

**Wisdom Between East and West:
Mesopotamia, Greece and Beyond**

edited by Francesco Sironi and Maurizio Viano

Introduction

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The papers collected in this volume originate from the workshop *Wisdom between East and West: Mesopotamia, Greece and Beyond*, organized at the University of Turin on 26-27 October 2022. That event came as the conclusion of Maurizio Viano's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellowship BRISDOM, *Bridging East and West, Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Greek Traditions* (Grant Agreement No. 795154), a research project that had started in January 2019. The workshop was jointly organized by an Assyriologist, Maurizio Viano, and a Classicist, Francesco Sironi, who has worked on these themes as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Turin (2021).

The workshop aimed at investigating wisdom and wisdom literature in Mesopotamia, Greece and neighboring areas in a comparative perspective. Wisdom stands at the dawn of literature in both the East and the West. The Sumerian wisdom composition *The Instructions of Šuruppak*, preserved in copies dated to the mid-third millennium BCE, is one of the oldest Mesopotamian literary texts. Wisdom is also found in the earliest stages of Greek literature, like in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Wisdom is a broad category that may include sayings, proverbs, fables, books of instructions, disputations, dialogues, and technical writings such as medical or astronomical texts. Wisdom reflects on some of the most fundamental questions of mankind, such as the meaning of life, mortality, and the relation to the divine and is also deep-rooted in folk culture like no other genre. Furthermore,

wisdom motifs are also conveyed in text-types that are not usually regarded as wisdom literature, such as epics, hymns, prayers, and myths. Such a complex kind of literature had an enormous circulation in both the East and the West. In Mesopotamia, wisdom texts were studied in scribal schools as part of the curriculum and were connected to royal ideology: kings, for instance, were often portrayed as endowed with wisdom, which was essential to their office. In Greece, Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Aesop's fables are shining examples of the widespread circulation of wisdom literature. The broad circulation of wisdom texts clearly fostered the transmission of motifs in the ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The papers presented in this volume are organized in sections and touch several themes and features of wisdom, providing a comprehensive insight in this complex matter. The first section investigates the concept of wisdom and its epistemological implications. Moving from the two major strands of Mesopotamian wisdom tradition (a popular tradition and a school tradition), Giorgio Buccellati explores the contrast between idealization and realism in this twofold epistemic perspective. In her essay, Francesca Rochberg offers a critique of Hellenocentric views on the history of science by investigating the cuneiform scribal-scholarly knowledge termed *tuṣarrūtu*. Maurizio Viano and Francesco Sironi then present a comparative study of the concepts of truth and falsehood in Mesopotamian and Greek thought.

The second section of the volume is dedicated to actors of wisdom, namely sages and practitioners. Massimiliano Ornaghi investigates the overlaps of the features of wise men and poets in ancient Greece, paying particular attention to the perspective of the audience. Stéphanie Anthonioz explores the association of scribal wisdom and royal power in the ancient Near East, with a focus on Seleucid Uruk and Jerusalem. Figures of female advisors between East and West are the subject of Jacob Kuciak and Sebastian Fink's paper, which also points out differences between such figures in Greece and Mesopotamia. Nicola Reggiani presents the most important features of Greek medicine in an attempt to outline a framework of interactions and cross-connections with Egyptian medicine. Stefano de Martino offers an overview of Hittite dancing, focusing on the genre of narrative dances.

The third and last section of this book deals with wisdom and literature in its various forms, from epics to proverbs. Yoram Cohen discusses the limits of transmission of Babylonian literature to other non-cuneiform literatures. Simonetta Ponchia analyses dialogical structures in Mesopotamian epic literature between II and I millennium BCE. In his contribution, Niek Veldhuis argues that the wisdom embodied in Sumerian proverbs is that of the Old Babylonian scribal school where they were copied. Andrea Ercolani provides an overview of proverbs in Greek culture and wisdom traditions. On the

Mesopotamian side, proverbs and *gnōmai* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* are the subject of Bernardo Ballestreros' essay. Jana Matuszak investigates law, morality and subversion in Sumerian culture by analysing the legal framework and transmission history of two Sumerian prose miniatures from the Old Babylonian period.

As the reader can see, this volume benefits from various contribution by foremost specialists and offers an interdisciplinary perspective on wisdom in the Ancient Near East and the Greek world. We hope it can provide an overview on the current status of research and foster further investigations towards a better understanding of the ancient world and the interactions within it.

