

Melammu Workshop

Experiencing Borders in Antiquity

Gdańsk, May 23, 2023

Organized by **IBSC UG** and **the Melammu Project**

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Human beings, as many animals, need a safe space where they can stay, rest and sleep. Often this space is perceived as a peaceful inside which stands in stark contrast to a dangerous outside. As individuals create their safe spaces, also human societies demarcate the space they are living in and conceptualize it as their own, safe space. A place which is pacified, where rules and customs are known, where people feel at home. The outside is often conceptualized as something dangerous, where dangerous animals and animal-like humans, barbarians, are living. Additionally ghosts and demons inhabit the wilderness, so staying inside and enjoying the company and support of other “insiders” is the most comfortable option. But besides dangers the outside also provides ample opportunities for the brave, who leave the safe place in order to bring back home all kinds of valuable things and interesting stories about exotic places. The outer world was both – a temptation and a threat.

In order to protect the civilized space from the dangerous outside different buildings, fences, walls and magical barriers are used. This creates borders that are conceptualized and experienced in different ways as they serve a clear purpose for the people living inside but might also be experienced as unjust by the outsiders and consequently lead to conflicts.

Besides material borders there are also immaterial borders within a given society and between societies. These borders can be manifested by the use of a certain language, by a certain way of living (sedentary vs. nomadic), by religious customs, by the outer appearance, or by culinary habits, to name just a few. Sometimes these differences were stressed, on other occasions it seems that they were no major obstacle for cooperation, especially in the context of empires.

While borders can be understood as a kind of protection, providing a safe space for the people living inside, they also create restrictions. If a larger group of people is living together in a relatively small space, like an ancient city, many regulations are needed that create and define new borders. Therefore, the option of crossing the border and escaping “the social cage” might become attractive in some societies and might create romantic ideas of a more natural life in an uncontrolled and wild space. Idealizing the wild, uncontrolled space might thus be a side-effect of societal restrictions in highly developed societies. Besides this border crossing can also be motivated by war and conquest, trade and commerce, certain religious practices, or simply by the need to cover the basic human needs.

In this workshop we want to focus on an emic perspective on borders and understand how the crossing of borders was perceived in antiquity.

- What do the ancient texts tell us about the experience of crossing borders?
- How are borders described and conceptualized in the texts?
- Are their special rites or religious ideas connected to the crossing of borders?
- Why were borders crossed and on which occasions is this perceived as something special?
- Is there a hierarchy of borders (easy, complicated, or impossible to cross)? Are there absolute borders according to ancient ideas?
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The proposals for individual 20 min. papers send by mail to krzysztof.ulanowski@ug.edu.pl and/or sebastian.fink@uibk.ac.at. The deadline for submission is **March 1, 2023**.

