

SAW Conference Scholars and Scholarship in Late Babylonian Uruk

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Cross-fertilization between Greek and Babylonian Thought in Seleucid Uruk

Abstract - This presentation will explore some aspects of the interaction between Babylonian and Greek thought during the Hellenistic period as it is documented by scholarly tablets discovered at Uruk. First I will briefly consider the sociological and socio-linguistic background of Greek influence and the acculturation of native Babylonians in the dominant Hellenistic civilization, including the question of Greek settlements in Babylonia and at Uruk in particular, the question of double names and also the presence of Greek loanwords in cuneiform texts, although these occur mostly in the administrative sphere. The main part of the presentation will concentrate on scholarly tablets from Uruk in which one can detect cross-fertilization between Babylonian and Greek thought. One is the description of constellations contained in a large tablet to be published by John Steele, Wayne Horowitz and me together with similar uranological texts; the tablet contains a short, native explanation for the reinterpretation of the traditional Babylonian constellation of the Hired Man into the Greek view of that constellation as a Ram (I will also consider the alternative explanation that the reinterpretation was a purely Babylonian development). The other text I will discuss may reflect cosmological views that are very close to Pythagorean theories propagated in the works of the philosopher Philolaus (ca. 470-385 BCE); this text will form the main part of my presentation.