Acknowledging the Philosophical and Spiritual Value of Doxography as a Literary Genre

Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette

Abstract: Doxographical writings appeared early on in the Graeco-Roman world. The genre of doxography never disappeared ever since. It can be found in Islamic and Christian literature, and even, in some ways, in some modern writings on the history of philosophy. My doctoral dissertation explored the genre in the Asian context, through three early Indian models. In Asia, doxographies are found pretty much anywhere philosophy developed, in Tibet and China in particular. Despite the widespread use of doxographical formats of writing in various cultures, modern philosophers tend to look down on the genre, which they perceive as an unreflective and by times even misleading presentation of philosophical ideas. Recent research in classical doxography, however, has shown that there is more to be found under their covers than a mere listing of opinions. My own contribution to the discussion shows that early Indian models can even be seen as 'spiritual exercises' in their own rights. This paper challenges the pejorative connotations some may entertain towards doxography and calls for a renewed appreciation of the genre.

Prolegomena

My research project at *Distant Worlds* focused on a peculiar genre of philosophical literature which had so far received but a minimal amount of attention. The kinds of texts which preoccupied me were those Sanskrit writings which appear as philosophical digests summarising the arguments of various schools of thought on key points of debate. Since the practice of labelling such materials as 'doxographies' was already established, and since there are several similarities between the Indian genre and the related doxographical literature theorised by classicists, I kept the convenient label. However, as is customary when one borrows Western philosophical categories to reflect on the Indian context, I was aware that the term 'doxography' already carries a meaning which needs be attuned in order not to misrepresent the peculiarities of the Indian sources I deal with.

This short paper reflects back on that crucial categorical choice which determined my overall doctoral research. It explains why I consider the label 'doxography' to be an appropriate designation for the texts on which I worked. It spells out how my research endeavoured to bring forth a new critical perspective on a literary genre often denigrated by philosophers. While doing so, I engage with a relevant piece of scholarship which I have unfortunately failed to include in my thesis, that of Pierre-Julien Harter. Moreover, to exemplify the overall research project which I carried out while being a *Distant Worlds* Fellow, I reframe some of its critical points around the notion of 'doxography' and 'spiritual exercises', as articulated in the resulting monograph *Dialogue and Doxography in Indian Philosophy: Points of View in Buddhist, Jaina, and Advaita Vedānta Traditions*, published in 2020 at Routledge. In this way, this paper offers a condensed version of the theoretical framework I used to analyse my Sanskrit materials. It summarises some of my conclusions on the matter and provides a deliberative addendum.

Doxography

Today, what remains of the early Western doxographical tradition is chiefly found in the imperfectly preserved *Placita* of Aëtius, an extensive collection to be dated to the first century CE. This corpus was the main focus behind the theories of the revisionist movement of interpretation of Western doxographical sources initiated by Jaap Mansfeld and David Theunis Runia (1997–). For my purpose, the primary significance of this enterprise is the definition of 'doxography' which it produced, insisting on the dialectical nature of such writings.

By combining the broad and narrow definitions of doxography formulated out of extensive scholarship in Classical philosophical literature by Mansfeld and Runia, my research has put forward a broad definition of 'doxography' that can be used on either side of the Indus river.

A doxography is:

1. either a whole text, or a part of a text:

2. where competing views of philosophers or schools are presented following a division of topics organised into sets and sub-sets with specific differences to which a name-label is attached in most cases.

3. where the original argumentative support of such views may or may not be given;

4. where the author's own view and arguments may or may not be criticised;

5. where the content consists either in literal or in non-literal renderings of sources; and

6. where the overall concern is primarily systematic, dialectic, with little or no historiographical character.[1]

This definition outlines with concision and precision the formal structure of doxographical writings, highlighting the dialectical disposition of their content, philosophical views. The fact that it can be applied to a broad range of materials across cultures and time periods makes this definition a valuable comparative apparatus.

Perhaps the most critical elements of my definition rest in the last two points (5–6), stressing that doxographies consist either in literal or in non-literal renderings of sources and that their overall concern is primarily systematic, dialectic. This is particularly important concerning Indian doxographies which, out of idealised/abstract renderings of philosophical postures, tend to reproduce specific dialectical strategies which can be traced back to famous founding figures and narratives.

In Western Classical literature, Mansfeld stresses that doxographies are always fully dedicated to the presentation of competing views on a given topic and are not independent compositions where philosophers would formulate their own view. This remains true in the Indian context. Doxographical contents are either 'fragments' or 'testimonies' dependent on a certain tradition of transmission.

Indian doxographies consist mainly in testimonies, sometimes accompanied by limited identifiable fragments. However, their purpose is not merely to list competing views, and especially not to render them in their exact initial form, as one would expect of modern histories of philosophy. But, as with Aristotle's own dialectical listing, they teleologically orient the reader towards a 'solution.' This may answer for the frustrations of some Indologists who, overlooking the dialectical nature and function of the material they were dealing with, accused Indian doxographers of not being rigorous in their descriptions of competing philosophical tenets.

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[1] Bouthillette 2020, 13–14.

Indian Doxography

Within Indian doxographies, systematisers are breaking down the doctrinal contents of competing schools of Indian thoughts into more or less coherent topical lists. Through them, the Indian philosophical world itself is made to appear as a somewhat coherent list. We hear of six or more philosophical schools, generally referred to as *darśana*-s, literally referring to an established 'view', or 'authoritative opinion', shared by a certain community. To me, this does not primarily refer to a network of authors, although these are undoubtedly the systemisers and promoters of *darśana*-s, but, rather, as in doxography, a *darśana,* concretely, is an architecture of finely organised topical lists structuring different schemes of reasoning, designed to convey specific 'cognitive products.' These cognitive structures interact with one another to form as coherent an identity as needed by a given religious community. They tend to vary according to given sociohistorical contexts but are generally presented in literature as quasi eternal truths (*padārtha*/*tattva*-s), for obvious rhetorical reasons. For example, the doxographical literature dealing with various *darśana*-s typically presents them as ideal abstractions, given all at once by some authority (*āpta*/*devatā*), and not as a historical product. These doxographical lists have shaped the way we talk of Indian philosophy. But one should not mistake the aesthetic depiction of the Indian philosophical realm found in doxographies with the actual complex sociohistorical puzzle in which Indian philosophy actually developed. These texts, I argue, are designed to inform an aesthetic exercise of though formation and transformation, which I theorise as a spiritual exercise. In doxography, as in ritual, sharp categorical oppositions are negotiated by an informed perspective, a certain vision of order which organises the world in strings of symbolic reasoning. As Classicists have noted, dialectic is the *Sitz im Leben* of doxography.

Tibetan Doxography

I am not the only one to have taken notice of the dialectical nature of the doxographical materials found in and around the Indic cultural milieu. Similar reflections have been made before me by Pierre-Julien Harter while discussing the Tibetan *grub mtha'* genre. Though he does not discuss 'dialectic' explicitly, Harter argues that this discriminative nature is in fact what makes doxography interesting from a philosophical point of view, while it is generally disappointing from a historical perspective. He explains that, in Tibetan doxographies, a genre which developed out previous Indic materials,

> [t]he treatments of the schools are partial ones, and could even be interpreted as historical distortions. This partiality may be damaging from a historical point of view, but it is not so from a philosophical point of view. The specific interest of a philosophical approach is not the opinion or position of some individual or group as such (which is justifiably the focus of a history of ideas). Rather, what is at stake is what should be considered to be right or true about a specific topic that is addressed universally. By universality I mean the mode through which an issue can be analyzed, elaborated, and given an answer (or even solved), abstracted from its mere historical, contingent conditions. A universal treatment should be capable of being transferred to other times and places without losing its power to 'make sense'.[2]

In brief, Harter argues that the peculiar dialectic he encounters within his *grub mtha'* sources is one where 'truth' is distinguished among a range of possible options or views concerning a given topic. These texts, he suggests, work in abstraction of historical reality, to rather focus on universal principles valid beyond temporal contingencies. It is in this sense that, according

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[2] Harter 2011, 102.

to him, they can be considered to be genuinely philosophical, since they seek to establish truth.

> [T]he elimination of all schools but one necessarily leads to a true position—even if this position is only provisionally true, before being itself reconsidered as a framework for a new question.[3]

Harter and I agree on the dialectical nature of the different doxographical sources we engage with. We both see our sources as presenting genuine philosophical exercises, what I insist on further by theorising such practices as 'spiritual exercises', in tune with Pierre Hadot's work. Where Harter and I slightly disagree concerns the use of the label 'doxography' to denote such literature.

Idealist Philosophy and its Pejorative Views on Doxography

Harter perpetuates an understanding of the doxographical genre initially articulated by idealist philosophers in the 19th century. For example, he observes, that,

> [g]enerally, doxographies were digests providing the tenets of a school or of an individual philosopher—the conclusions or 'dead thoughts' as Hegel would say, since the life of the thinking process was missing, and only the inanimate results were given. In a sense, we could say that they were no more, and maybe no less, philosophical than is a Dictionary of Philosophy from A to Z.[4]

I am also aware of such readings of doxography entertained in similar Western philosophical scholarship. One of the most succinct expression of this view is that formulated by Jorge J. E. Gracia. The latter plainly stated what is commonly expected of the Western doxographer:

The main characteristic shared by all doxographical approaches is their emphasis on uncritical description. In contrast with the more probing and critical character of the polemical approaches […], doxography aims to present views and ideas in a descriptive fashion without aiming to evaluate them critically. Indeed, in keeping with its historical emphasis, doxography often discourages interpretation.[5]

Influenced by similar ideas, Harter is hesitant to refer to his *grub mtha'* texts as 'doxographies.'

> I am proposing two points for consideration. First, the term doxography may not be the best term to translate *grub mtha'*. Other genres of Greek literature may better map onto Tibetan *grub mtha'*. Second, interpreting certain Tibetan texts from the perspective of doxography may prevent us from seeing the philosophical significance of those texts. This is why I will use the phrase school denominations rather than the phrase doxographical categories.[6]

That other genres of Greek literature share similar features with the *grub mtha'* does not preclude the term 'doxography' from being a skilful designation of such texts, given that one defines the genre in a way which reflects its most probing features in relation to the materials one studies. Harter's second point is more interesting. He suggests that merely referring to a text as being 'doxographical' may discredit its philosophical worth in the eyes of philosophers. Hence, to avoid displeasing the crowd, Harter bows to old habits and avoids the designation of 'doxography' altogether, preferring the no-less problematic concept of 'school denomination'.

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[3] Harter 2011, 106.
[4] Harter 2011, 97.

[5] Gracia 1992, 246.
[6] Harter 2011, 98.

On my part, I believe it to be most useful to challenge the 'idealist' reading of dox-ographies, especially knowing that its interpretation is out of touch with state-of-the-art research in field. Recent philological studies of classical doxographies (Mansfeld – Runia 1997, etc.) have consistently shown that various ancient doxographical texts adopted a dialectical structure similar to that devised by Aristotle himself and, thus, were not intended as purely descriptive or historiographical accounts. Hence, I would rather dispute philosophers' views on doxography instead of reinforcing their prejudices towards a literature (or a people!) for which they have little understanding. After all, doxography was not the only domain where Hegel has shown a peculiar aptitude to denigrate what he did not understand. Concerning Indian thought in general, for example, he could not help but see it as mere child's play, 'fantastic', 'subjective', 'wild', 'dreamy', 'frenzied', 'absurd', and 'repetitive'.[7] I do not see any substantial reason to perpetuate such unhelpful 'reasoning'. On the contrary, I consider it to be of utmost importance, for the future of philosophical inquiry, to refute such prejudices once and for all.

Philosophy and Doxography

Besides the label issue, the name 'doxography', Harter's project and mine have much in common. His interest lies in pointing out the philosophical substance of his sources.

> I want to show that school denominations can function as more than just labels for classifying opinions, and are used for purposes beyond the desire to create a worldview or order. They also participate in *authentic philosophical inquiries*. […][8]

> Using school denominations is a way to situate one's own philosophical position and not just a way to categorise other people's opinions. Using school denominations as a way to map the possible answers of a philosophical problem and to enclose the totality of the problem within a logical frame enables one to navigate through possible solutions to find the one that responds accurately to the problem, to find one that is necessarily true. […][9]

> [W]e can allow the texts to speak to us in the present, where 'speaking' means causing us to fundamentally question our own conceptions and behaviors. It is the only way that these texts can be meaningful with regard to truth and falsehood.[10]

Harter stresses the 'authentic philosophical inquiries' articulated in his Tibetan sources. He suggests that, by using school denominations (which I read as 'doxographical schemes') to identify the best philosophical position on a given topic, they cause the student to fundamentally question his or her own conceptions and behaviours. It is precisely this kind of self-reflection triggered by teleological schemes, the structural rhetoric of doxographies, which I argue constitutes the 'spiritual exercise' of doxography,[11] at least within the texts I studied.

Doxography and Spiritual Exercises

I borrow the expression 'spiritual exercise' from the historian of Classical philosophy Pierre Hadot (1922–2010), who was *Directeur d'études* at the *École pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE) and Professor at the *Collège de France*. By moving away from a historiographical reading of doxographical materials, and by rather insisting on their dialectical nature, I suggest that the point of Indian doxography is primarily transformative, before being informative. Doxography is designed to direct the student in a precise doctrinal direction

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[7] On Hegel and India, see Rathore – Mohapatra 2018.
[8] Emphasis is mine. Harter 2011, 94–95.
[9] Harter 2011, 113.

[10] Harter 2011, 114.
[11] On Indian doxography as a spiritual exercise, see Bouthillette 2020, 18–20.

signposted by rhetoric and dialectic, not by historicity. The point is not merely to inform students about philosophical exotica. Doxography engages students in a dialogue. Being dialogic, and by times dramatic, doxographies tend to take some rhetorical liberty with 'historical reality'. Doxography is but a means to an end: converting/confirming. And the end justifies the means. In brief, doxographies are intended to shape one's view.

Indian doxography, as a spiritual exercise, adopts different dialectical forms, dependent on the sectarian filiation in which it is embedded, for example. My research at *Distant Worlds* has highlighted three different dialectical forms. It is essential, in order to understand the dialogical dynamic of Indian doxographies, to firmly establish each of these forms in its dialogical soil. Only then can their doxographical scheme reveal its full pedagogic and psychagogic value. Uprooted from their doctrinal sectarian context, doxographies are literally insignificant.

Three Indian Doxographical Models Studied

The analysis of each of the three doxographies I studied sought to elucidate the dialectical teleology through which each doxographer is guiding his student, towards the adoption of 'right-view' (*samyag-darśana*). In doing so, the author engages each student in a process of conversion and confirmation, depending on one's initial station within the *maṇḍala* (symbolic disposition) of views. In that sense, doxographies can engage with a broad array of students of different capacities. Only by establishing the right view indicated by the doxographer can a student's view move from its conventional status to the position of truth, the ultimate perspective. This is the ultimate outcome of the spiritual exercise.

My research looked at the earliest doxographies of Madhyamaka Buddhism, Jainism and Advaita Vedānta to highlight three dialectical teleologies peculiar to each tradition. By organising philosophical views in these specific patterns, doxographies manage to both level a certain criticism of the doctrinal content of each *darśana* (philosophical view or cosmovision[12]), and to establish a dialectical path to 'right-view'. Each teleology reproduces a dialectical attitude which can be traced back to the narrative forms and pedagogies of its specific tradition. This should come as no surprise since these dialectical methods, by conveying specific propaedeutic to truth, characterise the spiritual identity of each tradition: their own conception of the way to go about cultivating liberative knowledge. It is only natural that Indian doxographies display idiosyncrasies in tune with their respective worldview.

Madhyamaka

For Madhyamaka Buddhism, I showed how the dialectic of no-view underpins the thematic progression of Bhāviveka's *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* (MHK), directing its dialectical teleology. The first three chapters of the whole text form a single dialectical unit. It establishes the author's perspective through a negation of Abhidharma categories. Thereafter, every succeeding doctrine is refuted in a movement going from the most acceptable position, from a Madhyamaka perspective, to the most problematic one, leaving the Mīmāṃsā view at the extreme end of a downward spiral into absurdity. This *reductio ad absurdum* of world philosophy is typical of Madhyamaka dialectics. Bhāviveka's dialectical model, in the MHK, can be said to be a declining teleology, a fall away from truth. The ultimate perspective is first provisionally established through the corrective negation of the most acceptable

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[12] On 'cosmovision' as an apt rendering of the Sanskrit term 'darśana', see Schlieter (2020 draft version on Academia.edu, yet unpublished).

conventional standpoint. From there on, Bhāviveka continues to grind to pieces all other mundane views.

This brief presentation of the MHK's dialectical strategy now leads me to address a slight criticism towards another piece of scholarship with which I could not engage in my thesis due to its later publication, that of Jan Westerhoff's interpretation of Bhāviveka's doxographical strategy, formulated in his excellent monograph *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Overall, Westerhoff's treatment of Bhāviveka's doxographical work is helpful. I seek here to stop upon only one detail, when he argues, that,

> one key aim of such doxographic treatises was to establish a doxographic hierarchy, that is, to set out different schools **in ascending order of truth**. This idea mirrors the early Buddhist distinction between *sūtras* with interpretable meaning (*neyārtha*) and those that did not need to be interpreted but could be taken literally (*nīthārtha*). Applied to doxographies, this distinction entails that different doctrines are not described as a set of varying wrong views that differ from the one correct view the author wants to defend; instead **they are arranged in a hierarchy with the view to be defended at the top**.[13]

My only concern with this passage is to the effect that, as I just explained, within Bhāviveka's MHK, the best position is found at the beginning of the text, where the author exposes his own views through a traditional discussion on foundational Abhidharma categories. In that way, there is indeed a hierarchy, and a top position, but the latter is found at the beginning and not at the end of the list, as in the Advaita model which I will present in a moment. Thus, the MHK is particularly interesting exactly because it employs a different teleological model than the most common pyramidal ones used in Indian doxographies. It is an inverted pyramid of sort. Instead of an ascension towards truth, it offers a descent into absurdity. This, I argue is in tune with the general rhetoric of 'no-view' and the distinguishing *reductio ad absurdum* methodology of the Madhyamaka school.

Jaina

As for Haribhadra's *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (ṢDS), its dialectical model is one of equipoise. For the followers of the Jina, the *jaina-mārga* is the *axis mundi* of philosophy. It is *madhyastha*, implying that it stands in the middle. The Jaina path developed all the necessary conceptual tools to abide by the salutary middle way, and the purifying ascetic disciplines suited to remove obscuring *karma*-s. Through the ṢDS, Haribhadra engages his students in a propaedeutic to truth. This dialectical training revolves within the conceptual realm. Nonetheless, it gravitates towards the non-conceptual axis of truth, the ultimate reality, using heterodoxy as a training ground for engaging in a multiplexed (*anekānta*) soteriological method designed to lay the foundations of omniscience. In the end, views are mere perspectives. Only in that sense can they be equal. However, the superior 'perfect' vision (*samyag-darśana*) of the omniscient one (*sarvajña*), which is discussed exactly in the middle of the list of views enumerated within the ṢDS, is not bond to them. It is no mere view. Though the text seems to objectively present each view in an egalitarian manner, its subtle rhetoric clearly indicates that the Jaina middle way revealed by the virile Jina is the only true superior omnivision.

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[13] Emphasis is mine. Westerhoff 2018, 130.

Advaita

When it comes to (pseudo) Śaṅkara's *Sarva-siddhāntasaṅgraha* (SSS), where every view negates the preceding, ever progressing upwards towards the throning Advaita Vedānta position, the dialectical model is a gradual ascension. Every further step on the stairway to enlightenment broadens the previous perspective. It is a movement towards the overarching truth of the Advaita, the worldly expression of which can only be found within scriptures, acting as fingers pointing at the moon of ultimate truth. The journey is said to culminate in pure *brahman*, where all views, all singulars, subside in the one general category, the only being (*sat*), the cosmic *axis mundi*. Perhaps one could talk of the Advaita methodology as a dialectical movement from the particular to the universal, using doxographical categories as instantiations of necessary particulars to be dissolved as they are outgrown by a wider truth. They are necessary only in the sense that they represent various stages of ignorance found among worldlings and, most importantly, in oneself. Appearing as general models of thought, they serve a skilful pedagogy. In practice, the SSS contributes to a rediscovery of one's 'true nature', pure consciousness. And this ultimate state does not exist among the views listed in texts and debated by scholars.

Last Words

My research thus presented three different teleological models structuring the overall rhetoric of Indian doxographies. The Madhyamaka model presented the best view at the beginning of its listing. The Jaina model opted for a middle position, while the Advaita assumed the final position. This by no means indicates that each tradition consistently perpetuated these models. It is not the case. The most common model of doxography I have seen thus far, regardless of sectarian filiation, is in fact the pyramidal ascending hierarchy represented here by the Advaitin SSS. This diversity of models is nonetheless worthy of notice. It appears to be unique to India. When I presented these findings to Classicists (including Runia and Baltussen) at the Munich conference *Received Opinions: Doxography in Antiquity and the Islamic World* (6–8 March 2018), during a discussion period, none had ever heard of any other model than the ascending pyramidal one. The idea that doxographical dialectic may constitute a form of spiritual exercise in its own right was also novelty. This confirmed my intuition to the effect that a better understanding of the nature and function of Indian doxography could lead to a reappraisal of the genre worldwide. It is an idea I now propose to study further through the notion of 'list' and 'list-making' in Indian philosophy.

One last time, I would like to express my gratitude to all the wonderful people I met at *Distant Worlds* and for the generous support I received.

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Preface

Beatrice Baragli, Albert Dietz, Zsombor J. Földi,
Patrizia Heindl, Polly Lohmann and Sarah P. Schlüter

The Munich Graduate School for Ancient Studies

The Graduate School Distant Worlds has been funded by the 'Deutsche Forschungsgemein-schaft' (DFG) and the Excellence Initiative since 2012. With its conceptual orientation, it pursued the goal of promoting the research of young scholars in the entire field of ancient studies in an innovative and interdisciplinary way. In 8 years, the GSDW offered several generations of PhD students and postdocs from all over the world the possibility to conduct and discuss their research in a supportive academic environment and within the excellent research infrastructure of the LMU Munich. On a personal level, the fellows were supported by a group of enthusiastic professors and postdoctoral fellows, who shaped the intellectual stimuli and professional supervision of the GSDW. From the contents' point of view, the Graduate School was divided in seven focus areas: the constructions of (1) norms, (2) elites, (3) 'the beautiful' (aesthetics as a whole), and the organisation of (4) coexistence, (5) exchange, (6) dealing with dissent, and (7) memory and forgetting. The GSDW not only performed seminars and lecture series each semester to stimulate methodological and expert discussion but also allowed for both individual research trips as well as study trips in groups, which brought the members of different focus areas to destinations like Israel, USA, Iran, and many others. These trips, together with colloquia in smaller and larger groups in which the fellows discussed their ongoing research, shaped the community of the school on professional and personal levels. The range of activities conducted offered a pool of ideas which fed into the diverse individual projects and focus areas. Sometimes only with some distance, as we observe, do we recognise the extent to which the school has broadened our academic horizons and the many ways in which the discussions and feedback positively influenced our work(s).

About the Journal

The Distant Worlds Journal (DWJ) was founded with the aim of transforming the diversity of subjects present at the Graduate School Distant Worlds into a publication format and thus offering young researchers a platform to publish their articles in a peer-reviewed journal. Between 2016 and 2020, five issues were published, each dedicated to a specific topic: *Continuities and Changes of Meaning* (1, 2016); *Dealing With Antiquity: Case Studies and Methodological Considerations in the Ethical Engagement of Ancient Materials* (2, 2017); *Migration and Change* (3, 2017); *Chances and Problems of Cultural Anthropological Perspectives in Ancient Studies* (4, 2020) and most recently *Ideologie und Organisation: Komparative Unter-suchungen antiker Gesellschaften* (5, 2020). In total, 47 authors contributed 39 articles to these fascicles. In addition, two Special Issues have been published: One edited by A. F. Bergmeier, K. Palmberger and J. E. Sanzo called

Erzeugung und Zerstörung von Sakralität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge der internationalen Tagung in München vom 20.– 21.10.2015 (2016), and *The Semantics of Space in Greek and Roman Narratives* (2018), edited by V. Fabrizi.

Overall, the reception of the articles in this journal were very successful with articles accessed over 5159 times. Thanks to the open access online publication format, we were happy to see that the readership spans disciplines and across the world. Especially in the challenging times we are facing now, the availability of research for everyone, everywhere becomes indispensable if we want to have a discourse where every scholar can participate.

The Distant Worlds Journal ends with this special issue dedicated to the Graduate School Distant Worlds. For this reason, the call was for scientific papers from anyone formerly or currently affiliated with GSDW. Everyone, from the principal investigators to the pre-doctoral students had the chance to write about their research that was inspired by their time at the Graduate School, which gave them the space to develop new ideas, methods and ways of thinking or to present their research or (new) projects.

Contributions to this Issue

13 contributions of former doctoral students, visiting professors, principal investigators, affiliates and fellows were accepted for publication. The authors write about the research they did during their time at the Graduate School, the research they were inspired by, or the research they are doing at their new place of work. In the following, a brief overview of the contents is given.

Assyriology

Returning to the topic of a former presentation of hers at a GSDW reading group in 2014, **Beatrice Baragli** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) examines Mircea Eliade's impact on Assyriological studies. She points out that Eliade's work has largely been neglected in Assyriology for decades, despite the attention he previously devoted to other Mesopotamian texts such as glass recipes. Only recently have Assyriologists started to re-discover Eliade's work on the interpretation of these cuneiform sources.

Zsombor J. Földi (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) describes in his paper how the loss of cylinder seals was dealt with in 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE Mesopotamia. He not only lists the previously known documents recording this loss, but also presents a previously unpublished exemplar of this genre. A comparison with similar documents from Old Babylonian Mesopotamia provides an insight into the handling of such losses.

In her article, **Sarah P. Schlüter** (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) sheds light on the life of a woman named Madawada, who lived at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE in Kaneš, present-day Turkey. Using what is preserved of the archive of Madawada and some archaeological data, the author attempts to gain information about her life.

Christian Archaeology

Sabine Feist (University of Bonn) describes the unique access in the southern vestibule of Öşk Vank. Here, so-called angel pillars open the boundary between the profane and the sacred, thus creating an easily accessible 'barrier-free' space of Christian sacred architecture. The article discusses the special role of the angel pillar in its liminal function and describes the regionally specific peculiarities of the pictorial representation.

Classical Studies

Susanne Gödde's (Freie Universität Berlin) study deals with the relationship between suffering and salvation in ancient Greek novels. The focus is on the question of whether these novels were influenced by religious – especially Christian – patterns and motifs, as earlier research suggests.

Tonio Hölscher (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg) sketches in his study a theory of images based on the social aspect of daily life with and around images. He emphasizes the social interaction with images in a community of living and deceased people, rather than focusing on more common questions like: 'What is an image?' The author had discussed such thoughts in a Doktoranden-Seminar at the 'Münchner Zentrum für Antike Welten' in the winter semester 2014/2015.

Sophie Hüdepohl (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) presents the Roman city of Guntia (present-day Günzburg) which belonged to the Roman province of Raetia. Her article is based on her doctoral research conducted at the GSDW, focusing on the late-Roman phase of the town and on questions of mobility and migration.

Egyptology

John Baines (University of Oxford) takes up a topic to which he already devoted himself during his time as a visiting professor at the 'Münchner Zentrum für Antike Welten': biographies. In his article, he deals with two statues of the Egyptian dignitary Wepwawetaa, housed at museums in Leiden and Munich. On both steles there are biographical inscriptions that provide information about Wepwawetaa to the reader, but also the steles themselves have their own 'biographies', their own history.

Patrizia Heindl (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) discusses the modern history of three statues of the Egyptian lecture-priest Petamenophis, all of them found in Italy. The article recapitulates the circumstances of their discovery and their history since then. It concludes with the story of the re-discovery of one of these statues by the author in 2018. More details shall follow in the author's forthcoming PhD thesis.

Indology

Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette (Ghent University) discusses the results of his doctoral thesis that he wrote during his time at the GSDW. He highlights the philosophical and spiritual value of doxography, which is nowadays often ignored by philosophers. Focusing on the early Indian evidence, he advocates for a new appreciation of this literary genre.

The contribution of **Tanni Moitra** (Adamas University, Kolkata) investigates the concept of *Āpaddharma* in the Brahmanic and Buddhist traditions. *Āpaddharma* can be translated 'law of crisis', and it substitutes, in case of a crisis, for the laws of normal circumstances. It can be therefore understood as a 'midway' between *dharma* 'law, norm' and *adharma*, its contrary.

Pre- and Early History

Anthony Harding (University of Exeter), former visiting professor at the 'Münchner Zentrum für Antike Welten', is presenting a retrospective of plagues, starting with our current situation. The focus is on the archaeological evidence and how we can detect plagues and pandemics. Starting with an overview of plagues that are also recorded in written sources, the author discusses the possibility that gaps in the archaeological record of the later prehistory of Europe could reflect widespread diseases.

Carola Metzner-Nebelsick (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) reconsiders the use and meaning of chariots in the 2nd millennium BCE in the light of a new find. She argues that chariots were used earlier than generally presumed within the Carpathian Basin, and ascribes a symbolic meaning to chariots as status markers.

The range of topics in this issue reflects the multifaceted nature for which the Graduate School in Munich was known. The numerous disciplines and consistent interdisciplinary discourse shaped the thinking and work of all involved.

The special issue ends with an epilogue by the director and spokesperson of the Graduate School Distant Worlds: **Martin Hose** (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich).

Last Words …

This final issue is dedicated in gratitude to all those who have contributed with their work to the establishment and functioning of the Graduate School Distant Worlds. Special mention should be made of Martin Hose, Isabella Wiegand, Anna Waldschütz, Nicole Schüler and Monika Seebeck, but also the board members and principal investigators as well as all predoctoral, doctoral and postdoctoral fellows, who have contributed greatly to the Journal and its success.

Special mention has to be made of the founding members of Distant Worlds Journal, who launched the project in 2016: Henry Albery, Beatrice Baragli, Amanda Bledsoe, Fabian Heil, Polly Lohmann, Lauren Morris, Zsuzsanna Végh, Gioele Zisa and Laurien Zurhake. Through subsequent fellows, the initiative has continued throughout the life of the Graduate School, thus documenting in retrospect, the various research projects at the Graduate School itself, and the reach of the publication platform also among external young scholars.

The Distant Worlds Journal could not have existed possible by the support of Martin Hose, Katrin Bemmann and the team of Propylaeum at the Heidelberg University Library, nor without the professors who supported the young journal with their professional expertise and by being members of the Advisory Board. They are sincerely thanked for their trust and support.

With the closing of the Graduate School in 2021, we are all moving to new spheres beyond Distant Worlds, without losing our academic roots we all proudly carry.