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**Between and Beyond Empires:
From the Seleucids to the Sasanians (2nd c. BC – 7th c. AD)**
Wrocław/Breslau, December 3–6, 2024

ABSTRACTS AND SHORT-BIOS OF SPEAKERS

About

As a follow-up of the conference in Obergurgl (*The Achaemenid Persian Empire and Imperial Transformations in the Ancient Near East, 7th – 2nd c. BCE*, July 3-7, 2023) the one in Wrocław will continue to focus on the phenomenon of imperial transformations in the framework of a *longue durée* perspective and within a transdisciplinary approach. On the one hand, empire as phenomenon should no longer be thought as an organic biological “creature” with a clearly defined beginning and end. Moreover, the various paths of transformation processes that occur in phases of turmoil and crisis ought to be followed. On the other hand, special attention should be drawn on the agency of the vast imperial borderlands as these areas in particular are often entangled actively in these processes of transformation. The central focus of this conference lies on western Afro-Eurasia within a broad chronological framework that runs from the “Hellenistic” period to the early Islamic era. The various contributions are asked to address transformation processes as well as phenomena of imperial heritage and imperial “argumentation” through time and space. Although the Eastern Mediterranean, Western Asia (Near East) and the Iranian highlands are regarded to represent key zones of the inquiry, their outreach towards Central Asia, the Steppe, the Balkans and the Arabian Peninsula is not to be neglected. Therefore, the conference intends to develop a broad and transregional understanding of the various transformation processes involved as well as their spatial and chronological dimensions.

Institutions

Austrian Academy of Sciences, Commission “Transformation Processes and Empire in the Ancient Afro-Eurasian Worlds”	
University of California, Los Angeles, Pourdavoud Institute for the Study of the Iranian World	 Pourdavoud Institute for the Study of the Iranian World
University of Wrocław, NAWA Project “From the Achaemenids to the Romans”	
University of Innsbruck, Department of Ancient History and Ancient Near Eastern Studies	
University of Innsbruck, Doctoral College “Entangled Antiquities”	
Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Iranian Studies	
Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [COE8], Cluster of Excellence “EurAsian Transformations. Resources of the Past & Challenges of Diversity”	

Fabrizio Sinisi

Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

Imperial Religions in Iran, 3rd Century BC – 3rd Century AD

The period between the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD saw the establishment of two empires in the Iranian world, first the Arsacid one in western Iran and Mesopotamia and then that of the Kushans in eastern Iran and across the so-called Indo-Iranian Borderlands. The scale of these imperial constructions required the elites that governed them to engage with a variety of imperial traditions of different cultural origin, offering peculiar opportunities for comparative discussion.

The presentation will focus on the features of the religious background of the relevant notions of kingship that can be gleaned from iconographic evidence, with special emphasis on the developments in the East, aiming at sketching a picture of the religions that were involved in dynastic projects at imperial scale as historically attested in the time frame preceding the political changes brought by the advent of the Sasanians.

Fabrizio Sinisi: Studies and PhD (2001-2004) in Rome, University “La Sapienza”, on ancient Iran. Since 2007, Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (currently FG Numismatik, ÖAI), working in the framework of the Sylloge Nummorum Parthicorum project. His main interests are in cultural history of the pre-Islamic Iranian world in the early Middle Iranian period as evidenced by visual sources, with special focus on royal and divine iconography.

Edward Dąbrowa

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Imperial Heritage in the Hasmonean Judea

The successful resistance of the followers of Judaism against of the so-called Hellenistic reform may suggest that the Hellenistic influences over Judea would have been effectively stopped for a long time. The reality was quite the opposite. The succeeding members of the Hasmonean dynasty, leading armed forces against the Hellenists and supporting them rulers of Syria, changed their own attitude over time and with the evolution of their political stance in Judea. The moment they allied themselves with the claimants to the Seleucid throne, they began to receive honors in a Hellenistic fashion. Over time, those became the symbols of their political leadership. However, the symbolism of power was not the only area of social life with notable signs of Seleucid legacy in Judea. Moreover, influences from the times of the empire of Achaemenids and Ptolemies are also visible. They affected material culture, public administration, military organization, urbanization, as well as culture in a broad sense, with Greek language as its inseparable part in literature and as a means of communication. Despite the Hasmonean's opposition against the Hellenistic reform, they preserved

the diversity of the complex imperial heritage in Judea. It is true that some of those elements did not survive the period of their rule, but others did become an integral part of Judean culture.

Edward Dąbrowa, Professor emeritus of Ancient History at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Research interests: history of Asia Minor, the Near East (Syria and Judea) Mesopotamia, and Iran in the Hellenistic, Parthian and Roman Periods. Editor-in-chief of "Electrum. Journal of Ancient History" (ejournals.eu/electrum).

Christoph Michels

University of Münster

Imperial Benefactions? Seleukid Munificence in the Aegean and the Question of Centre and Periphery

By acting as *euergetai* towards (not only Greek) cities and sanctuaries, the Seleucids fulfilled a central role of Hellenistic monarchy. Particularly in the case of munificence towards Greek cities, leagues and sanctuaries, it can be shown due to the better source situation that these gifts were part of royal power politics and that the connections established in the *euergetic* exchange, which was based on reciprocity, had an impact on *Realpolitik*. On the one hand, then, it was about the concrete relationship between king and city. On the other hand, the kings of the various dynasties competed for prestige as peers on an international stage.

However, the extent to which the self-image of the Macedonian Seleucids as rulers of a multi-ethnic empire is reflected in the practice of *euergetism* is a matter of debate. My paper is concerned with the possible transformation of the Seleucids' self-image primarily in the period from Seleucus I to Antiochus IV in relation to their role as *euergetai*. Can a change and a dissociation from the former homeland by the rulers living in 'exile' be observed here? Similarly, the study of the practice of munificence, on which the kings were prepared to spend large sums of money (interestingly, and in contrast to the Ptolemies, this is not the case in the area of *agonistics*), may be useful in reflecting the Seleucids' view of their own position as well as the centres of the world in which they operated.

Christoph Michels has been a Heisenberg Fellow at the University of Münster since 2020. He studied History, Classical Archaeology and Art History at the University of Bochum. In 2008, he received his doctorate in a co-tutelle programme at the Universities of Innsbruck/Frankfurt with a thesis on the kingdoms of Bithynia, Pontos, and Cappadocia (published 2009). In 2016, he completed his habilitation at Aachen University with a thesis on the representation of the Roman princeps using Antoninus Pius as example (published 2018). He has held substitute professorships in Bayreuth, Düsseldorf, Münster, Tübingen, and Mainz. From 2014-2017, he was member of the Junges Kolleg of the AWK NRW. His research focuses on cultural history and the history of monarchy as well as on political communication in antiquity.

Stefan R. Hauser

University of Konstanz

Environmental Change: Its Political and Economic Implications

Imperial transformations are usually described as result of human, mostly royal and elite activities. The natural environment in all its complexities of climate, topography and ecology is often considered secondary in modern reconstructions. Nevertheless, environment in its natural setting as well as in its humanly induced and transformed version as landscape provides far more stimulus to economic activity and political organization than just as passive scene or background for human agency. In fact, it constantly interacts, stimulates and guides human responses and activities.

Based on geological, archaeological and contemporary written sources considering a *longue durée* perspective, this paper attempts to describe continuous environmental change as major force and motive for the development of economy, trade and trans-regional integration within empires based in Babylonia.

Stefan R. Hauser (PhD Berlin 1994) holds the chair for the Archaeology of Ancient Mediterranean Cultures and the Ancient Near East at the University of Konstanz (Germany). A former Getty Scholar, Senior fellow at Center of Advanced Study in the Visual Art, National Gallery of Art, and fellow for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, his main fields of research include, Late-antiquity, Arsacid-period archaeology and history, history of research, nomadism, and the neo-Assyrian Empire. He is currently directing excavations of Alexandria-on-the-Tigris/Spasinou Charax, in southern Iraq, and is co-director of the transdisciplinary French-German project "CHARTAQ", which explores the date, setting and meaning of these supposed fire-temples.

Julian Degen

University of Trier

The Transformation of Imperial Landscapes: The Elites of Asia Minor and the Coming of Rome

Sometime during the reign of Augustus and early Tiberius, Strabo penned the *Geographies*. It is a monumental geographical description of the world as seen through the lens of a Hellenistic scholar socialised in Rome. Born in the Hellenistic kingdom of Pontus, having extensively travelled Asia Minor, and having read a wide range of Hellenistic literature, Strabo provides a unique account of the history of Eurasia from Alexander's death to the rise of Augustus. Especially the focus of the *Geographies* on Asia Minor is worthwhile for studying imperial transformation processes, as he incorporates social structures and changing landscapes of Asia Minor into his geographical narrative. Locating his geographical description within the wider conceptual framework of imperial elitism, it is argued that Strabo's *Geographies* are a valuable source to study the changes in the

imperial societies of Asia Minor as they occurred during the transition of empires from the Hellenistic period to the coming of Rome.

Julian Degen currently holds a post-doc position at Trier University, where he is working on his second book dedicated to Strabo. He studied Ancient History and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Innsbruck, where he earned his PhD with a dissertation on Alexander and his empire. Afterwards he held positions at Kiel University and Trier University. His research focus is on Greek historiography, Ancient Near Eastern history, empires, and geography.

Erich Kistler

University of Innsbruck

Hellenistic Iaitas – Roman Ietas: From Border Buffer Zone to Imperial Borderland

Around 90 BC, the Hellenistic polis on Monte Iato in western Sicily underwent a dramatic transformation. The northern hall was converted into a basilica with the addition of a tribunal, and the agora was transformed into a forum. At the western edge of the agora, the Hellenistic buildings were demolished to make way for a podium temple and a comitium. The official language was changed from Greek to Latin. These are all clear signs that the Hellenistic-indigenous Iaitas had become the Roman Ietas. The only question that remains is: why did this transformation take place 150 years after the incorporation of western Sicily into the Roman Empire? By combining the concepts of buffer zone and imperial borderland, this study aims to explore possible answers to this question.

Erich Kistler is Professor of Classical Archaeology in the University of Innsbruck. For the past ten years he had directed the research project *Between Aphrodite Temple and Late Archaic House* at Monte Iato (western Sicily) in cooperation with the University of Zurich and the Polo regionale di Palermo per i Parchi e i Musei Archeologici. He has published extensively on the project and on wider aspects of consumption, including his 1998 monograph *Die Opferrinne-Zeremonie. Bankettideologie am Grab, Orientalisierung und Formierung einer Adelsgesellschaft in Athen* and the co-edited collection *Debating Sanctuaries and the Power of Consumption* (Wiesbaden 2015).

Victor Gysembergh

CNRS, Léon Robin Center for Research on Ancient Thought, Paris

Transformations of the Astral Sciences in the Wake and/or at the Outskirts of Empires

This talk will draw connexions between three moments in the history of the astral sciences that played out in the wake and/or at the outskirts of ancient empires: Eudoxus of Cnidus in Cyzicus,

Hipparchus of Nicaea in Rhodes, and anonymous writers of cuneiform in Uruk. It will first summarize Eudoxus of Cnidus' development of the first comprehensive corpus of astral sciences in the Greek world, with a focus on the intercultural background that made it possible and on its reception in Attalid Pergamon. It will then discuss Hipparchus of Nicaea's transformation of the Greek astral sciences, and in particular his creation of the first known star catalogue, both as a product of intercultural knowledge transfer and in the context of Hellenistic empire-building. It will conclude by reviewing a case (recently proposed by the speaker) of knowledge transfer between the Roman Empire and anonymous astronomers practicing in Uruk after 47 CE, and consider some possible implications of such an interaction for the history of relations between ancient empires.

Victor Gysembergh is a CNRS researcher at the Léon Robin Center for Research on Ancient Thought (Paris). Since 2018, much of his research has focused on the study of palimpsest and damaged manuscripts using advanced imaging techniques, notably multispectral imaging. This work has led, inter alia, to the rediscovery of Claudius Ptolemy's lost treatise on his Meteoroscope, fragments of Hipparchus' Star Catalogue, and fragments of a Latin introduction to Platonic philosophy (often referred to as the "New Apuleius"). His work lies at the intersection of the history of philosophy and the history of science. A common denominator is the desire to renew the interpretation of Greco-Latin sources by taking into account not only cuneiform texts, but also other ancient and medieval languages of learning.

Michele Minardi

"L'Orientale" University of Naples

The Origins of Chorasmian Art: A Socio-Cultural Inquiry

Demonstrating the persistence of a largely unknown artistic tradition is challenging. However, the exceptional outcome shown by the 1st century AD painted imagery of Akchakhan-kala, a royal Ancient Chorasmian seat excavated by the Karakalpak-Australian Expedition in recent years, provides clear evidence of a local aulic artistic tradition. These wall paintings not only confirm the pre-existence of Chorasmian mural art but also point to a broader painting tradition likely existing throughout Central Asia. Additionally, the Avestan deities depicted at Akchakhan-kala serve as extraordinary examples of the persistence and survival of Achaemenid iconographic models. This evidence, emerging from an area at the frontier of the Achaemenid Empire and later from the periphery of the "Graeco-Iranian world," reflects the unique cultural and historical trajectory of the region, distinct from the rest of sedentary Central Asia. Across Asia, numerous examples demonstrate the capacity for preservation and transmission of iconographies over the centuries. This process manifested prominently through the influence of Hellenistic civilization; however, this does not preclude the possibility that other imagery forms survived and were transmitted through Hellenistic techniques and practices.

Michele Minardi is Assistant Professor of Iranian Archaeology and Archaeology of pre-Islamic Central Asia at “L’Orientale” University of Naples, Italy. He directs the ISMEO Joint Italian-Karakalpak Archaeological Mission in Ancient Chorasnia (Uzbekistan) and has been Field Director of the ISMEO/Ca’ Foscari Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan since 2020, and of the Karakalpak-Australian Expedition since 2010. Besides fieldwork and other research activities, Minardi’s current focus is on the project “Old Kandahar: An Archaeological Reappraisal,” supported by the White-Levy Program for Archaeological Publications. Prior to this, he conducted research at the University of Sydney, the University of Bordeaux, and at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow.

Bernhard Schneider and Sebastian Fink

University of Wrocław and University of Innsbruck

Emesal Lamentations and their Imperial Setting from the Seleucid to the Parthian Period

Emesal lamentations are a somewhat strange genre. While Sumerian ceased to be a vernacular around 2000 BC, Emesal lamentations were only written down in a largely Akkadian-speaking world. These texts praise the power of the gods, describe their terrible wrath and the destruction they cause. At least since the Isin-Larsa period Emesal lamentations were closely connected to royal ideology and state cult. In our talk we will investigate the last period of Emesal lamentations, from the Hellenistic period to the last dateable Emesal texts from the 1st century BC. The analysis of the archaeological context of the late Emesal archives, a comparison (when possible) of the late material with earlier versions of the same compositions and finally an analysis of the groups which were involved in the transmission of those texts will allow us to contextualize these texts in their imperial setting.

Bernhard Schneider earned his PhD at the University of Innsbruck with a diachronic study of the main Sumerian sanctuary of Enlil at Nippur. In 2023 he was holding a Post-Doc position in the project “MeMaRe: Mesopotamian Material Religion: Shifting Landscapes of Human-Divine Networks in Ancient Mesopotamia” at the UKSW Warsaw (NCN, OPUS 21) and also published his first monograph on the ziggurat of Nippur. Since 2024 he is the PI of the project RuBab – Rural Southern Babylonian Sites During the Early “Age of Empire” (ca. 720-150 BC), based at the University of Wrocław (MSCA Cofund with NCN, POLONEZ BIS 2).

Sebastian Fink is Senior Scientist at the University of Innsbruck. He studied Philosophy and Assyriology in Innsbruck and held positions in Kassel and Helsinki. He has published on various aspects of Mesopotamian history, culture and literature.

Sina Kazemirashid

University of Innsbruck

Conceptualization of “Past Space” in Present Academic Discourse: An Example from the Arsacid Period

The phrase “Past Space” is introduced in this article, from a socio-geographical point of view, and is defined as a conceived space (rather than a strictly physical entity) which shall be conceptualized in present academic discourse, using at-hand theories of space and spatial perception, such as the post-colonial and post-modernist movement in spatial sociology and philosophy, generally known as the “Spatial Turn”.

Conceptualization of past spaces—the Arsacid settlement of Nisa as the case study in this article, through the contextualization of contemporary social theories is not a common trend in the academic literature, therefore there are few methodological grounds for such attempts. In this article, the focus is put on representation of the Arsacids’ imperial and non-imperial power and culture through fabrication, manifestation, and use of space.

This “material representation” of past space is investigated mainly by the spatial analysis of architectural and urban features of Nisa, one of the most well-known Parthian settlements; and is conducted based on a contemporary theoretical framework and the 3d reconstruction of spatial features of Nisa. The main data used for three-dimensional reconstruction is the available archaeological corpus of Nisa and satellite images. As for the historical elaboration and processing of the spatial data, written material, including current scholarships, and Greco-Roman historiographical resources are put to use.

This research provides a new insight into the socio-cultural significance of ancient spatial constructions, through bridging the distance between contemporary sociological theories on space and historical studies on spatial perception.

Sina Kazemirashid is a doctoral student at the Doctoral College “Entangled Antiquities”, department of Ancient History and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria since 2023. His academic background is focused on built and natural heritage. He studied Landscape Heritage Studies at Politecnico di Milano, Italy, where he conducted his thesis on the restoration of Pasargadae paradise based on historical and archaeological evidence. He is currently doing research on spatial perception in antiquity focusing on the settlements from Seleucid and Arsacid periods (312 BCE – 224 CE).

Nina Mazhjo

University of Wrocław

Alien Wisdom and the Cultural Legacy of the Persian Empire

Narratives of Iranian religion and the tradition of the Magi, as written by historians and philosophers during the Roman Imperial period, were often heavy on conjecture while demonstrating little knowledge of authentic Iranian traditions. Plutarch, Lucian, and Firmicus Maternus, to name a few, wrote about these topics, producing works with little to no parallels in Iranian and Zoroastrian sources. Questions remain, then, as to where these authors sourced their works. What inspired them to transmit this so-called knowledge of the other, and to what extent were they even concerned with conveying authenticity in the first place? This research project endeavors to examine more closely (Greek and) Roman historiography and narratives of their Near-Eastern other – namely, ancient Iranian religion, the tradition of the Magi, and the exotic wisdom attributed to them. I will also inquire into the motivations leading to the canonization of these narratives and their role in cultural innovation. I seek to answer why did these intellectuals turn their interest towards Iranian traditions? Did they perhaps have the chance to witness the ritual performances they spoke about, or were they in contact with priests and adherents of said traditions? Lastly, how much and to what extent was authenticity a concern of theirs? This project will approach these ancient descriptions from the perspective that these intellectuals made deliberate choices in their attempts to answer then-pressing cultural requisites. It also attempts to investigate the political context that triggered these cultural selections and innovations, as well as the cultural hegemony their results and outcomes could produce.

Nina Mazhjo completed her Ph.D. in the History of Religion from Concordia University in 2019, researching the cultural transmission of Mithras from Iran to the Hellenistic and Roman world. Currently, she is a research associate in the NAWA project at Wrocław University, conducted by Prof. Dr. Rollinger and Prof. Dr. Nawotka. Her research interests include foreign cults of the Roman Empire (especially Mithraism), cultural exchange, Knowledge transfer, and identity in the entangled ancient world.

Piotr Głogowski

University of Wrocław

Interactions between Empire and City-States in the Levant from Hellenistic to Roman Times

The ancient Levant was a complex socio-political environment where many different *species* of political organisms were to be found. One of them was what we can call the city-state. Throughout the ages, these polities maintained close relations with great imperial structures of the Near East very often becoming their subjects or tributaries. Because of that, these civic communities had to

develop adequate modes of interaction *with* and *within* particular imperial systems. The establishment of the Macedonian and Roman rule over the region coincided with a substantial cultural and socio-political transformation. Consequently, many Levantine civic communities acquired a number of features characteristic of the Greek *polis* and have eventually been recognized as such. Keeping in mind the importance of interactions between local populations and their imperial overlords, this process as well as the change and continuity of local power structures should also be considered in the imperial context. In this paper, I wish to discuss the nature and modes of interactions between great powers (Hellenistic kingdoms and Roman Empire) and Levantine city-states (with a special focus on cities of Phoenicia, Judea, and Palestine), the role of these interactions in the process of development of these communities, and their adaptive strategies. As I will try to argue, one of the most important elements of the development of interactions between city-states and empires is the change of the nature of public documents of Levantine communities.

Piotr Głogowski holds a PhD in Ancient History at the University of Wrocław, Poland (2021). His academic interests include Phoenicia in the Greco-Roman times, Achaemenid studies, Ancient Greek literature, and Greek and Semitic epigraphy. He is a principal investigator in the project entitled “The Development of the Epigraphic Culture of the Near-Eastern Peoples in the Greco-Roman Period: The Case-Study of the Southern Levant (Phoenicia, Judaea-Palestine and Transjordan),” carried out within the Preludium 19 programme funded by the National Science Centre, Poland. Dr. Głogowski currently holds a Postdoc position at the University of Wrocław within the NAWA Chair project directed by Prof. R. Rollinger entitled “From the Achaemenids to the Romans: Contextualizing empire and its *longue-durée* developments” where he conducts his research on the cultural and socio-political transformations of the Phoenician communities and their integration within the Greco-Roman world.

Miguel John Versluys

Leiden University

“Referenzraum und Verstehungshorizont”. Embedding Global Diversity in the Late-Hellenistic Kingdom of Commagene at the Euphrates

One way of understanding Empires is to look at them as ‘instruments’ that emerged on the stage of world history to manage increasing connectivity. The period around 200 BCE seems to constitute a major threshold in this respect. It is famously characterized by Polybius, in his *World History*, in the following manner: “From this point onwards history becomes one organic whole: the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events are related and contribute to a single end.” Simultaneously we witness the installation of four Empires (Rome, Parthia, Maurya and Han) that, together, will soon stretch from the Atlantic to the Chinese Sea. In my lecture I will argue that this “200 BCE threshold” indeed testifies to a new phase in the Globalization of the ancient world and hence the development of ancient Empires. Where earlier in the first millennium, Empires

had been exploring the possibilities of Globalization with the local and regional still being their (conceptual) point of reference, now the supra-regional and global had definitively become their point of departure. As a result, all post-200 BCE Afro-Eurasian Empires are fully engaged with the (cultural) work of embedding global diversity. They do so, for instance, by creating global pasts for their local or regional beginnings. I will use the late-Hellenistic kingdom of Commagene at the Euphrates as a case-study to illustrate these ideas.

Miguel John Versluys is Professor and Chair of Classical & Mediterranean Archaeology at Leiden University and PI within the Gravity Grant program *Anchoring Innovation*. His research focuses on the cultural dynamics that characterize the global ancient world. Recent publications include *Visual style and constructing identity in the Hellenistic world. Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I* (Cambridge 2017) and the edited volume *Canonisation as innovation. Anchoring cultural formation in the first millennium BCE* (Leiden 2022).

Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider

University of Wrocław

Innovations and Persistence within the Cults in Palmyra

Tadmor-Palmyra, the city with the splendid ruins from the early Roman Imperial Period located in the central Syria, is placed, according to Pliny the Elder, *inter duo imperia*: Roman and Parthian. Being between the two big powers of the time and a great leader in the international trade, this city presents a mosaic of different religious traditions with local deities such as Yarhibol, with the Mesopotamian great gods such as Bel and Nabu, but also with the strategies of interpretation of the deities into Greek and Roman culture codes. The temples present a mix of architectural backgrounds and habits making them special in the area of the Near East. This paper deals with the religious language in the epigraphic sources, the geographical placement of Palmyra and its impact on the religious life of the Tadmoreans. The approach to this topic is through the lenses of continuity and local innovations. We will examine where the people located their sanctuaries and how the topography resulted in the way of addressing to the gods. We will also look at the management of the temples – people and rituals.

Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider is a historian of religions of the Near East after Alexander the Great until Late Antiquity and an Aramaic epigrapher. She is an author of many publications on Palmyra and Hatra, e.g. a monograph on the dedications without theonyms from Palmyra at the prestigious series *Religions of the Greco-Roman World*, vol. 197 in 2021. In her research, she is concentrating on the organization of worship in the temples in the Parthian and Roman period in the East as well as on the question of the impact of geography on the ancient cults. Since 2022 she works as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Wrocław and since 2024 she is a consultant for Aramaic

inscriptions and parchments for the International Dura-Europos Archive (IDEA) Project at Yale University and Bard College, New York USA.

Marek Jan Olbrycht

Rzeszów University

Economic Policy and Commerce in the Arsakid State

Economic policy is an issue neglected in the study of the Parthian state. It is desirable to point out the phases of the development of Parthian economy, which were related to the political phases of the Arsakid state, starting from the early period (250-165 BC) through the empire-building era (165-87) until the Later Parthian Empire (110-226 AD). Some insights can be drawn from the monetary policies of the Arsakids and their vassals, as well as the directions of the Arsakid coinage influx into areas outside the empire or in the borderlands (Caucasia, Bactria). The centers of production (including in Babylonia, Margiana, and Media), mining and raw material production (such as salt in Babylonia, wood in Carmania, and semi-precious stones in eastern Iran, among others) should be noted. The trade factor appears as a key issue for Parthia in Chinese annals and western sources (Justin, Strabo, Pliny and others). All these testimonies stress the political and economic importance of trading activities within and beyond the boundaries of Parthia, even if they provide no broad programmatic statements about 'economic policy'. The factors contributed by the Arsakid state and Parthian vassals include the military control of regions accompanied by the creation and growth of social and economic communities, the monetary and commercial instruments, the legal framework (visible in contracts from Avroman or documents from Susa), and the infrastructure, including transportation networks, harbors, and trading centers.

Marek Jan Olbrycht is Professor of History, Archaeology and Ancient Oriental Studies at Rzeszów University, Poland, and Member of the Oriental Commission of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków. Formerly: Member at the School of Historical Studies, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton and Humboldt Visiting Professor in Germany, University of Münster. His focus has been the history of ancient Iran and Central Asia, Alexander the Great, and ancient warfare. He published more than one hundred articles and several books (including *Parthia et Ulteriores gentes*, 1998, *Alexander the Great and the Iranian World*, 2004; *Early Arsakid Parthia (ca. 250-165 B.C.). At the Crossroads of Iranian, Hellenistic, and Central Asian History [Mnemosyne, Supplements, Volume: 440]*, 2021. He established the journal *Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia* (since 2010). His full record is available at: <https://ias.academia.edu/MarekJanOlbrycht> and at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marek_Olbrycht/research.

Jake Nabel

Pennsylvania State University

Freedom and Citizenship in Post-Hellenistic Iran

In recent years, the view that Greek democracy was an exceptional form of ancient government has taken hits from two directions. On one side, scholars of the ancient Near East point to deliberative assemblies in their regions that look democratic or at least communitarian, and conclude that ancient democracy existed outside of Greece. On the other, classicists stress that Greek citizenship was denied to much of the population in ostensibly democratic poleis, and conclude that ancient democracy did not exist within Greece. This paper seeks additional perspective on this issue by exploring the interplay between Greek and Iranian notions of freedom, a key concept in the ideology of the democratic polis. How did Iranian elites understand democratic rhetoric that insisted on the right of a free citizenry to rule? Through evidence from the Achaemenid through the Arsacid periods, I consider the Iranian view of Greek democracy to add further context to debates about its alleged exceptionalism.

Jake Nabel is the Tombros Early Career Professor of Classical Studies and an Assistant Professor of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Pennsylvania State University. He is a historian of ancient Rome, pre-Islamic Iran, and the points of contact between the two. Jake's research interests include Roman-Parthian relations, late antique Armenia, and ancient political thought. In early 2025, his book *The Arsacids of Rome: Misunderstanding in Roman-Parthian Relations* will be published by the University of California Press.

Leonardo Gregoratti

University of Udine

All The Great King's Men: Arsacid Crisis in Roman Authors

The first half of the 1st century AD, from the extinction of the ruling Arsacid line with Phraates V to Vologases's I restoration, was a crucial period in the history of the Parthian Empire. That phase in Arsacid history was traditionally seen by Western sources merely as a time of political troubles during which several candidates for the throne fought against each other until the last prevailed and conquered a kingdom torn by decades of internal strife. Sinisi's work on Parthian coinage demonstrated that this explanation is simplistic and superficial. The reality, as often happens, was much more complex. The first decades of the modern era constituted a period of profound transformation for the Empire, during which the state's traditional structures were put into discussion and new powers arose. The Western authors, extraordinarily rich in details on Parthia for this period, were more interested in dealing with the engaging narration of the Arsacid "Game of Thrones"; therefore, they failed to grasp the transformations in action and to understand their

deep consequences. Nonetheless, their reports of the events registered an evolution in the Parthian government structure, particularly concerning who had the power to create kings and maintain them in power. The aim of this paper is to analyse the information provided by the literary sources in order to illustrate which *homines novi* had become fundamental in order to achieve or maintain solid control over the Parthian kingdom.

Dr. **Leonardo Gregoratti** was educated at the Universities of Udine (Italy) and Trier (Germany). He has conducted research in Udine, Trier, Kiel and Bergen. Between 2013 and 2018 he collaborated with the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University as IAS Fellow. Recently he has been a visiting researcher at the University of Freiburg (Germany). His research interests include Roman History and Epigraphy and the history of Western Asia, in particular the Roman Near East, Palmyra, the long-distance trade and the Parthian Kingdom. He collaborated as classical historian with the archaeological missions conducted by Udine University in Syria and now collaborates with Iranian colleagues.

James Howard-Johnston

University of Oxford

The Sasanians and their Imperial Heritage

The two most striking characteristics of the Sasanian empire in its fourth-sixth century heyday were (1) the high degree of its militarisation and (2) its appropriation of the whole Iranian past. Ardashir's extraordinary feat of uniting by force the disparate parts of Iran and Mesopotamia, followed by Shapur's victorious campaigns against the Romans, secured the authority of the new dynasty and endowed it with unparalleled *xwarrah*. Over the fourth and fifth centuries the hold of the centre over the periphery was steadily tightened as client-kingdoms in east and west were incorporated into directly administered territory and as massive defensive systems were installed to secure the frontiers. The fiscal grip which ensured a regular flow of revenue and the funding of public works was complemented by a grasping ideology, which appropriated Achaemenid and Arsacid sites of memory while simultaneously erasing both dynasties from the Iranian past. The Sasanians portrayed themselves as the heirs of an even grander mythical dynasty, the Kayanids, whose achievements as earthly agents of Ahura Mazda outshone those of Achaemenids and Arsacids.

The institutions of the state - fiscal, military and administrative - are best studied in the last century and a half of its existence, when Khusro I initiated a thorough-going reform programme. Its ideological acme came under Khusro II in the second decade of the seventh century, when he was poised to unite western Eurasia under his rule.

James Howard-Johnston was University Lecturer in Byzantine Studies at Oxford University and Fellow of Corpus Christi College from 1971 to 2009. He has written extensively about the Sasanians, most recently in *The Last Great War of Antiquity* (Oxford, 2021).

Jewish Communities in and between the Roman and Persian Empires during the 6th and 7th Centuries

The 6th and 7th centuries saw a deterioration in the treatment of Jews in the Later Roman Empire. Members of Jewish communities were marginalized due to the anti-Jewish legislation established under the *imperator christianissimus* Justinian I. Subsequently, prejudice against them intensified throughout the Mediterranean world, resulting in violent pogroms. Expecting a more tolerant treatment as well as religious and political autonomy, many Jews consequently sided with the Sasanians, prominently so during the conquest of Jerusalem in 614. However, their hopes were soon disappointed, since the Persian state was not more tolerant *per se* compared to the Roman Empire. Instead, it propagated strictly purpose-driven policies to secure its own interests against the Romans, which encompassed a wide repertoire of diplomatic “carrots and sticks”, as it were, to win, push and punish possible alliance partners.

The presentation provides insights into the treatment of Jews between the Roman and Persian empires during changing geopolitical constellations. Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of religious minorities in contested borderlands between the empires and the subsequent transformation of regional powers are thereby not interpreted as an expression of blind fanaticism or seemingly modern tolerance, but rather as consequences of varying political objectives that resulted from the military, political, economic and ideological foundations and resources for achieving strategic goals and maintaining imperial authority. In doing so, the contribution offers new findings regarding the history of Jewish communities and the functioning and impact of late antique superpowers in context of social, political and military entanglements in embattled border regions.

Since 2022, **Dr. Nikolas Hächler** is an ERC-fellow in the project “The Just City” at the Department of History UZH, where he examines the reception of Cicero’s notions of justice in the church fathers Lactantius, Ambrose, Augustine and Isidore of Seville. In his doctoral thesis he examined the composition, functions and importance of the senatorial order during the 3rd century CE. Supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), he had the opportunity to work on a postdoctoral project on the reign of the emperor Heraclius (610-641) in Vienna, Paris, Munich and Princeton between 2019-2022.

Clemens Steinwender

University of Innsbruck

Arabia between the Romans and the Sasanians: Agency and Transformation of an Imperial Borderland in Late Antiquity

The Arabian desert was a major obstacle for imperial expansion. From a Roman perspective, the Arabian Peninsula was mostly perceived as a distant region on the edge of the empire, which was sometimes viewed positively because of its trade routes and as a source of mercenaries. The Sasanian approach, however, was quite different. At various stages of Sasanian history, the Arabian Peninsula was a cornerstone of the empire, strengthening its economic stability and military security. Indeed, the geopolitical location of the Sasanian dominion required close relations with the Arab confederations and a certain degree of authority over the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, this region was embroiled in the imperial struggles between the Romans and the Sasanians, and its inhabitants were often times divided in their allegiance. The Arabian Peninsula in late antiquity itself was transformed by the actions of these entities and the events also had repercussions on the empires themselves.

This paper will discuss the specific situation of the Arabian borderland between the competing Roman and Sasanian empires in late antiquity. The following questions will be addressed: In what ways did the two empires compete in Arabia and what were the results? How do our sources reflect these circumstances? What role did nomadic confederations and other dominions like Himyar play in these undertakings between empires and borderland? Finally, also the question will be asked how these competing empires and transformative processes shaped the Arabian Peninsula during late antiquity.

Clemens Steinwender completed his BA in History and his MA in Ancient History and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Innsbruck. Since 2021 he has been a PhD student there with the supervisors Prof. Robert Rollinger and Prof. Touraj Daryaee and the thesis titled: "At the boundary of empires. Sasanian Imperial borderlands, their networks and the emergence of new power structures." He is a member of the doctoral program "Entangled Antiquities" and also a junior scholar on the board of the Melammu project. His research interests include late antiquity, empire studies and globalization phenomena in antiquity.

Paulina Kaczmarczyk

University of Innsbruck

Seleucids and their Heritage in the Late Antique Historical Writing

Except John Malalas' chronicle (especially the 8th book on the Hellenistic period), the late antique historical works are of limited use for Seleucid studies. The Hellenistic history – perceived as the

time of Macedonians – did not occupy high position in the predominantly Christian literature of that period (4th – 7th c. CE). Although the narrative of John Malalas seems the only late antique author paying attention to the Seleucids, and therefore has to be the primary source to analyse, it could have been an exception among other sources giving the priority to the Ptolemies. This paper seeks to contextualise Malalas' narrative on Seleucids within his Chronicle and among other historical works of his times, and answer why their scope and focus differs. It examines the scarcity of views on Seleucid dynasty in Late Antiquity and the hypothetical factors which could shape this perception over time. Among the main objectives lies the position of the Seleucids and their empire in the universal world history and understanding of the heritage of the Seleucid dynasty in Late Antiquity as rather Macedonian/Eastern Mediterranean than Iranian/Near Eastern.

Paulina Kaczmarczyk is a doctoral candidate at the University of Wrocław, currently preparing a historical commentary to book VI-VIII of John Malalas' Chronographia. She is interested in Malalas' perception and reception of ancient history and the reflection of Justinian's reign in the narrative of the distant past. Her research interest in John Malalas has been shaped during her intense international mobility to Athens, Budapest, Tübingen, Paris and Innsbruck, funded mostly with external funds like the Erasmus Traineeship programme, Scholarship of French Government or Ernst Mach Stipendium. For over two years, she was a research assistant in the NAWA project lead by prof. Robert Rollinger at the University of Wrocław.

Alexander Steiner

University of Innsbruck

Multilingualism Between Empires. The Eastern Silk Road Borderlands as Linguistic Areas

This paper will deal with the nature of multilingualism in the Borderlands of central Asia in Late Sasanian Times. Multilingual communities, according to LOVEDAY (1996), can be categorized by the degree of mono-, bi-, or multilingualism. Those which are relatively monolingual on one end and those who are highly multilingual on the other end of the spectrum.

Borderlands and Imperial Centres seem to show this spectrum in the way that centres tend to be less multilingual while the Borderlands show a high degree of multilingualism. The Borderlands thus turn to centres of contact-induced language change. Social aspects seem to be the most important factor in these areas for language change, as THOMASON AND KAUFMAN put it: „it is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact“¹. In this light, I will (1) summarize the linguistic situation of the Sasanian, Central Asian, Borderlands and (2) highlight the role of Imperial Borderlands for the linguistics developments.

¹ Thomason, S. G. / Kaufman, Terrence (1988): Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics. Berkeley: University of California Press, 35.

Alexander Steiner is a PhD Candidate at the University of Innsbruck (Austria) where he also received his BA and his MA both in Ancient Near Eastern Studies with a focus on philology and linguistics. His research interests are in the fields of contact-induced language change, linguistic relativity (language and thought) and spatial perception in near eastern languages. In his PhD Thesis with the working title Concepts of Absolute Space in Near Eastern and Central Asian Antiquity. A Survey of Sumerian, Akkadian, Iranian, and Tocharian Absolute Direction Terms he works on the crossroads of Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Historical Linguistics by carrying out an analysis of spatial perception (especially cardinal direction) terms and their metaphorical concepts in Sumerian, Akkadian, Middle Iranian and Tocharian where he is focusing on the interplay of language and thought. Since 1st of September 2024 he works on his thesis within the framework of a DOC fellowship granted by the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Bernhard Palme

University of Vienna

Iran's Bridge to Africa: The Sasanian Expansion into Egypt

As long as written records go back, Egypt was a zone of intensive political, cultural and economic contacts between the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula and its southern neighbors from Meroe to Ethiopia. Egypt was of great interest to the Sasanian Empire because of its rich agricultural production and trading power, but above all as a gateway to the Maghreb, to sub-Saharan Africa, and – via the trade routes along the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean – to southern Arabia and India.

In the years 618-619, Khosrow II succeeded in conquering Egypt in the course of his attack on the Eastern Roman Empire. Over 1100 years after Cambyses II, the land on the Nile came back under the rule of the Iranian King of Kings. Although Sasanian rule over Egypt lasted barely ten years, this episode was of far-reaching political-military significance – not least as a harbinger of the Arab conquests.

My presentation will focus on three questions: How did the Sasanids succeed in conquering a heavily fortified Egypt so surprisingly quickly? What measures did the Sasanids take to establish their rule over Egypt? What military and administrative consequences did the government of the Eastern Roman Empire draw after the Byzantine reconquest?

Bernhard Palme has been teaching Ancient History and Papyrology at the University of Vienna since 2004; since 2009 he has also been head of the Papyrus Collection and Papyrus Museum of the Austrian National Library. His research focuses on the history and culture of Greco-Roman Egypt and the historical analysis of papyri. He has published numerous papyrus editions as well as studies on the administrative, social and legal history of the Later Roman Empire.

Philipp von Rummel

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI), Berlin

The Transformation of Empire and Imperial Heritage in Africa

Within the framework of this conference's focus on Western Afro-Eurasia this paper focusses on the regions of northern Africa within a broad chronological framework from the "Hellenistic" period to early Islam and asks for the changing perceptions of Empire and imperial heritage including the Saharan borderlands and a view to sub-Saharan Africa. With a focus on archaeological sources, the main emphasis is on the parallelism of constant transformation and change on the one hand and the significance of long-term continuities beyond political, religious and ethno-social changes from Punic Carthage over the Roman Empire, Vandal and Moorish kingdoms to the early Islamic dynasties on the other.

Philipp von Rummel is secretary general of the German Archaeological Institute. He is an archaeologist specialising in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the archaeology of identity and the archaeology of North Africa. He leads research projects in Rome (Italy), Simitthus (Chimtu, Tunisia) and Henchir Bourgou (Tunisia), is co-spokesperson of the DAI networks 'TransArea Network Africa' and is spokesperson of the consortium NFDI4Objects, a research data infrastructure for the material legacies of human history within the German National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI). Philipp von Rummel is co-editor of the 'Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts', the 'Archäologischen Anzeigers' and several monographic series as well as a board member of the Berliner Antike-Kolleg.

Sören Stark

New York University

"Steppe Empire" Reconsidered. The Process of State Formation of the Ashina-Turks in Historical Perspective

The polity of the Ashina-Turks, though extremely short lived, could arguably be called the first steppe polity of truly global scale as it spanned from Manchuria to the northern pontic steppes, and directly interacted with Sasanian Iran as much as with Byzantium and several Chinese dynasties. This represents a massive increase in geographical and, consequently, political sway compared to earlier "steppe empires," such as the one of the early Xiongnu and the Rouran, which remained largely confined to the eastern parts of Central Eurasia. Thus, the question emerges: what enabled the Ashina-Turks to dominate a "steppe empire" of unprecedented scale? In search of possible answers my contribution will discuss the imperial ideology of Ashina-Turks as well as institutional specifics of their polity, and compare them with the polities of their predecessors in the Central Eurasian steppes.

Sören Stark holds the position of Professor for Central Asian Archaeology at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University. He received his PhD in 2005 from Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg with a study on the history and archaeology of the Turks in Central Asia. Stark has close to two decades of experience in conducting and directing archaeological fieldwork in Central Asia. Most recently, he is co-directing the Uzbek-American Expedition in Bukhara with active field projects in the city of Bukhara and in the nearby Kyzylkum desert, investigating contexts dating between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Islamic period.

Daniel Ziemann

Central European University, Vienna

The Bulgars and the Imperial Heritage

This paper explores the evolving and often competing imperial patterns in the First Bulgarian Realm from its establishment in 680/681 until the official recognition of the imperial title under Tsar Peter (927–969). The formation of the Bulgar state in 680/681 mirrors similar processes in Western Europe among groups such as the Goths, Vandals, and Franks, especially as part of this new polity emerged on former Roman imperial soil, where Roman traditions were still discernible. Unlike the West, however, the continuous presence of the neighboring Byzantine Empire influenced the Bulgars' border regions and beyond, offering both a role model and a counterpoint. Over the subsequent centuries, elements such as remnants of imperial architecture, imperial narratives, and the position and religious significance of the Emperor were selectively adopted and sometimes deliberately rejected by the Bulgars. It remains challenging to ascertain the extent to which competing imperial models from a Central Asian context persisted among the Bulgars, providing alternative models of rulership. The ambition to claim the title of Emperor could only be realized several decades after the Christianization in 866. A comparative approach may shed light on aspects of these processes that have remained obscure.

Since 2009, **Daniel Ziemann** has been an Associate Professor in the Department of Historical Studies at Central European University in Vienna. He earned his PhD from Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main in 2002. His research focuses on the early and high medieval political and legal history of Southeastern and Central Europe. In 2007, he published a monograph on the emergence of early medieval Bulgaria, titled *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht: die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7.-9. Jahrhundert)*. Alongside Nada Zečević, he edited the *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe*, published in 2012. His interests include early medieval state formation processes and their actors, as well as the transmission and adaptation of Canon Law in the early Middle Ages.

Mischa Meier

University of Tübingen

The Emergence of the Eastern Roman Empire in Late Antiquity

The Byzantines referred to themselves as 'Romans' and naturally saw their empire as the Roman Empire. Scholars call the eastern part of the Roman Empire in the period from the 5th to the 6th/7th century the 'Eastern Roman Empire'. The lecture will examine the question of how this Eastern Roman Empire came into being, how it can be outlined and how the transition to the 'Byzantine Empire' took place.

Mischa Meier, Professor for Ancient History at the University of Tuebingen since 2004. His fields of research are Greek History, Early Principate, Late Antiquity, ancient historiography and natural disasters in history. His last monographs are ‚Geschichte der Völkerwanderung‘ (Munich, 8th ed. 2021), ‚Gene und Geschichte‘ (Stuttgart 2021, with Steffen Patzold), ‚Geschichte der Hunnen‘ (Munich 2025, forthcoming).