

CAENO Foundation, Department of Religious Studies Workshop

**Cultural encounters in the Hellenistic era: Babylon, Greece, Egypt, and the  
Biblical World**

Schedule and Abstracts

University of Miami, February 27–28, 2025

**THURSDAY FEBRUARY 27**

**9:45-10:00 AM**

**Welcome**

**10:00-11:00**

The reception of foreign literate cultures in Judean temple literature in Hellenistic times: a proposal about its geo-political and religious motivations based on the Book of Daniel

**Sylvie Honigman, Tel Aviv University**

The temple literature of Judea in Hellenistic times incorporated elements of form and content originating in five foreign literate and oral traditions, including Babylonian, Canaanite, Demotic, Greek, and Persian (Achaemenid). The proposed paper will focus on the Book of Daniel that was composed in the second century BCE. Not only does this work combine intertextual references to all five said traditions alongside the local one and is bilingual—half of the chapters are composed in Hebrew and the rest in Aramaic—but as I will argue, the foreignness of these intercultural borrowings is foregrounded and reified. Moreover, the Book of Daniel provides clues about the geo-political and religious motivations underpinning this peculiar reception of foreign elements. Key to understand these motivations is the status of Judea as a second-tier, subaltern province in an ever-changing imperial context, and the aspiration of the Jerusalem's temple scribes to promote their local deity as the imperial patron-deity to whom all foreign kings owe their kingdom. My working hypothesis will be that the five foreign traditions reified in the Book of Daniel were perceived either to have an imperial or at least hegemonic status (Persian/Achaemenid, Greek, Demotic, and presumably also Akkadian/Babylonian) or to connote an imperial setting (the Aramaic language and Canaanite cultural elements).

**11:00-12:00**

Contacts between Hellenistic Babylonian and Greek scholarship

**Kathryn Stevens, University of Oxford**

The results of contact between Babylonian and Greek scholars in the later first millennium BC are clear. Greek borrowing and adaptation of Babylonian data, parameters and concepts, particularly in the realm of celestial scholarship, can be traced in detail by comparison of surviving cuneiform tablets and Greek and Latin literary and documentary sources, while the work of Berossus shows that Babylonian scholars of the third century BC were sufficiently conversant with Greek historiography, ethnography and philosophy to compose works in Greek that combined Greek and Babylonian traditions. What remains opaque is how, when and where

these contacts took place. Cuneiform scholarly texts only exceptionally provide contextual information beyond the place of writing, the source text and the copyist. Greek and Latin texts that contain borrowed data rarely provide insight into its origin, beyond occasional attributions to ‘Chaldaeans’. Meanwhile, the loss of perishable materials from Babylonia means that, with the exception of a few texts on stone or clay, the Greek written record from the region is entirely lost, and with it crucial information about education and intellectual activity. Clues about interactions between Greek and Babylonian scholarship can be found in source citations, testimonia and anecdotes by Greek and Roman authors, as well as in the epigraphic record, but much of this material is of uncertain quality and has often been disregarded. I will re-examine the surviving evidence for contacts between Greek and Babylonian intellectuals during the Hellenistic period, with the aim of shedding some additional light on the long-standing question of how, when and where these contacts occurred.

**12:00-2:00 PM**

**Lunch at the Faculty Club**

**2:00-3:00**

Associations between planets and stars of the zodiac in Babylonian astrology.

**Matthieu Ossendrijver, Friei Universität Berlin**

The Babylonian compendium BM 36609+ (Roughton, Steele, and Walker 2004) includes a hitherto mysterious section in which planets are assigned to zodiacal stars and nearby areas. In this presentation I attempt to offer a tentative interpretation for some of these associations.

**3:00-4:00**

“The Mutations of the Zodiacal Sign Pisces”

**Paul-Alain Beaulieu, University of Toronto**

The zodiacal sign Pisces, known as *zibbātu* “tails” (Sumerogram KUN.MEŠ) in Akkadian, was viewed in Babylonia as a Dove paired with a Fish. The Dove was named *šinūntu* (or *šinūnūtu*), and the fish was the goddess *Anunītu*, a form of Ištar. In Greece this constellation became simply a pair of fish, hence our constellation Pisces. The paper will trace the history of that transformation.

I will also discuss the speculations surrounding the mythological aspects of that constellation and their diffusion in the Hellenistic world, mainly through the influence of Ctesias and the legend of Semiramis. The paper will also address the existence of various networks for the exchange of knowledge between Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome

**4:00-5:00**

**Open Forum**

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 28**

**10:00-11:00 AM**

Acknowledgement and non-acknowledgement of foreign astral science in Greek texts

**John Steele, Brown University**

Research over the past century or so has shown the extent of foreign (Babylonian and Egyptian) astronomy and astrology that was known by Greek astronomers and incorporated within Greek astronomical practice. In Greek texts, some of this material was identified as being Babylonian or Egyptian, but much more is presented as simply part of astronomy or astrology, without any hint that it originated outside of the Greek world. In this paper, I examine several Greek astronomical and astrological texts and look whether the material that *we* know came from Babylonia or Egypt was identified as being from these places or whether it is simply presented as being part of the general tradition of astronomy in the Greek world. We will see that several different things can play out, even within the same text. For example, some material may be correctly identified as being Babylonian (or ‘Chaldean’) whereas other material is (incorrectly) said to be Egyptian, and other material is presented without any indication of a foreign origin. Looking at these cases will allow us to ask several questions about the encounter and interaction between Greek and non-Greek astral science: What material became naturalized and what remained foreign? And why? Did the genre that astronomers were writing in and/or the type of astronomer affect how material was presented? Did the interaction change over time? Does this tell us about how different (sometimes non-compatible) scientific traditions interact?

**11:00-12:00**

Mesopotamian “Alchemy” in the Lab

**Maddalena Rumor, Case Western Reserve University**

Found in the library of Assurbanipal, K 7942+ is a small, somewhat obscure, yet unique, fragment of a cuneiform tablet that preserves three technical procedures involving metals. While the first procedure remained incomprehensible, in 1966 the second and the third were recognized by Leo Oppenheim to be early instructions for the making of silver out of base metals. He also noted how the tablet’s methods and concerns are generally comparable to those of the Greek alchemical tradition – a tradition which is otherwise understood to have developed within Hellenistic Egypt. Important elements, however, were still missing in the evidence Oppenheim had at disposal, which limited the impact of his study. In this talk I will build on Oppenheim’s work by adding new information, including evidence obtained by combining a traditional textual approach with chemical experimentation. I will then reflect on the implications of the findings for our understanding of the larger context from which Hellenistic Alchemy emerged.

**12:00-2:00 PM**

**Lunch at the Faculty Club**

**2:00-3:00**

Meeting Modernity and Antiquity in Modernity and Antiquity

**Wayne Horowitz, Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

In this paper I will share some thoughts on issues relating to cultural clash, blending, and synchronism that have been informed by my study of the cuneiform world in late antiquity, as well as my current research with the First Nations in what is now Northern Canada and Alaska, and the Maori in New Zealand.

**3:00-5:00**

**Open Forum**