



Receptions of the Ancient Near East in Popular Culture and Beyond

edited by
Lorenzo Verderame
Agnès Garcia-Ventura

Receptions of the
Ancient Near East in
Popular Culture and Beyond

Receptions of the
Ancient Near East in
Popular Culture and Beyond

edited by

Lorenzo Verderame and Agnès Garcia-Ventura

 LOCKWOOD PRESS

2020

RECEPTIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST IN POPULAR CULTURE AND BEYOND

Copyright © 2020 by Lockwood Press

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Lockwood Press, PO Box 133289, Atlanta, GA 30333 USA.

ISBN: 978-1-948488-24-2

Front cover: Walter Andrae, draft of the stage setting act I, first scene of *Sardanapal*, 1907. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin —Preußischer Kulturbesitz, estate Andrae 235[1].

Back cover: “Torre di Babele 2” by Piero Passone, acrylic on brick.

Cover design by Susanne Wilhelm.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Verderame, L. (Lorenzo), editor. | Garcia-Ventura, Agnès, editor.

Title: Receptions of the Ancient Near East in popular culture and beyond / edited by Lorenzo Verderame and Agnès Garcia Ventura.

Description: First. | Atlanta, GA : Lockwood Press, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019057239 (print) | LCCN 2019057240 (ebook) | ISBN 9781948488242 (paperback) | ISBN 9781948488259 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Civilization, Western--Middle Eastern influences. | Civilization, Ancient, in popular culture. | Civilization, Ancient--Middle East. | Middle East--Civilization--To 622.

Classification: LCC CB251 .R37 2020 (print) | LCC CB251 (ebook) | DDC 909/.09821--dc23

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

Contents

FOREWORD	
Paul Collins	xiii
PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS	
Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Lorenzo Verderame	1
VISUAL ARTS	
PEDRO AZARA AND MARC MARÍN	
Mesopotamia in Miró. Miró in Mesopotamia	11
JEAN M. EVANS	
Case Studies in the Popular Reception of the Tell Asmar Sculpture Hoard	33
SILVANA DI PAOLO	
Images of Ruins as Metaphorical Places of Transformation: The Case of Persepolis	49
PERFORMING ARTS	
KERSTIN DROSS-KRÜPE	
<i>Artaserse</i> : An Ancient Oriental Ruler on Modern Opera Stages?	63
VALESKA HARTMANN	
When Imitation Became Reality: The Historical Pantomime <i>Sardanapal</i> (1908) at the Royal Opera of Berlin	83
DANIELE FEDERICO ROSA	
Ye Go to Thy Abzu: How Norwegian Black Metal Used Mesopotamian References, Where It Took Them from, and How It Usually Got Them Wrong	105
FILM AND TELEVISION	
KEVIN MCGEOUGH	
“Babylon’s Last Bacchanal”: Mesopotamia and the Near East in Epic Biblical Cinema	117
EVA MILLER	
He Who Saw the Stars: Retelling Gilgamesh in <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i>	141

LORENZO VERDERAME

- Evil from an Ancient Past and the Archaeology of the Beyond: An
Analysis of the Movies *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Evil Dead* (1981) 159

NOVELS AND COMICS

JANA MYNÁŘOVÁ AND PAVEL KOŘÍNEK

- The Ancient Near East in Czech Comics and Popular Culture:
The Case of *Jáchym and the Printer's Devil* 181

LUIGI TURRI

- Gilgamesh, The (Super)Hero 197

FRANCESCO POMPONIO

- Mystery Literature and Assyriology 217

RYAN WINTERS

- Ancient Aliens, Modern Cosmologies: Zecharia Sitchin and the
Transformation of Mesopotamian Myth 237

ARCHAEOLOGIST IN THE MIDDLE

DAVIDE NADALI

- The (In)visibility of Archaeology 249

JUAN-LUIS MONTERO FENOLLÓS

- Imagining the Tower of Babel in the Twenty-First Century: Is a New
Interpretation of the Ziggurat of Babylon Possible? 269

SILVIA FESTUCCIA

- Athletic Disciplines in the Ancient Near East: Representation and
Reconstruction 287

AFTERWORD. Memory and Memories: From the Ancient Near East to the
Modern West

- Frances Pinnock 301

CONTRIBUTORS

307

SUBJECT INDEX

313

AFTERWORD

MEMORY AND MEMORIES FROM THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST TO THE MODERN WEST

FRANCES PINNOCK

Ancient Near Eastern archaeology, followed shortly after by Assyriology, started in the mid-nineteenth century,¹ with the exploration of some of the great late Assyrian royal palaces—at Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad—and with the discovery of the extraordinary carved decorations of their walls, which are the oldest evidence of the historical relief, a genre brought to a peak of accomplishment during the Roman Empire. Since its beginning, the history of the first archaeological discoveries was interwoven with the complicated diplomatic and political events² that characterized, in the same years and until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the history of a wide area between India and Egypt.³ On the one hand, archaeology was frequently used as a cover for activities that may—with some benevolence—be defined as diplomatic;⁴ on the other hand, the decipherment of the first cuneiform documents—in particular the tablet of the legend of Gilgamesh with the Mesopotamian version of the deluge—supported the vision of those who were interested in the ancient Near Eastern past only in

1. I expressed these considerations during the seminars organized by A. Garcia Ventura and L. Verderame at the Sapienza University of Rome (2015–2016): I am very grateful to both for giving me the opportunity to take part in this volume, collecting the output of those stimulating meetings.

2. The history of the ancient Near Eastern archaeology is summarized in Matthiae 2005, 3–21, but see also, recently, Liverani 2013, 14–35, in particular on p. 28 for an interesting insight on the way Arab historians and geographers considered the antiquities of their world.

3. These events are usually called the Big Game and pivoted on the need by the great powers of the time—United Kingdom, France, Germany and, later on, Russia and the United States—to dominate the main trade routes of the most important precious and/or raw materials: For a recent presentation of these issues see Dalrymple 2013.

4. In some instances, the first explorers of the ancient Near East were really spies, at the service of their governments, like Rawlinson and, during the First World War, Lawrence; see Matthiae 2005, 25–32, about the political biases of this discipline at its beginnings.

the hope to prove the truthfulness of the biblical tales (Moorey 1991, 10–12), giving origin to the so-called biblical archaeology.⁵

After these first pioneering approaches, ancient Near Eastern archaeology followed a long path, both concerning the theoretical grounds and the practice of field archaeology, though it was not always prompt in accepting the most modern approaches of the historic and archaeological research in general. Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century we can date the birth of historical archaeology and the introduction of a kind of excavation technique, with the German explorations at Babylon in 1899 and Ashur in 1903 (Matthiae 2005, 36–42). Finally, albeit with strong discussion, the stratigraphic method was adopted for the first time by Kathleen Kenyon in her excavations at Samaria (Moorey 1991, 62), and even more importantly, at Jericho (Moorey 1991, 94–97; Matthiae 2005, 40–41). The impact of the New Archaeology of the late 1960s was only slowly and gradually felt in our field of studies, and more for the adoption of new methodologies than for the introduction of new historical perspectives.

After the Second World War, archaeologists working on the field had to face new challenges in building up relations, and eventually cooperations, with the cultural authorities of the countries that, more or less artificially created at the end of the First World War, were at that time gaining their independence and were creating structures devoted to the study of their past, frequently based on the formulations given during the mandate period (Moorey 1991, 49). Each country was different in its approach to the study of its remotest past and in its approach to the possibility, or willingness, to cooperate with foreign archaeologists.⁶ Moreover, in some instances, local political authorities had their own personal agendas, which could conflict with a sound historical reconstruction, or could be superimposed over the historical reconstructions provided by archaeological and philological data.

In the last three decades, the political situation in the countries of the Near East has progressively deteriorated, leading to the present tragic situation, for which it is nearly impossible to foresee a rapid solution, in which the local populations are bearing the heaviest burden, in terms of loss of lives, loss of economic power, and loss of relevance, whereas the cultural heritage is being destroyed, looted, and dispersed. At the same time, in Europe, but not only in Europe, the study of the human past is considered less and less important, and there is a constant trend to reduce or even close courses in ancient history or whole departments.⁷

5. Moorey 1991, 2–4, where he also points to the different approaches to the biblical tradition, between sincere faith and some degree of cynicism.

6. These approaches varied from a real historical methodology and a great opening to cooperation, as happened in Syria, where in 2010, more than 120 foreign archaeological expeditions were active, frequently as joint expeditions, to the (temporary) rejection of the pre-Islamic past and of international cooperation, as happened in Iran after the Khomeinist Revolution.

7. For example, in Italy there has been a recent proposal to eliminate the history test in the high

The economic monoculture of modern neocapitalism isolates intellectuals, and diminishes their role, mocking their inability to produce material wealth and using the cultural heritage as a background for manifestations functional to the world of economics in the largest sense, not aiming at producing cultural curiosity and desire for knowledge. On the one hand, the cultural heritage is destroyed, or is sold on the antique market in order to produce money for guerrillas; on the other hand, funding for research is cut, but banks are supported, so, with different modes, the cultural heritage is destroyed, and a financial system is kept alive, which does not produce wealth, but only reproduces itself.

In this world, apparently so dark and hopeless, does the study of, or the interest for, the ancient Near East have sense?

It seems that, thus far, in that tormented part of the world, the temporary interruption in field activity provoked by conflicts has led to a useful period of fruitful meditation, to the refinement of methodologies and to some changes in perspectives.⁸

Another extremely positive element is the very strong interest for the ancient Near East in two different spheres: on the one hand, many young people approach the “Orientalist” disciplines, from those dealing with the oldest periods, to those dealing with the late antique and medieval times. They show passion and enthusiasm, as clearly appears from their participation in events, like the cycle of seminars organized by A. Garcia Ventura and L. Verderame, whose results are published in this volume, or from the growing interest in the series of congresses “Broadening Horizons,” specifically devoted to them. Also, the participation of young and talented scholars in larger forums, like the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, the *International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, or the annual meeting of the *American Schools of Oriental Research*. On the other hand, a peculiar, and fascinating, phenomenon is the penetration of the ancient Near East into our contemporary popular culture in different ways, sometimes with misunderstandings, sometimes with a correct knowledge: contemporary music, comics and manga, and popular literature use ancient Near Eastern characters, scenarios, and imagery, sometimes in order to create autonomous languages, and sometimes recreating old representations of the Oriental world with cultural or political bias.⁹ Nonetheless, this only means that the ancient Near East, albeit

schools, and on 8 May 2019 an international appeal was launched against the closing of the Centre of Prehistoric Archaeology of the Near East (PANE) of the University of Brno in the Czech Republic.

8. I am thinking of the strong development in the use of satellite imagery, and particularly in their analysis and in the interest to landscape and waterscape, besides the traditional cityscapes, and I refer in particular to the works of Tony Wilkinson (2003) and Jason Ur (2010), among others.

9. There are different problems concerning the modern use of archaeology, particularly by the media, which usually prefers to talk about the “mysteries” of the ancient world, or to present everything in the light of biblical or political interpretations: Gerstenblith 2012, 22; Cline 2012; Cartledge 2012, 153–56; Pollock 2005; Bernbeck 2005.

remote in time, is still a part of a cultural background more widespread that can be imagined.

Thus, albeit facing very difficult moments, we must not despair, but rather we must still deal with the ancient Near East. We must still spread the knowledge of the ancient Near East, increase our knowledge of the ancient Near East, and, first and foremost, face the challenges of the contemporary world with an open mind and with adaptability. Certainly, the ancient Near Eastern archaeology of the twenty-first century is, and will more and more be, different from that of the nineteenth or the twentieth centuries, for several reasons.

As regards the West—or, as M. Liverani (2013, 399) recently put it, the Wests—the changes concern the differences in the scientific and methodological approaches that have always characterized Europe and the United States. One even more important change is the appearance on the scene of scholars in regions previously uninterested, or nearly completely uninterested, in our field of studies, like Central and South America, which are now starting to deal with the ancient Near East with methodologically very interesting approaches. In China there are now positions for the study of Assyriology and other subjects in local universities, which are also attracting young “Western” scholars.¹⁰ Again, should we consider this novelty a challenge to a cultural primacy, or rather a great opportunity to confront different methodologies and theoretical approaches, which will hopefully lead to the opening of new perspectives in our field of studies? I think, of course, that the only fruitful approach is the most open and curious one.

Facing these novelties, we should be obliged to reflect on the complex nature of our behaviors, in the academy and on the field, and of our interactions. On the contrary, as I have already maintained, our universities are flustered by an economic and cultural crisis, certainly stronger in some countries than in others, and yet quite general. The economic crisis led to the decrease or annulment of funding, and most of all to the insecurity of personnel: for these reasons it is nowadays impossible, as concerns field archaeology, to plan wide-scope interventions, and it is possible to plan only small projects of short duration.

Summing up, the ancient Near Eastern archaeology in the twenty-first century, in a time of slowing down, or blocking of field operations, has the opportunity to reflect on its perspectives, to change greatly, and to find ways to face new challenges, some difficult and painful, some equally difficult but also fascinating. In a world where fear of the other, and contempt for who or what is different seem to dominate the scene and are exploited by ruthless politicians in order to gain some votes, only the development of a network of knowledge of the richness of the past from where we come and of the opportunity of the possibilities provided by the differences we face every day, may

10. Some of these “new” countries also have strong economic power, and they are also approaching the Near East and Africa with economic proposals, which can be more easily accepted because they come from nations who have themselves suffered from the colonial presence.

build up a future where everyone will be free to live one's own specificity in harmony with other specificities. The question is: will we have the intellectual and material capacities to do this?

Bibliography

- Bernbeck, R. 2005. "The Past as Fact and Fiction: From Historical Novels to Novel Histories." In R. Bernbeck and S. Pollock (eds.), *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, 97–121. Malden, MA, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell.
- Cartledge, T. W. 2012. "Walk About Jerusalem: Protestant Pilgrims and the Holy Land." In E. M. Meyers and C. Meyers (eds.), *Archaeology, Bible, Politics, and the Media: Proceedings of the Duke University Conference, April 23–24, 2009*, 139–60. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Cline, E. H. 2012. "Fabulous Finds or Fantastic Forgeries? The Distortion of Archaeology by the Media and Pseudoarchaeologists, and What We Can Do About It." In E. M. Meyers and C. Meyers (eds.), *Archaeology, Bible, Politics, and the Media: Proceedings of the Duke University Conference, April 23–24, 2009*, 39–50, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Dalrymple, W. 2013. *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan 1839–42*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Gerstenblith, P. 2012. "The Media and Archaeological Preservation in Iraq: A Tale of Politics, Media, and the Law." In E. M. Meyers and C. Meyers (eds.), *Archaeology, Bible, Politics, and the Media: Proceedings of the Duke University Conference, April 23–24, 2009*, 15–35. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Liverani, M. 2013. *Immaginare Babel: Due secoli di studi sulla città orientale antica*. Rome and Bari: Laterza.
- Matthiae, P. 2005. *Prima lezione di archeologia orientale*. Rome and Bari: Laterza.
- Moorey, P. R. S. 1991. *A Century of Biblical Archaeology*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press.
- Pollock, S. 2005. "Archaeology Goes to War at the Newsstand." In R. Bernbeck and S. Pollock (eds.), *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, 78–96. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Ur, J. A. 2010. *Urbanism and Cultural Landscapes in Northeastern Syria: The Tell Hamoukar Survey, 1999–2001*. Oriental Institute Publications 137. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Wilkinson, T. J. 2003. *Archaeological Landscapes of the Near East*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.