

ABSTRACTS

1) *The Other World of Odysseus: Cultural Encounters in the Iron Age Mediterranean*

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In the Iron Age, Phoenician and Greek sailors and merchants interacted with groups from the Black Sea to the Atlantic coasts of Africa and Europe. Can we imagine their views of the Mediterranean world they may have exchanged? What commonalities would they have found in their experiences of those encounters, and what may have been their perceptions of those other worlds? Focusing on a range of artifacts and sites, drawing on archaeology and literary sources, this talk explores the various modes of cultural interaction that helped form an interconnected Mediterranean, and the peculiarities of the multi-cultural experiences in different areas, such as Iberia, Sardinia, Sicily, Cyprus, and the Aegean.

2) *An island in the west: Iron Age Sardinia on the cusp of a new era*

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Often seen as remote, studies of Sardinia's island situation, far from other centres, have seen it as developing a complex socio-political system in isolation. Yet, recent scholarship focusing on connectivity and interactions has revised our opinion of how far this really was. Data regarding contact with Crete, Cyprus and even west Asia during the Bronze Age complement that from the western Mediterranean during the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages demonstrating that Sardinia was part of networks stretching across the whole Mediterranean. The distinct socio-political changes that took place in the island communities during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages can likely be related to greater contact with overseas communities. However, whilst contact with the prehistoric Iberian and Villanovan communities in the Bronze Age can be seen to be between communities on an even footing with each other, the situation was quite different at the start of the Iron Age with the arrival of Levantine traders and settlers on the island itself.

This period of the Iron Age, the start of which is generally associated with the arrival in the late 10th century BCE, of Phoenician communities in the west - in search of new markets - brought fresh changes and challenges for the Sardinian Nuragic population. Indeed, although internal factors (population decrease, ecological factors etc.) can account for some of the arrival of Phoenician settlers was also fundamental. Yet, Phoenician and indigenous Nuragic cultures are often dealt with as two separate topics in the literature in this period; with the former tackled by Phoenician and Classical scholars and the latter by prehistorians. This approach often overlooks the complexities that this period merits.

Whilst the period of culture contact in the Early Iron Age is often seen from the Phoenician perspective the question also arises as to how this contact was received by the indigenous populations of Sardinia. Human agency as well as geography played decisive parts here, as differences in the Nuragic Sardinian communities can be noted across the island. This paper attempts to bring together these two perspectives through an examination of the material culture of both Sardinians and Phoenicians; at Phoenician sites, where the presence of indigenous material suggests interactions, and

from indigenous sites, which can evidence the presence of foreign material and thereby contact. Evidence comes from various levels -transport amphorae (which imply trade between two communities), or of domestic cooking ware (which suggest a deeper connection on a more intimate level) or grave goods which can reveal details of the extent of this interaction. Themes running through this are that of hospitality, cultural understanding. In this way it is possible to sketch a multi-scalar picture of interactions from both sides between Sardinians and Phoenicians from the domestic to international during this complex period and at the same time ask how far archaeological material can be used to answer complex questions of cultural contact.

3) *Artistic patterns in Khoe-San petroglyphs: Exploring universal spatial themes in human figures through comparison with Rock Art styles from the Levant*

Lynette Boardman (North-West University, South Africa) & At Lamprecht (North-West University, South Africa)

Although there is no evidence of direct contact between the Khoe-San of the Schoonspruit Basin in South Africa and the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean, comparisons of artistic patterns in rock art, particularly the depiction of human figures, can provide insights into a shared cognitive capacity for symbolic thinking. Shared human behaviours, such as an appreciation of spatial cognition and its use in the past, may help explore how depictions of humans were deliberately chosen to reflect specific identities. This study will reanalyse a representative selection of Khoe-San petroglyphs from the Schoonspruit Basin, comparing them to Levantine rock art in terms of formal, structural, and thematic variations, as well as technological specificities. The goal is to uncover traces of cultural identities through the analysis of these distinctive artistic productions.

4) *Ancient Aethiopians in the Mediterranean: Between mythology and history*

Asterios - Evangelos Kechagias, North-West University, South Africa

The term Aethiopes in antiquity, along with Aethiopia, appears frequently in Greco-Roman and Christian sources but does not consistently refer to the same entities. At times, these terms denote the inhabitants or regions of Africa; at other times, they refer to people or areas in the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, or even India. Occasionally, they are used inclusively, while in other contexts, they carry a more specific connotation. Moreover, many related descriptions are mythical or imaginative, although some portray these figures in more historical terms. The complexity increases when these terms are paralleled by various authors with Kushite and Kush/Kash, terms used by Egyptians, Israelites, and Mesopotamians primarily to designate the inhabitants and territories of ancient Sudan, though these last terms had diverse applications as well. The association of Aethiopes and Aethiopia with Sudan, rather than with regions further south corresponding to modern-day Ethiopia, is significant and should not be overlooked. This more southerly association only emerges in later, post-Christian periods with the rise of the Aksumite Kingdom.

The relevance of this topic to a conference on intercultural exchanges lies in the portrayal of Aethiopians as significant figures in the mythological and historical narratives of the ancient Mediterranean. For instance, the Aethiopian king Memnon is said to have come to the aid of the Trojans in their war against the Achaeans. Similarly,

King Cepheus is sometimes depicted as ruling a kingdom in Canaan while also being connected to Argos in the Peloponnese. Greek epic and tragic literature often explored “Aethiopica” in depth, while Herodotus and other sources describe Aethiopians as inhabitants of various Aegean islands, such as Cyprus and Kos. Moreover, in the constellations of the Greek sky, Aethiopian figures like Cepheus, Cassiopeia, and Andromeda are prominently featured.

This raises several questions: Who were the Aethiopians said to have reached the Mediterranean? How and to what extent did they influence Mediterranean peoples? Are they truly connected with the Kushites of Sudan, suggesting ancient interactions between Kushites and Mediterranean cultures? Are these accounts purely fictional, or might they have a historical basis? What insights does archaeology provide on this topic? What unique characteristics of the Aethiopians inspired such extensive focus by ancient Mediterranean authors? This presentation will seek to examine these questions by analyzing the relevant sources. Its primary objective is to uncover potential historical connections that may link historical Aethiopians—whoever they might have been—with the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean.

5) From elephant hunters to long-distance traders: observations on the establishment of trade relations in the Red Sea in the Greco-Roman period

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During Ptolemaic rule, Egypt maintained numerous contacts in the interior of Africa in order to import elephants for use in warfare. A network that can be reconstructed from the sources developed along the Nile and along the west coast of the Red Sea. In addition to the import of elephants, this network also served to establish trade relations in the Indian Ocean region. In many respects, the Ptolemies drew on the knowledge that had already been built up through exploratory voyages and expeditions under the last ‘Pharaonic’ kings and under the Achaemenids. When Egypt became a Roman province in 30 BCE, the infrastructure policy in the Red Sea region and on the southern border of the province changed. In addition to military expeditions in the 20s BCE, an infrastructural boom can be observed along the most important desert routes between the Nile and the Red Sea. The permanent Roman presence in the desert led to increasing conflicts with indigenous, nomadically organised desert tribes from the middle of the 1st century CE. These tribes called themselves ‘barbarians’ in ostraca texts; for example, we know of a tribal leader called Baratit who described himself as the ‘Tyrannos of the Barbarians’. The Roman administration responded to the conflicts with military force on the one hand and with offers of social integration on the other.

From the second half of the 2nd century CE, the evidence of conflict recedes and the indigenous desert tribes appear as ‘members’ within the Roman army. They are even so well integrated locally that they can be used by Egyptian usurpers as fighters against the ruling emperor in the 3rd century CE. In the course of this development, which is merely outlined here and can be reconstructed from papyrological, archaeological, literary and epigraphic sources, knowledge about East Africa, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden also increased. The lecture would like to show this increase in knowledge, which goes hand in hand with the increasing infrastructural penetration of the desert and the Red Sea region and also with the integration of indigenous tribes. To what extent do changes in social networks go hand in hand with an empirical increase in geographical and cultural knowledge? What caesuras can be recognised in terms of personnel, infrastructure, economy and politics for the connections between

Egypt, East Africa and the Red Sea region? Methodologically, it will also be shown how different types of sources – especially literary, papyrological and archaeological material – can be used comparatively and as a parallel tradition.

6) *Approaching Greco-Roman Spaces as the Nabataean “Other”*

Anna Accettola, Classics Department, Hamilton College US

Were we to believe Greco-Roman sources, the Nabataean Kingdom would scarcely exist before the mid-first century BCE. Apart from occasional skirmishes with the surrounding empires, the kingdom made little impact on the authors of preserved texts. However, archaeological and inscriptional evidence shows that people from Nabataea moved around the Mediterranean and made an impact where they landed as early as the late third century BCE. In this talk, I argue that the discrepancy between archaeological and written sources may in fact be due to Greco-Roman misconceptions and expectations about Nabataean expressions of identity and social constructions. The inhabitants of the Nabataean Kingdom were organized along tribal lines and in familial groups for far longer than much of the eastern Mediterranean. The coalescence of this kingdom though created new pressure for its leadership and inhabitants to present themselves in a manner recognizable to external powers. In practice, this meant that “Nabataean” was often a term only used beyond the physical boundaries of the kingdom, in order to define an ethnonym or territorial association that would be understandable to the Greeks and Romans (Graf 2004). More specifically, I argue that the term “Nabataean” was used as a way to minimize an unacceptable form of ‘otherness,’ that of not belonging to a formalized political organization of a Greco-Roman style.

To overcome these evidentiary challenges, I argue that we must turn our analyses to the discrepancy between emic and etic identification of these individuals. While inscriptional evidence may provide more chronologically accurate information about the movement of Nabataeans throughout the Mediterranean and Arabia, it too is often created for the benefit of its audience, thus reproducing Greco-Roman standards. As such, we must rely more heavily on the physical remains and non-public inscriptions of Nabataeans within and beyond the borders of the kingdom to find native expressions of self. From this evidence, I argue that Nabataeans were extremely adaptable in creating an external expression of self that met the expectations of Greco-Romans, while carefully maintaining their distinctive identity, even in foreign lands.

Cited Works:

Graf, David F. “Nabataean Identity and Ethnicity: The Epigraphic Perspective.” In *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* (Vol. VIII), edited by F. al-Khraysheh, 145-154. Amman: The Department of Antiquities, 2004.

7) *Maschalismos: A Forgotten ‘Ritual’ From the East?*

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In most Mediterranean cultures, maintaining the integrity of the deceased’s body was crucial, and any violation of this principle carried serious consequences. However, there are instances where the disintegration of the body was considered legitimate,

particularly in the case of wrongdoers. While Greeks of the historical period generally avoided such treatment of the dead, early Greek poetry and archaeological evidence suggest otherwise (Bosnakis, 2020).

One such act, *maschalismos*, baffled scholars already in antiquity and is still debated in modern times. Recently, it has been argued that due to misinterpretation by ancient and Byzantine scholars, *maschalismos* emerged as a specific practice involving gruesome mutilation and the binding of severed body parts under the armpits (Doroszewska and Kucharski, 2019). Although written evidence is scarce, it indicates that whatever *maschalismos* entailed, it was intended to dishonour the victim and their family and was performed on enemies as a form of revenge. Whether binding of the victim was involved or not, the ritualised (and magical) character of the act can be seen in disabling the victim from action by cutting off bits that could enable it; subduing and disabling from action conceptually also involve dishonouring (*atimia*) the victim.

Maschalismos is a pre-Greek word (Beekes, 2010) and appears to have roots in sacrificial vocabulary (Parker, 1983), though the exact nature of the ritual remains elusive. Similar acts of mutilation are documented in Semitic (Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia) and Hittite sources, often in contexts of punishment and revenge. Given that the earliest known forms of corpse maltreatment are found in Homeric poems, which originated in the Eastern Mediterranean, and that Greek sacrificial rituals have parallels in Eastern traditions, including shared vocabulary, we seek to reassess the act of *maschalismos* as preserved in early Greek sources. This reassessment will consider other documented instances of ritualised disfigurement of corpses (both in written and archaeological evidence) and sacrificial rituals within Greek and Semitic traditions, to explore the potential apotropaic or cathartic meanings behind these practices.

By posing methodological questions about linguistic and cultural exchange between Greeks and the Levant, we aim to determine whether the similarities in the ritualized violent treatment of corpses are the result of coincidence, influence, adaptation, or convergence. Through the case study of *maschalismos*, we hope to shed light on similar unexplained phenomena and enhance our understanding of cultural dynamics and exchange in the ancient Mediterranean.

Beekes R., 2010, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden-Boston.

Bosnakis D., 2020, *Κατηφείη καὶ Ὀνειδος. Τεπεινωμένοι και καταφρονεμένοι νεκροί*, Athens.

Doroszewska J. and Kucharski J., 2019, 'A ritual of the afterlife or the afterlife of a ritual: *maschalismos* in ancient Greece and beyond', in J. Harrison (ed.), *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World*, Abingdon, 155-172.

Parker RCT., 1983, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Oxford.

8) *India in the Poetic Imagination of the Roman Republic*

Johan Stehenkamp, North-West University, South Africa

This paper is about the ethnography of India subcontinent as it existed in the minds and texts of the Republican and Augustan poets. Although the ancient Greek speaking east had close contact with peoples of the Indian subcontinent at least after the conquests of Alexander of Macedon, these peoples would only become part of the Roman World late in the last century BCE. Peoples from the subcontinent were not known in Rome, unlike many other different peoples from the Ancient Near East. Yet, they do feature

in the literature. This paper will investigate what the poetic texts says about specifically people considered to be ‘Indian’, both as part of the general category of ‘Eastern peoples’, but also as a unique category among these peoples.

9) *Rustica Quondam Fistula: When Quondam?*

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This study questions the conventional understanding of “quondam” in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 8.191-192 “rustica quondam fistula” as an indicator of indefinite time, i.e. “sometimes,” and instead proposes that “quondam” in this case refers specifically to the past, i.e. “previously, once.” In this light, the Etruscan musical tradition underlying the Greek context of the Ovidian narrative exemplifies one way in which local culture survives in the face of external contact. Three sets of evidence—philological, mythographical and iconographical—might support this reading.

Philologically, Ovid rarely indicates indefinite time with quondam. Moreover, this conventional understanding of the word does not satisfactorily explain why the collocation “rustica fistula” is otherwise unattested. On the other hand, the alternative reading of “quondam” as referring to the past does not necessarily clash with the tense, mood and the simile. Mythographically, the phrase “rustica quondam fistula” closes the recurrence of an unprecedentedly detailed organological description of syrinx in the initial book of the *Metamorphoses* that highlights the feature of unequal tubes. The tale of Syrinx the nymph is embedded in the tale of Io and Hermes’s execution of Argus. The novelty of the syrinx instrument in the mythological narrative necessitates such organological elaboration. This emphasis, peculiar to Ovid, placed upon the antiquity of the instrument concurs with the understanding of “quondam” as a past time rather than an indefinite time. Iconographically, syringes of various shapes were seen in the Mediterranean world. The preference for shape differs from place to place and from time to time. “Quondam rustica” is very likely a limitative modifier that singles out one particular type of syrinx for the simile.

In the Greek world, the earliest shape is the rectangular syrinx consisting of pipe of equal length. During the Hellenistic Ages, the graded type, together with several combination types, emerges. Therefore, Ovid is not following this trajectory in line with the Greek origin of his mythographical narrative by claiming the primacy of the graded shape. On the other hand, the Italic tradition of the instrument fits the Ovidian narrative well. The Etruscans and people further north in the Alps enjoy the graded syrinx before the advent of the Greek rectangular type by the end of the sixth century BCE. The connotation of syrinx likely underwent similar changes in Ovid’s times through the blending of the imported Greek and local Italic musical traditions. Iconographical and epigraphical evidence suggests that syrinx was then no longer considered merely the instrument for bucolic contexts, but began to be involved in musical orchestra in religious or theatrical performances, hence only “quondam fistula”, i.e. “once rustic.” Ovid’s words thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the relation between Greek and Roman musical organology. When read in parallel with iconographical representations of this instrument, it dissolves the simplistic illusion that the Roman graded syrinx derives from the shape prevalent during the Hellenistic Age in the Greek East, the origin of which is still uncertain. The complexity of the interaction between the Italic tradition and this recent imported novelty is illustrated by Ovid’s delicate design of cloaking the former in the latter.

10) Milindapañha: The Conversion of King Menander to Buddhism

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The adoption of Buddhism among several of the Indo-Greeks is attested by the celebrated conversion of King Menander I (c. 155-130 B.C.E.), who was the greatest of all the Indo-Greek kings of the Euthydemid dynasty. His realm extended over much of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and his conquests pushed the borders of his kingdom as far as the river Ganges and Palibothra, the Pataliputra of Emperor Ashoka. The story of Menander's conversion is told in the Buddhist text, the Milindapañha ('Milinda's Questions'), which is preserved in Pāli, and in Chinese translations. When the Milindapañha was first translated into English in 1890 by T.W. Rhys Davids, it sparked a wide range of interpretations. Weber (1890) thought the text should be associated with the Platonic dialogues, while Tarn (1938) postulated that it was based on a short Greek text entitled Questions of Menander.

More recently, some scholars (Vassilides, 2004) have questioned the veracity of the Milindapañha, suggesting that since the oldest manuscript is dated to C.E. 1495—later time than that of Menander—the account is spurious. Others, conceding that the text was known in ancient India (since the Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa [c. 5th century C.E.] mentions it), argue that the Milindapañha is the account not of Menander I's conversion but of a later Indo-Greek king called Menander (Kubica, 2020). In this paper, I will examine the veracity of the account of King Menander I's conversion and argue that he did indeed become a follower of the Tathāgata. In doing so, I shall not only be making a close reading of the Milindapañha but also other Indian texts such as the Yuga Purana, as well as selected passages from Strabo, Plutarch and Justin. In addition, there is a wealth of numismatic evidence and archaeological remains such as the Shinkot Casket and Butkara Stupa, which will be used to support the veracity of the Milindapañha's account of a Greek king becoming a Buddhist.

11) Christ's Apostle Thomas in India: Spiritual aspects of the interaction of Christianity with Hinduism

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According to tradition, the apostle Thomas arrived in India in 52 CE via the spice route. He is believed to have landed on the West Coast of Southern India at the trading port and Jewish settlement at Muzirin (Cochi). Three of the eight churches that Thomas established in the Kerala province are still functioning as Thomasine churches today, and their leaders claim descent from the first Christians converted by St. Thomas. The early Christian writers Origen, Eusebius, and Ephrem the Syrian mention St Thomas's travels but there is no evidence proving that Thomas had been in India because at that time "India" was a generic term that denoted all the territories that lay to the east of the Roman empire. This paper presents local circumstantial evidence of close contact of Thomasine Christianity with Hinduism in the first millennium of Christianity, keeping in mind that the Portuguese brought Catholicism to India only in the sixteenth century. The interaction of Christianity with Hindu philosophy in the first millennium is also apparent near Madras on the East coast where St. Thomas was martyred in 67CE. He was buried there on St. Thomas Mount at Chennai, where a Thomasine church commemorates the event.

Less than 200km South from there is the sacred mount Arunachala. At the foot of Arunachala is the 9th Century Hindu Temple, a World Heritage site. Just along the road from there is the Sri Ramana ashram. It was intended that Johnny Quin, who has spent some time there, would present the upshot of his personal experience as a young Christian in search of meaning and understanding, longing to find confirmation of the beyond. Unfortunately, he is not able to be with us. As co-presenter he planned to explain how he traversed the colourful landscape of India with a backpack, a few hundred dollars and a silver cross necklace. On his journey he encountered many challenging aspects of life, due to the extreme social differences of vibrant India. These experiences ultimately strengthened his spirit and gave him a new perspective. During the many days that he spent in the meditation hall of the ashram of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Johnny experienced an overwhelmingly blissful sense of oneness with God that would forever change the course of his life.

It is thought-provoking that by 1980 the theologian John Hick noted that better contact with adherents of other faiths has shown that “everywhere the one (infinite) Spirit has been pressing in upon the human spirit ... the claim that outside Christianity there is no salvation seems unrealistic and implausible ... each of the great streams of faith can learn from the others”. Is it possible that the religious impulse or intuition to re-link to, and worship an “Ultimate Divine Reality” is the same the world over? Can Christians and also other religions truly experience the one and same God, each in their own way, according to their own culture?

12) The Persian Darius in the heart of the Western desert of Egypt

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Darius the Great, the third Persian king of the Achaemenid Empire, ruled from 522 to 486 BCE. During his reign, he led several military campaigns to expand the empire, including the conquest of Egypt from 519 BCE. In the Western Desert of Egypt, Darius the Great built/completed the temple of Hibis at the Kharga Oasis within a strategic location in Africa, 800 km south from Alexandria and about 300 km west from Luxor. The trilingual “Inscription of Darius I” at the prestigious archaeological temple of Hibis has been written in Persian (in the Old Persian script), Egyptian (in hieroglyphs), and Babylonian (in the cuneiform script). It not only commemorates the conquest of Egypt under his rule, but it also exposes extraordinary political, economic and cultural presence of Darius I in ancient Egypt, and also provides valuable information about the extent of the Achaemenid Empire during his reign.

13) Build the Wall!: Walls and Identity in the Globalizing Achaemenid Mediterranean

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Scholarship on the Athenian Long Walls has been dominated by the Periclean War Strategy in the Peloponnesian War. However, this situation is a bit of putting the cart before the horse – the Long Walls were built before the Peloponnesian War, so we should be interested in what ideological justification made the building of the Long Walls possible. This paper uses research on backlashes to globalization to understand the Long Walls’ justification, specifically to argue that they provided a psychological need for an “enclosed” community against intensifying intercultural contact. I will also

examine the contemporaneous missions of the Judean Achaemenid imperial officials Ezra and Nehemiah, who rebuild the walls of Jerusalem for similar reasons.

Research on backlashes to globalization has shown that while globalization tends to increase net wealth, it does not necessarily distribute new wealth equitably across different groups. This inequality leads to extreme politicians who propose solutions that protect the in-group often at the expense of perceived out-group members (e.g., foreigners). Border walls are frequently called for as a physical implementation of a psychological need to protect the in-group against supposed depredations from globalization and out-groups.

The mid- and late 5th century BCE was a period of intense intercultural contact (cf. Thucydides' reference to the Peloponnesian War as the greatest *kinesis* ("movement") of people), and scholars have begun to study ancient intercultural contact as a form of regional globalization. I suggest that the Athenian Long Walls partly helped meet a psychological need for the Athenians to preserve the Athenian in-group and to try to keep at bay a wider-world that was creeping into Athenian life. We can see such fears in contemporary discourses. As Thucydides tells it (Book 1), the Athenian debate about building the Long Walls falls into a discussion about whether the Athenians are becoming too much like the Persians. Moreover, the Old Oligarch worries that Athens' native culture is becoming mixed with outsiders, and he refers to Athens as, ideally, an "island." Pericles also refers to Athens as an "island." Moreover, Pericles' citizenship law (contemporaneous with the building of the walls) – which required two native born Athenian citizen parents to be a citizen – shows a great fear of contamination by outsiders.

Indeed, these citizenship laws show remarkable similarities to contemporary legal changes in Judah as shown in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, suggesting parallel responses to similar situations. Moreover, an important part of Nehemiah's program is the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, which Nehemiah explicitly says are for protecting Judean identity from outsiders. Indeed, these missions were part of the Achaemenid imperial response to Athenian involvement in the Egyptian Revolt (mid-5th cent.), demonstrating the entanglement of these phenomena.

In short, I argue that the Athenians and the Judeans were both reacting to the increasing pressures of globalization on their local cultures. Consequently, they responded in similar ways to shore up local identities that mirror modern phenomena. Walls were an important way for both groups to delimit their local identities against outsiders.

14) *The Middle-Asia Nomadic People as a Chain in Ancient Silk Road: Intercultural Contacts of Xinjiang, China, in 1st millennium BCE*

Zeyu Jiang, Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College London, UK

This study examines the pivotal role of Middle-Asian nomadic peoples in the development and perpetuation of the ancient Silk Road, focusing on intercultural contacts within Xinjiang, China, during the 1st millennium BCE. The nomadic tribes of Middle Asia, often perceived as peripheral actors in Silk Road history, are reevaluated as essential conduits for trade, cultural exchange, and technological diffusion between East and West. The findings reveal how these nomadic populations facilitated the movement of goods, ideas, and technologies across vast distances, acting as intermediaries between the advanced civilizations of China, Persia, and the

Mediterranean. This study highlights the role of Xinjiang as a cultural melting pot, where nomadic and sedentary ways of life merged, leading to unique developments in material culture, social organization, and trade practices on both sides of the Silk Road. By revisiting the narrative of the Silk Road through the lens of the Middle-Asian nomads, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intercultural dynamics that shaped the ancient world. It underscores the importance of considering the contributions of all societal groups and their interactions in the historical processes, challenging the traditional regional bias in the historiography of the Silk Road.