NARRATING THE BEGINNINGS

Madrid-Innsbruck Conference

Organised by Universität Innsbruck and Universidad Complutense de Madrid, with the collaboration of the Centro de Estudios del Próximo Oriente (Spain).

Alberto Bernabé – Sebastian Fink – Robert Rollinger (coord.)

Salón de Grados de la Facultad de Filología. Universidad Complutense de Madrid

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Creation myths are the first documents that show a keen interest of man in the past. Either the creation, or more commonly, the organization of the world as we know it is described and explanations are given for certain phenomena. The contribution of these texts to universal history is clearly the idea that the whole world has one common origin, that the home of mankind was designed by one (or more) creator(s) and this results at least in a common prehistory of all human beings (at least as a consequence of this conception, even if the focus of individual texts might be a regional one). Additionally creation myths also provide orientation for their readers. In this respect one has to ask, what the specifics of each of these world views are and how the beginning of history is conceptualized.

In this conference we would like to have a broad view on creations myths from different times and areas of the world with a special focus on the contribution of these texts to the conception of the past as “universal history”, as a common origin of mankind or as the great opening the theatrum mundi.

Conferences will be published in Springer-series.

Scientific Commitee

Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa, Alberto Bernabé, Sebastian Fink, Ignacio Márquez Rowe, Julia Mendoza, Robert Rollinger.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

Thursday, November 3rd

9.00-10.00 Registration
10.00-10.30 Opening session
10.30-11.00 Alberto Bernabé (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) "Introductory remarks"
11.00  Coffee break

11.30-12.10  Barbara Böck (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) “Explaining the emergence of social institutions: the Sumerian myth ‘Enki and the World Order’”

12.10-12.50  Ignacio Márquez Rowe (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) “The Babylonian vision of the world”

13.00  Lunch break

15.00-15.40  José R. Pérez-Accino (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “The facets of the diamond: creation and text in ancient Egypt”

15.40-16.20  Mary Bachvarova (Wilamette University) “Of gods and men: theogonic motifs in the *Iliad* and humans in Hittite mythology. Tracing Anatolian legendary history into the first millennium BCE”

16.30  Coffee break

17.00-17.40  Paolo Xella (Università di Pisa - CNR) “Narrating the beginning: cosmogonic, theogonic and anthropogonic traditions in the Bronze and Iron Age Syria-Palestine”


**Friday, November 4th**

9.30-10.10  Mark S. Smith (Princeton Theological Seminary) “Creation stories: origins and evil”

10.10-10.50  Marco Antonio Santamaría (Universidad de Salamanca) “Imaging the beginning in Early Greek theogonies”

11.00  Coffee break

11.30-12.10  Teodoro Manrique (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha) “Völuspá and the uncertainty of Norse creation myths”

12.10-12.50  Julia Mendoza (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Cosmogony in progress: The creation myths from Vedic to Puranic texts”
13.00 Lunch break

15.00-15.40 Alfonso Lacadena (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Maya creation texts”

15.40-16.20 Friedrich Pöhl (Universität Innsbruck) “The Lakota Sioux cosmology or how Inyan (Rock) created the world”

16.30 Coffee break

17.00-17.40 Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala (Universidad de Córdoba) “Creation myths in Arabian lands”

17.40-18.20 Robert Rollinger – Sebastian Fink (Universität Innsbruck) “Concluding remarks

18.30 Closing session

21.00 Congress dinner

Abstracts

Barbara Böck (CSIC, Madrid) “Explaining the emergence of social institutions: the Sumerian myth ‘Enki and the World Order’”

How did institutions emerge and how was the function of formal organizations explained? The Sumerian myth “Enki and the World Order” depicts an image in which the god as over-lord imposes institutions from a state of nature, which are supported by controls. The creation of institutions is not the solidarity product of individuals or the joint project of several deities equal in power but the result of one commanding deity. The present paper aims at analysing how the organization of the world was conceptualized, contributing thus to the idea of universal history according to Sumerian mythology.

Ignacio Márquez Rowe (CSIC, Madrid) “The Babylonian vision of the world”

The Babylonian book Enuma elish is today considered first and foremost a literary monument in honour of Marduk as the champion of the gods and the creator of heaven and earth. Although indeed its prime object was to offer a cosmological explanation and justification for Marduk's promotion from the position as patron god of Babylon to that of head of the entire Babylonian pantheon, what is of prime
importance is that the composition offers for the first time in Mesopotamian history an account of the origin and order of the universe as a whole. Unlike other Mesopotamian creation stories, Enuma elish gives a chronologically organised outline of the principles of the cosmos, the gods, the world, and mankind, being thus the first narrative of Universal History.

José R. Pérez-Accino (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “The facets of the diamond: creation and text in ancient Egypt”

Ancient Egyptian cosmogonies do not present a coherent and uniform corpus of texts. Instead, they seem to narrate the process of creation of the world through different and apparently conflictive narrations. How these narratives could survive independently in a rather religiously controlled environment and lengthy period such as the Egyptian can be explained through a multiple angled approach of both the concept of the divine and the process of creation itself.

Mary Bachvarova (Wilamette University) “Of gods and men: theogonic motifs in the Iliad and humans in Hittite mythology. Tracing Anatolian legendary history into the first millennium BCE”

In previous work I have discussed the interplay between narratives about the origin of the gods and the framework for the earliest human history in Near Eastern thought, touching upon how it has shaped the legend of the fall of Troy, as told in Homer’s Iliad. In this presentation I delve more deeply into the use in the Iliad of theogonic motifs found in second-millennium Hittite myths, both of native Anatolian origin and the Hurro-Hittite material. I begin by examining the interactions of the human and divine sphere in the Hittite material, arguing that there are more and closer parallels between the earlier Anatolian narratives and the Iliad than there are with other Near Eastern traditions. I then look at motifs drawn from theogonic narratives in the Iliad, examining how they have been repurposed to serve a legend that marks the end of the heroic age, the time in which the gods were in close contact with humans. I argue that these findings can be used to flesh out the Greco-Anatolian conception of the earliest history of the world, extending from the birth of the gods to the fall of an internationally renowned city such as Troy.

Paolo Xella (Università di Pisa - CNR Rome) “Narrating the beginning: cosmogonic, theogonic and anthropogonic traditions in the Bronze and Iron Age Syria-Palestine”

Cosmogony, theogony and anthropogony are not explicitly told by direct textual sources in Late Bronze and Iron age Syro-Palestinian world, but we have enough evidence (especially as far as Ugarit and the Phoenicians are concerned) to be able to say that these type of myths existed, at least – but not exclusively – at the level of oral tradition. Moreover, as it is to be expected in polytheistic religions, we also know that the main protagonists of these events are the gods, and particularly a
creator god who is called Ilu at Ugarit and El in the Phoenician world, whose role is also testified *mutatis mutandis* to by the biblical traditions concerning YHWH-Elohim. Even there is no doubt that such a comparative inquiry needs to be deepened and broadened to include all the aspects of this archaic tradition, it is possible to reconstruct in part its development and identify some common motifs also thanks to the contribution of external sources. As a whole, this documentation speaks in favour of a remarkable homogeneity, originality and historical continuity of the Syro-Palestinian tradition, from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period.

Juan A. Álvarez-Pedrosa – Simón Gutiérrez Castro (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Zoroastrian millenarism and its reception in Classical Greece”

Greeks frequently depict Zoroaster by means of a construct that represents him as a philosophical (mainly astrological) author, an image well rooted in the Chaldean astrological tradition. Greeks also portray Zoroaster as one of the masters of humanity and is, thus, confused with the figure of a prophet or founder of a religion (but never in the oldest sources).

The notion of a Saviour was unknown for the Greeks of the Classic period, hence their adoption of more familiar references for addressing Zoroaster: as a king who arrives in order to subvert a precedent situation (in Xantos of Lydia) or as a new master of humanity similar to Plato (in Eudoxus). Later on certain outstanding events in history (such as the conflict between Europe and Asia which gives rise to the Trojan War [Plutarch quoting Theopompus]), all of which are foundational elements in the Greek cosmological doctrines (Kingsley 1995), were added to Zoroaster’s figure. Another option was to consider him contemporary with Pythagoras, another master of humanity (Aristoxenus, Kingsley 1990).

In this sense, it can be argued that the Iranian soteriology, already outlined in the pre-Achaemenid era (*Yašt* 19, 10-11, 88-89, 92-94), is transformed in the view of the Greeks of the Classical period in either the appearance of one of the masters of humanity or an Achaemenid king. This idea can also be connected with a moment in which Iranian religion has converted his kings into new Saviours (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* II, p. 40), as can be inferred from the study of the royal Achaemenid inscriptions.

Mark S. Smith (Princeton Theological Seminary) “Creation stories: origins and evil”

One of the great topics insufficiently studied is evil in the context of creation stories. With a focus on West Semitic sources and especially Genesis 2-4, this presentation will examine some proposals about this question and discuss some of its difficulties.
Marco Antonio Santamaría (Universidad de Salamanca) “Imaging the beginning in early Greek theogonies”.

Theogonies offer diverse but similar accounts about the first times. In the beginning, some gods appeared which were constituent parts of the world (Earth, Sky, Netherworld, Sea, Darkness and Light) and whose actions determine the configuration of its present state. The separation of Earth and Sky, due to a different god, is normally the decisive “demiurgic” event. I will try to assess the proposals of the authors of theogonies (Homer, Hesiod, Titanomachy, Pherecydes, Epimenides, Musaeus, Acusilaus) considering the context in which they are embedded and their role within the broader conception of divine and human history.

Teodoro Manrique (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha) “Völuspá and the uncertainty of Norse creation myths”

This paper aims to address a number of difficulties regarding heterogeneity and homogeneity in Old Norse cosmogony. As my analysis will show, the information on the myth of the creation of mankind that can be gathered from the incomplete and enigmatic stanzas in Völuspá, as well as the Snorra Edda, demonstrates the lack of a coherent anthropogenic myth and problematises the notion that Nordic mythology was of a heterogeneous kind. Added to this is the question of the permeability of the boundaries between Christian and pre-Christian sources which treat of the origin of the world and humankind. In this paper I will also examine the extent to which the Völuspá and the Snorra Edda conform to a set of common Indo-European beliefs concerning the creation of the first mythical being, in particular the idea that mankind originated from trees.

Julia Mendoza (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Cosmogony in progress: the creation myths from Vedic to Puranic texts”

Throughout the whole Vedic period religious conceptions undergo an evolution that is not the result of a reformative revolution but of a reflection on the ritual, the sacred texts and the basics of religion developed by powerful and influential priestly schools over several centuries. Our purpose is to compare several of the most important versions of the cosmogony from different periods (Vedic, Brahmanic and the most recent of the Puranas that build up the cosmic vision of traditional Hinduism) and show how they are transforming and reinterpreting old issues and how new cosmogonic gods or agents are introduced, determined by the ideological change and the various religious-philosophical interests of schools over time.

Alfonso Lacadena (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) “Maya creation texts”

The Maya of the Yucatan Peninsula developed one of the most fascinating and intriguing civilizations of Mesoamerica. First in their own hieroglyphic (logo-
syllabic) writing system and later in the alphabetic script brought by the Spanish Conquerors, for two millennia the Maya produced thousands of texts in which they reflected their world, culture, and beliefs. Based on revised critical translations, in this paper a comprehensive picture of Maya texts related to Creation—World, Cosmos, mankind—will be presented, discussing special issues about sources and methodology, themes, recurring events and variants, main actors, language and rhetorics, inserting them in the wider context of Anthropology and History of Religion studies, and comparative literature.

Friedrich Pöhl (Universität Innsbruck) "The Lakota Sioux cosmology or how Inyan (Rock) created the world"

The spiritual and intellectual legacy left to us by Native American cultures is often ignored or denied. Here, to rectify this error, however modestly, I shall focus on the creation of the universe according to Lakota thought and their vision of the world. Despite the fact that Lakota narratives of world formation are in distinct contrast to the creation myths of many other cultures both Indian and non-Indian, there is evidence of the attempt - as in the creation story of any culture - to bring the amorphous and chaotic universe that surrounds human beings into some kind of order. Lakota beliefs of world creation bear a close relationship to Lakota social and ritual life, in which kinship rules govern the design and the order of all that exists. These beliefs thereby establish an ethical imperative that derives its legacy from the very nature of being as conceived by the Lakota.

Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala (Universidad de Córdoba) "Creation myths in Arabian lands"

The Arabian Peninsula was home to several societies, cultures and languages, which constantly exchanged ideas and beliefs. Pagan groups coexisted along with Jews and Christians in a motley society in which syncretism and cultural hybridism forged a polyhedral religious environment where Islam emerged. The cosmological elements inherited from the Jewish and Christian monotheisms, in careful harmony with other features from the Persian world and the pre-Islamic Arab society will be crucial to create a new narrative that was by no means new, although it was presented as part of a new revelation, the ultimate revelation.