prudent remark in order to avoid any superposition of different traditions and ideas. As far as we know, no specific word for “sphaera” is attested in Akkadian; thus I suggest that it is better to wait for its appearance, possibly in an astronomical text, before attributing spherical models to Mesopotamian astronomy.

³⁰ See also the contribution of Dandamayev, 1988.

times play their unpleasant role also among Orientalists. I think that all these difficulties are nonsensical, because an historian cannot identify himself with the subject of his studies (if he is not using history for ideological and political reasons), and that it is time to accept a historical perspective in the sense of a “Weltgeschichte” of the Ancient World, without weak oppositions between East and West in search of the highest model of humanity, which in turn would be identified with Sparta, Rome, Athens, Babylon, Assur, Peking, etc. I have to say that serious Iranology cannot be done without the continuous help of the Classicists, of the Assyriologists, of the Indologists, of the Sinologists, and so on.

This does not signify that we do not have our own field, but that this field does not lay in a little lake but in an Ocean, where many waves and storms are present with all the consequences they can bring with them; for instance, the recent contribution of Simo Parpola offered during the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale of Venice (July 7-11 1997), and titled *The Originality of the Teachings of Zarathustra in the Light of Yasna 44*, focuses on the possibility that the construction of an Old Avestan formulaic phrase as “O Lord, what I ask you, answer me truly” (*taṭ θβā pərəsā ərəš mōi vaocā ahurā*) had an Assyrian parallel in the extispicy formula “O Sun, great lord, what I ask you, answer me with a true yes” (*Šamaš bēlu rabū ša ašallūka anna kīna apalan-ni*)³¹; Prof. Parpola suggests as possible a direct impact of this Assyrian pattern on the Gāōic one; this is not the place for a systematic analysis of his statement, which I can share with some nuances and special restrictions, but I absolutely agree with Parpola on the fact that it is nonsensical to

refuse a priori this comparison because of the presence of a parallel pattern in the Old Norse *Edda*; in other words I believe it is not methodologically correct to rule out an Irano-Mesopotamian comparison based on the prejudice that a far Indo-European parallel between two texts separated by about two thousand years and hundreds and hundreds of kilometres should be preferred to any direct parallel between a Semitic text of the first half of the first millennium BC and an Avestan text more or less of the same age and from a relatively close area. In fact we can see some Mesopotamian elements in the Iranian religious culture and not only in the Western Iranian area, but also in the Avestan *milieu*; the statuary description of Anāhitā cannot be separated by the Avestan representation of the starry god Tištrya (Sirius), who was compared with the star shot by the best archer of the Arians (Panaino, 1990b), a comparison which is clearly based on the Mesopotamian representation of Sirius as an arrow (see Sum. KAK.SI.SÁ; Akk. *šukūdu, šiltahu*);³² nor can the Iranian demonology with its monsters and serpents, as recently noted by Prods Oktor Skjærø (1987: 194-95; 1995) also with reference to the Manichaean mythology,³³ be considered *only* as an Indo-European heritage. I have noted in another contribution to be published in a Memorial Volume dedicated to Prof. Ahmad Tafazzoli, that the use attested among the mediaeval Zoroastrians and the modern Parsis

of deducing omens through ophiomancy belongs to an age-long tradition, probably going back to the Babylonian milieu, as already suggested by Gray (1918: 462-464). Babylonian omen-literature contains in fact many references to the appearance of snakes

³¹ See Starr, 1990: XVI.

³² On the Mesopotamian background of the cult of Sirius (in particular on the representation of the arrow-star) in

Iran see Panaino, 1987a; 1993: 47-59; 1995b.

³³ In this case see already Widengren, 1946: 71-73; 93-95.

and scorpions, and in particular to the appearance of snakes in certain months and days, as it happens in the Parsi *Mār Nāma* ‘The Book of the Snakes,’ a short text (32 couplets), contained in the Persian *Revāyats* of Dastūr Dārāb Hormazdyār, which can be compared with a parallel list of omens given by al-Bīrūnī in his *Chronology* (tr. Sachau, 1879: 218). In addition, we can quote another Parsi text from the Persian *Revāyats*, the *Borj Nāma* ‘Book of the Zodiacal Signs’ (in 26 couplets), which shows a possible Babylonian background³⁴; the present document, in fact, stated what the appearance of the new moon portended in each sign of the zodiac, as noted by West (1904: 129). Terrestrial omens can be connected and combined with celestial omens, as happened in the Babylonian tradition, where the omens of the series *Šumma ālu* (terrestrial omens) were associated with those of the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (celestial omens) in particular on a monthly basis in the *Diaries*. This important aspect of astral and terrestrial divination exerted a deep influence in many other traditions; for instance, in ancient India, as Pingree has clearly shown in numerous publications. Thus, Gray (1918: 456-458) quoted two New Persian *masnawīs* (attested in the Dolgoruki ms. of St. Petersburg, fol. 57^v), the first containing omens taken from seeing a snake on the seven week days, the second one omens taken at the time of the entering or of the appearance of the moon into the twelve zodiacal signs.

This example also attests to the persistence in Iranian culture of Mesopotamian traditions, which did not disappear under the Achaemenid power but remained a living cultural element of that area. This assumption is again validated, for instance, by the strong continuity of the ritual of the “substitute king,” which was still performed for Alexander the Great in Babylon.

In fact, according to Arrian (VII, 17. 1-4) and Diodorus (XVII, 11.2-3), the Chaldeans tried to stop the king from entering Babylon, because they saw in the stars bad *omina*, and both authors refer to the presence of a common criminal who was sitting on the throne of Babylon (Briant, 1996: 746, 882-83); it is clear that this event, notwithstanding the suspects of Alexander and the evident incomprehension of the Greek authors, is connected with an Assyrian and Babylonian tradition we know in detail³⁵ and that Arrian’s reference to “a Persian custom” (κατὰ δε τινα νόμον περσικόν) was a superposition of different traditions. On the other hand we cannot forget that the Babylonian astronomical schools were respected during the Achaemenid period and that Mesopotamian astral sciences strongly developed³⁶ under the Persians; thus we cannot exclude the possibility that on some occasions the Persian kings allowed the Babylonian *bārūs* to perform such a ritual, and that it was sometimes practiced in Achaemenid Babylonia despite the fact that we do not have any direct witness of it; otherwise it would be unclear why the Babylonian astronomers had continuously observed the sky³⁷ and regularly informed the Persian kings about the results of their observations.

Getting back to our main subject, it was again Gnoli, in another article (“Babylonian Influences on Iran,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. III, fascicle 3, London – New York 1988, 334-36), who carefully distinguished “three periods in the influence of Mesopotamian civilisation on pre-Islamic Iran: (1) the pre-Achaemenid period: before the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great; (2) the

³⁴ See Gray, 1909-10: 340-42 (text and translation); 1918: 464 (ms. Bu, fol. 64).

³⁵ See Parpola, 1983: XXII-XXXII; Reiner, 1995: 8; Hunger, 1997: 15-17.

³⁶ See Hunger, 1997: 23-42.

³⁷ For instance we have texts of the “Astronomical Diaries” not only from the reign of Artaxerxes I to that of Darius III (Sachs - Hunger, 1988: 54-175), but also for the period of Alexander and the Seleucids to 61 BC (Sachs - Hunger, 1989; 1996).

Achaemenid period; before the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great; (3) the Seleucid-Parthian-Sasanian period.” In this contribution I can briefly deal only with the second period, leaving aside for another occasion the first and the third, and, as the title of my communication indicates, concentrating my notes on the main problem of the Mesopotamia heritage of Achaemenian kingship without entering (or entering them only for compelling but minimal references) other subjects such as science, art, architecture, writing, religion, and so on, where Mesopotamian influence never ceased to have an obvious impact on Iranian culture.

One of the main later (as far as we know) Assyrian (and perhaps also Egyptian) influences on the Iranian kingship was represented by the new institution, founded by (or at least clearly attested at the time of) Cyrus II, of the coregency (particularly studied by H. Frankfort, 1955: 243-44). In fact it is well known that the Persian king, after the conquest of Babylon, more precisely from the month of October 539, was called, among his other titles (see below), *šar Bābili* “King of Babylon,” but very soon the title “King of Babylon” was transferred to his son Cambyses, who maintained it for a year, as is clearly shown by some tablets

where we find: “Year 1 of Cambyses, king of Babylon, son of Cyrus, king of the countries.”³⁸ This event deserves particular attention, because it shows that with this act the king designated his successor. In practice, the coregency represented a sharp change in the traditional old Persian custom in which the king was a sort of *primus inter pares*, chosen among the members of the royal clan (perhaps in certain conditions through a solar omen as in the case of Darius I), and it has been considered (Gnoli, 1974: 62-64) as the culmination of a secular process of strengthening of the Achaemenid kingship, by which some traditional elements of political instability, such as the lack of the principle of primogeniture, which might be risky and distabilizing were eliminated.

Another specifically Assyrian custom to be accepted in the Achaemenid royal ceremonial was that of the *προσκύνησις*, which has to be connected with the similar *labān appi*;³⁹ the introduction of this custom confirms the process of the separation of the King from his fellow “human” nobles as a sacred person. The direct continuity of some strictly Assyrian traditions in Achaemenid Iran is one of the most important subjects to be investigated⁴⁰ (and it would be important to distinguish more precisely,

³⁸ See Briant, 1996: 82.

³⁹ See Hofstetter, 1972: 104-106; Frye, 1972: 102-107; Gnoli 1974: 25, 63.

⁴⁰ I would like to point out that during the Tvärminne Symposium, two scholars, J. Goodnick Westenholz and G. Lanfranchi, noted that Darius’ formula, in which he claims to have won in one and the same year 19 battles (DB IV, 4-6: *θatīy dārayavauš xšāyaθiya ima taya adam akunavam vašnā auramazdāha hamahyāyā θarda pasāva yaθa xšāyaθiya abavam XIX hamaranam akunavam* “Saith Darius the King: ‘This is what I did by the favour of Ahuramazdā in one and the same year after that I became king. 19 battles I fought’”; see Kent, 1952: 128, 131; Schmitt, 1991: 68), follows and develops an Assyrian pattern. Prof. Lanfranchi has kindly given me the following information: Narām-Sin of Akkad (24th cent. BC) is: “Narām-Sin, the mighty, king of the four quarters, victor in nine battles in one year”; (see Frayne, 1993:

112, no. 9, 6-7; cf. no. 10, at p. 113, 13-19; no. 11, at p. 115, 6-8 etc.). Another example is attested in an inscription of Samsu-iluna, king of Babylon (and son of Hammurabi): “At that time I defeated with weapons, eight times in the course of one year, the totality of the Land of Sumer and Akkad which had become hostile against me” (see Frayne, 1990: 376, no. 3, 39-46). Dandamayev (1997: 44-46) suggests that a number of “elements of the Assyrian administration should have been preserved in former Median provinces of the Assyrian empire even after the fall of Nineveh,” and mentions in particular the Persian use of massive deportation, their administrative system which was very close to the Assyrian one, the postal service, the strict connection between the king and the governors of the provinces, the system of feudal land tenure, etc. On the “gifts” in the Assyrian and Achaemenid empires see Wiesehöfer, 1996: 63-65, 267.

when possible, what is properly Assyrian and what Babylonian in Iran); according to Harmatta (1974) the style of the Babylonian cylinder of Cyrus is not “Babylonian” at all, but follows that of the Babylonian inscriptions of Aššurbānpli; in other words it is in the use of some titles closer to the Assyrian protocol (see for instance the use of the titles *šār kiš-šat* “king of the universe,” *šarru rabû* “great king,” *šarru dan-nu* “mighty king,” and *šār kib-ra-ti ir-bi-it-tim*, “king of the four parts of the world” given to Cyrus; cf. line 20);⁴¹ on the other hand, we have to note, as emphasized by H. Lewy (1949: 75), that already Nabûna’id (the only Neo-Babylonian king to do so) used some typical Assyrian epithets, like *šarru rabû šarru dan-nu šār kiš-šat*, etc.

If the Persian king was not a god (in fact he is never defined as *baga-* “god”⁴² (in the sense of “giver”) in the O.P. inscriptions, while, on the other hand, the Sasanian kings bear the title of *bay* “god, divine being” (which in the Greek texts was translated as θεός),⁴³ he was chosen by A(h)uramazdā from among the other nobles [DNa 31-34: *auramazdā yaθa avaina imām būmim yau-*

datim pasāvadam manā frābara mām xšayaθiyam akunauš “A(h)uramazdā when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king” (cf. Kent, 1952: 137, 138)], his kingship came directly from god (*auramazdā xšaçam manā frābara* “A(h)uramazdā gave the kingdom to me”), the god A(h)uramazdā, “the greatest of the gods” (*maθišta bagā-nām*), protects the king and his clan [DPH 9-10: *mām auramazdā pātuv utāmai y viθam* “Me may A(h)uramazdā protect, and my royal house” (Kent, 1952: 136-137)], gives help [DPd 13: *manā auramazdā upastām baratuv* “May A(h)uramazdā bear me aid” (Kent, 1952: 136)] and averts [DPd 13-24]⁴⁴ the enemy armies (*hainā-*), famine (*dušiyāra-*) and revolt (*drauga-*, lit. “lie”); thus the king does everything according to the wish of A(h)uramazdā [DSf 20-22: *taya adam akunavam vašnā auramazdāha akunavam* “What I did, all by the favour of AM I did”; (see Kent, 1952: 142, 144)]. Between A(h)uramazdā and the King there is a special union: DSk. 3-5 *θatiy dārayavauš XŠ manā AM AMha adam AMm ayadai y AMmay upastām baratuv* “Saith Darius the

⁴¹ See Weissbach, 1911: 4-5; Eilers, 1971: 162, 165 = 1974: 30, 33; Lecoq, 1997: 185; Wiesehöfer, 1996: 44-45, 258; see also Berger, 1974; Rollinger, 1993: 20-26. It is important to point out that the adoption of some Assyrian patterns by the priests of Marduk (Harmatta, 1974: 38-43; see also von Soden, 1989: 285-92) has been related to their hostility towards Nabûna’id, but it is impossible to exclude *a priori* that Assyrian formulas were already known by the Medes and then, through this intermediation, by the Persians (see Lecoq, 1997: 76-77); in addition, we cannot avoid quoting the opposite conclusions of Julius Lewy (1944-45: 488), who assumed that: “in basing his religious policy upon Hārānian and Assyrian traditions concerning *šarrum-kēn*, the ‘kings of the totality,’ the ‘Era of the Moon-god’ and the like, Nabonidus rejected Babylonian doctrines”; Hildergard Lewy (1949: 68), however, has suggested that the Babylonian opposition against Nabûna’id was very conservative “because some of the religious ideas propagated by him were considered alien and, more particularly, Aramaean.” On the other hand I would like to stress that the Persians had direct contacts with Assyrians: in fact, as Dandamayev (1997: 43) notes, “Ca. 642 B.C. Cyrus I, the ruler of a group of Persian tribes, sent to Niniveh as a hostage his

eldest son Arukku with gifts and for some time recognized the sovereignty of Assyria.” I would like to thank my colleague Prof. Gianni Lanfranchi, who kindly reminds me that *šarru rabû*, “great king” marks the higher rank of the king than the “other (simply local) kings” (possibly the equivalent of O.P. *xšayaθiya vazarka*; see Harmatta, 1974: 32), and *šarru dan-nu*, “mighty king,” which is a generic title but derives from the Sumerian tradition; in addition Cyrus is also king of Babylon (*šār DİN.TIR^{ki} = šār bābili*) and “King of Sumer and Akkad” (*šār KUR šu-me-ri u ak-ka-di-i*) which refers to his lordship over Southern Mesopotamia as original place of the civilisation. For all these titles see Seux, 1967, *passim*; see also Cameron, 1955: 82; Liverani, 1981; Seidl, 1994: 114; Dandamayev, 1997: 44. It is necessary, in addition, to note briefly that the cult of the Moon in later Babylonian times can have had a certain impact on the Iranian tradition (see J. Lewy, 1945-46: 425-33; 1962; H. Lewy, 1949: 72ff; Panaino, 1995b: 72-73, n. 57a with additional bibliography).

⁴² See Wiesehöfer, 1996: 30.

⁴³ See Bartholomae, 1920: 6-10.

⁴⁴ See Panaino, 1987b; 1993b.

King: A(h)uramazdā is mine; I am A(h)uramazdā's. I worshipped A(h)uramazdā; may A(h)uramazdā bear me aid" (Kent, 1952: 145); DPd 9-11: *vašnā auramazdāhā man-acā dārayavahauš xšāyaθiyāhyā* "by the favour of A(h)uramazdā and of me, Darius the King" (Kent, 1952: 136-137); DB IV 46: *vašnā auramazdāha utāmai* "by the favour of A(h)uramazdā and of me" (Kent, 1952: 129, 131; but see Schmitt, 1991: 70). These and some other O.P. expressions show the strict personal relation which binds the God and the King. Another aspect of the Mesopotamian impact on the royal traditions in Ancient Iran is visible in the ritual for the New Year,⁴⁵ for which the monumental complex of Persepolis was built. Some scholars suggest that the Babylonian ritual of the *akītu* of Nisānu was transferred into the Iranian festival of the *Nawrōz*;⁴⁶ we can simply mention the well known fact that the Old Persian calendar was based on Mesopotamian patterns.⁴⁷ Another problem to be

more systematically investigated following the first considerations advanced by Cassin (1968: 79, n. 93; 81, n. 101) and Gnoli (1974: 74-75, n. 317) is the possible link between the idea represented by the Iranian (and mostly Avestan) *x'arānah* and the Babylonian *melammu* (cf. Sum. ME.LÁM).⁴⁸

These data attest to the deep influence of Mesopotamian culture on the Achaemenid kingship, but this is only a small part of a wider problem because the mutual relations are many and attested in different aspects from the intellectual and religious world to common life. In addition, we have to recall the special role of the Persian Empire, which not only was open to these influences, but which in turn favoured the diffusion from East to West and *vice versa* of ideas and traditions; this apparent "scramble" has to be underlined, because it will be seminal for the diffusion of parallel patterns, which only interdisciplinary research could bring into focus.

⁴⁵ See Gnoli, 1974: 28-31. See also Parpola, 1995: 392-93.

⁴⁶ See Gnoli, with bibliography, 1974: 28-29.

⁴⁷ See Panaino, in press.

⁴⁸ See Castellino, 1970: 262.

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