

The background of the poster is a light blue-grey color, overlaid with various anatomical sketches in a darker blue ink. In the upper left, there are sketches of a hand and a foot. In the lower right, a large, detailed sketch of a muscular male figure is shown in a dynamic, flexing pose. Other smaller sketches of limbs and figures are scattered throughout the background.

**Concepts of Humans and
Nature in Historical
Perspective:
Universals and
Variations, Continuities
and Transformations
6-8 September 2022**

**A conference of the
Research Training
Group 1876
“Early Concepts of
Humans
and Nature”**

**Johannes
Gutenberg-University
Mainz, Germany**

Concepts of Humans and Nature in Historical Perspective:
Universals and Variations, Continuities and Transformations

Venue

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Faculty of Natural Science
Alter Senatssaal (Room 07-232)
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Conference: Concepts of Humans and Nature in Historical Perspective: Universals and Variations, Continuities and Transformations

The Research Training Group 1876 "Early Concepts of Humans and Nature: Universal, Specific, Interchanged" invites to its International Conference "Concepts of Humans and Nature in Historical Perspective: Universals and Variations, Continuities and Transformations" to be held in **2022 on September, 6th–8th** at the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz (Germany).

The conference aims at presenting the results of the RTG's current research projects and bringing them together in an interdisciplinary dialogue, which is particularly dedicated to exploring the fundamental components of concepts concerning humans and the natural environment that can be regarded as constant or universal.

Despite the cultural diversity and historical variability in the ways in which different societies conceptualize humans and nature, the complex and cross-culturally diverse concepts are often based on core principles or fundamental building blocks that have a universal character (in terms of relative universals). For example, across languages and cultures, one usually finds terms that designate physical (corporeal) components and qualities of the human being as well as terms for properties or aspects of the human being that can be glossed with words such as "consciousness", "self", "soul(s)", "life force" or "mind". Moreover, there is a great diversity and cross-cultural variability in the conception of the human body and its physiological processes, as well as significant differences in the ways specific corporeal and non-corporeal components constituting a human being are named, defined, differentiated and perceived as interrelated. This raises questions as to which extent there are relatively stable basic or core concepts about the human being (and the body) that occur universally and to which extent such concepts are socio-culturally constructed, discursively shaped, subject to historical changes, and are therefore variable.

The concept of "nature", in the way it is shaped by the Western European tradition (especially in contrast to the term "culture"), cannot claim universality, as anthropological and historical studies have shown. However, throughout history, every society and culture has formed aspects and objects of its own concept and theory formation (e.g., in cosmologies, myths, etc.), embracing entities of the world such as flora, fauna, natural space, but also cosmic entities and fundamental physical elements. Moreover, anthropological studies (e.g., Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2013)) postulate a limited set of elementary cognitive schemata that cultures of different times and places selectively use to structure and organize their perceptions about "humans" and "nature" (i.e. non-human beings and entities of the world) and their relations to each other. These schemata, which serve as frameworks for cultural models, cosmologies and social practices, consist in different ways of defining similarities and differences between humans and other beings based on specific properties ascribed to them. Common elements of cosmologies typical for premodern civilizations are, for example, notions of hierarchy (setting different beings in a scale of gradual differences), but also concepts of analogy between the human

sphere and the cosmos, and of resemblances, correspondences, and relations between different beings and entities in the world. Examples for systems of thought based on analogies and correspondences are often found in ancient scholarly models and theories, such as the Greco-Roman system of the four humors/elements, the medical theory of signatures or astrology. Which basic schemata or universal building blocks for cosmological systems can we trace in the historical records reaching back to antiquity?

In two panels focusing on “(human) body” and “humans and nature” respectively, the conference aims to explore questions about both universal concepts and concepts whose specific occurrence can be historically determined. Possible fields of investigation and research questions are as follows:

1. Which concepts related to the human body (e.g., concepts of life, disease, death, creation, destruction, violence, etc.) are common across different times and societies?
2. Are there recurring or constant concepts related to the human body, in terms of its functions, dysfunctions, transience, properties, or with regard to its gendered nature?
3. In which similar ways and through which similar discourses and practices are concepts of the body and concepts of nature socio-culturally shaped?
4. Which cultural practices, social contexts, experiences and cognitive processes produce (or condition) these similarities?
5. Which common models, theories, representations and forms of expression have been developed and transmitted in order to understand and explain humans and nature?
6. What is the relationship between humans and nature in the societies under analysis? Are there overarching or recurring patterns (e.g., of opposition, binary, analogy)? Is the human being understood as part of nature and considered to be similar to other beings? Are there delimitations or hierarchies? Are there similar, recurring relationships and interaction patterns between humans and nature?

Programme

Tuesday, 6 September 2022

18:00 Get together & Welcome Dinner for the Speakers

Wednesday, 7 September 2022

9:15 Registration & Coffee

9:45 Welcome & Introduction

Chair: Prof. Dr. Alexander Pruß

10:20 Prof. Markham J. Geller (University College London)
Common Sense Anatomy: How Mesopotamians engendered the human body

11:15 Jonny Russell
Variations and continuities in medical concepts: towards a historical contextualisation of Egyptian *sry.t* and Mesopotamian *suālu*

12:10 Lunch Break

Chair: Yossra Ibrahim

14:00 Dr. Ulrike Steinert & Judit Garzón Rodríguez
The powers of semen and their conceptualization in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures

14:55 Jessica Knebel, Sibel Ousta & David Usieto Cabrera
Fire as an agent of punishment – a universal concept? On the use of fire against individuals in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Byzantium

15:50 Coffee Break

Chair: Apl. Prof. Dr. Annemarie Ambühl

16:05 Dr. Elisabeth Günther (Universität Trier)
Ugly bodies: Humor in Apulian vase-painting

17:00 Christoph Appel & Francisco Gómez Blanco
Gladiators and Tragic Heroes: Exploring and Comparing Semantics and Mediality
of Public Violence and Pain in Roman Antiquity

19:30 Conference Dinner

Thursday, 8 September 2022

9:30 Registration & Coffee

10:00 Welcome

Chair: Christoph Appel

10:10 Prof. Paul Pettitt (Durham University)
What were Neanderthals doing in deep caves? A psychological approach to their
imaginary worlds

11:00 PD Dr. Sara Kipfer (Universität Heidelberg)
Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathism of Nature in the Hebrew Bible and Be-
yond: Socionatural Entanglements as universals?

12:00 Lunch Break

Chair: Dr. Ulrike Steinert

14:00 Prof. Dr. Tobias Bulang (Universität Heidelberg)
Tierkunde(n) des Mittelalters. Konkurrenz und Interferenz von Naturkonzepten

14:55 Nicky van de Beek & Benny Waszk
Human-animal interactions in the prehistoric Near East and North Africa: Case
studies from Göbekli Tepe and Hierakonpolis

15:50 Closing remarks

16:05 Coffee & concluding discussions

Prof. Markham J. Geller (University College London)

Common Sense Anatomy: How Mesopotamians engendered the human body

An in-depth knowledge of internal human anatomy never features in Mesopotamian therapeutics, for obvious reasons: no systematic autopsies on cadavers were ever reported, and even if physicians would have known a bit more about internal organs, their functions would remain a mystery for many centuries. In fact, knowledge of anatomy was hardly relevant to Mesopotamian medicine, since therapies were not based upon physiology but on regimes of drugs. At the same time, however, Mesopotamian physicians regularly treated externally observable symptoms, which were thought to reflect 'internal' conditions, either perceived as physical or psychic. A good example are treatments for a condition known as *ŠÀ.ZI.GA* or *nīš libbi*, lit. 'raising of the heart', referring to sexual appetite or the lack of it, normally visible from external symptoms and readily observable activities. The question is how literally one interprets the anatomical evidence, i.e. whether this condition refers exclusively to male physiology (erection / impotence) or by analogy to female subjects as well, as a psychological condition affecting sexuality in general.

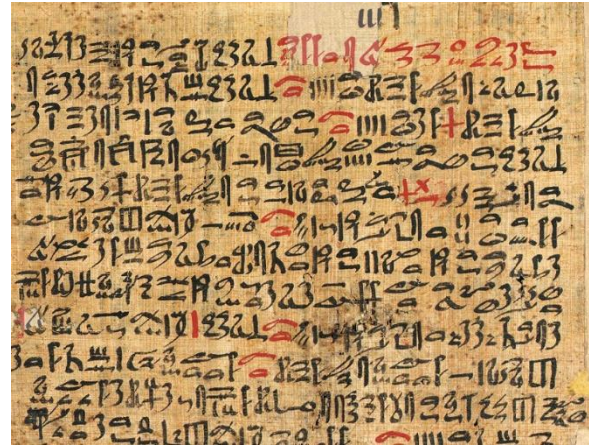


Terracotta plaque of a bed with nude couple. From Mesopotamia; first half of second millennium BCE.

Variations and continuities in medical concepts: towards a historical contextualization of Egyptian *sry.t* and Mesopotamian *suālu*

Beyond the identification of Egyptian *sry.t* with the modern translation ‘cough’ (Ebbell 1924; von Deines and Westendorf, 1962), very little has been written on the Egyptian perspective of sicknesses categorised under this classification, and even less so on its associations with other sickness classifications. This has been hindered by the limited textual evidence available for the classification in Egyptian, as well as by a general acceptance of previous misunderstandings which were heavily based on Western approaches to the source material. The result is an unreliable grasp of Egyptian perspectives of the body, sickness, and treatment. This in turn complicates any further attempt at exploring variations and continuities in medical concepts observable between extant medical papyri dated to different periods, as well as between historically related cultures, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia.

To tackle this deficit, this paper presents the results gained through a complete re-appraisal of passages concerned with *sry.t* and associated sickness classifications. It first explores the explanatory models for sicknesses of this category through a lexicographic analysis of conceptual metaphors from relevant passages, concomitantly examining the physicality of prescribed medicines, especially those which are analogous to the sickness concepts. Secondly, it delves into potential variations and continuities in concepts among



Col. 53 of pEbers, headed with ‘The start is a recipe of removing *sry.t*’; from the *Papyrus Ebers* website of the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig: <https://papyrusebers.de/> (10.08.2022)



The results of recreating Eb. 318 (col. 54, 5-6): a possible ‘re-enactment’ (Pommerening, 2017), analogous to the sickness concept *sry.t*

various Egyptian papyri, adding a comparative assessment with Mesopotamian recipes against Akkadian *suālu*. The paper will demonstrate that *sry.t* and *suālu* are cognates, offering new questions concerning the relationship between Egyptian and Mesopotamian medical concepts.

Dr. Ulrike Steinert & Judit Garzón Rodríguez

The powers of semen and their conceptualization in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures

Body fluids are a fundamental part of the human body and its physiology. In many ancient cultures, they are linked to notions of social identity, since they often play an important role in conceptualizations of the way in which the human person is constituted and formed (think, for example, of ancient theories of sexual reproduction or of bodily humours as the foundation for physical health, temperaments, and character traits). At the same time, body fluids are frequently associated with pollution, taboos and disgust, and ambivalent meanings and evaluations are attributed to them. Semen as an erotic, generative fluid in particular is encountered in various discourses related to sex and gender, medicine, cosmogony, philosophy, and religion. In such discourses, semen can be linked to diverse notions ranging from fertility and creation to disease and destruction.

This paper explores ideas about semen in textual sources from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The aim of this study is to analyse and compare some of the diverse concepts that were created around this body fluid in these two civilizations. By making use of primary textual sources, we seek to develop a better understanding of cross-cultural variations and constants in the elaboration of the properties and potencies attributed to semen.



Theban Mapping Project, Photographer - Francis Dzikowski, March 1998.

Jessica Knebel, Sibel Ousta & David Usieto Cabrera

Fire as an agent of punishment – a universal concept? On the use of fire against individuals in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Byzantium

Fire was conceptualized and interpreted in various ways in ancient cultures. Due to its properties and powers, fire is often recognized as an expedient and destructive instrument. A special feature observable in various cultures since ancient times is the use of fire as an agent of punishment meted out against individuals, often by divine powers. The use of fire in such contexts often implied the idea of a longer-term punishment that went beyond the physical destruction of the person and had an impact on their existence in the afterlife. However, the effect achieved by the use of fire against the (human) body was understood and justified in different ways, so that not only negative consequences could be derived from its use, but also positive effects, such as the purification of the soul in the Christian context (purgatory).

This paper focuses on the conceptualization and meanings of fire in ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Byzantine cultures, focusing especially on its use as an agent of punishment against individuals. Archaeological, textual, and visual sources are examined and compared with each other. By comparing differing viewpoints from different periods and cultures, we will investigate shared ideas as well as cross-cultural differences in the conceptualization of fire as a powerful agent.



Fragments of a funerary papyrus of the Amduat, Creative Commons CCO 1.0 Universal, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fragments_of_Funerary_Papyrus_of_Amduat_MET_vs28.3.112.jpg (10.08.2022).

Ugly bodies: Humor in Apulian vase-painting / Kein schöner Körper: Die Komik des Hässlichen in der apulischen Vasenmalerei

Bekannt ist die apulische Vasenmalerei des 4. Jhs. v. Chr. vor allem durch aufwendige Prachtvasen mit figurenreichen mythologischen Darstellungen. Die Frauen und Männer dieser Bilder, insbesondere die nicht in die Handlung involvierten Randfiguren, zeichnen sich durch ideale, jugendlich-schöne Körper aus und werden mithilfe von Kleidung, Schmuck und Attributen (etwa Spiegel, Parfümfläschchen, Strigilis) als ein attraktives, der Körperpflege verschriebenes Ensemble dieser Bilderwelt stilisiert. Auf der anderen Seite des Spektrums stehen Vasenbilder, die Schauspielerfiguren der Komödie zeigen (sog. Phlyakenvasen) und das Ideal der *kalokagathia* invertieren: Wie die Komödienschauspieler auf der Bühne tragen die Figuren Masken und Kostüme, welche die Proportionen des menschlichen Körpers absurd verzerren und ins Hässliche verkehren. Dies dient – in den Bildern wie auf der Bühne – der Erzeugung eines komischen Effekts und unterstreicht die Invertierung gesellschaftlicher Normen und Werte, wie in der Forschung bereits diskutiert wurde (Piqueux 2006; Giuliani 2018). Jedoch lässt sich in den Komödienvasen eine bildspezifische Strategie zur Visualisierung komischer Narrative greifen (Günther 2021), die über die dramatische Gattung der Komödie hinausgeht und sich insbesondere der Inszenierung des hässlichen Körpers bedient. Genau dieser Aspekt soll im Vortrag anhand der Formensprache und Ikonographie der apulischen Komödienvasen genauer beleuchtet werden. Dies wird besonders deutlich, wenn man die apulischen Schauspielerfiguren des 2. Viertel des 4. Jhs. mit karikaturhaften Figuren vergleicht, wie sie gleichzeitig auf kleineren Vasenformen, besonders Oinochoen, vermehrt auftreten. Hauptanliegen des Vortrags ist es daher zu diskutieren, inwieweit die Komik der apulischen Komödienvasen in dieser Zeit gerade darauf beruht, hässliche Körper in den Mittelpunkt der Bilder zu stellen, und inwiefern somit die Bezüge zu Komödienhandlungen zugunsten einer Parodie des antiken Körperideals zurücktreten.



Red-Figure Bell-Krater (Mixing Vessel),
Cleveland Museum of Art 1989.73. CC 0,
<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1989.73#>
(08.08.2022).

Gladiators and Tragic Heroes: Exploring and Comparing Semantics and Mediality of Public Violence and Pain in Roman Antiquity

The universality of physical violence as a social factor is unquestionable. It has been said that there has not been any society in the past without violence. In Roman antiquity, phenomena of physical violence permeate the most diverse areas of private, political and cultural life. Throughout the Roman Republic and the early Empire, violence was displayed on public stages and turned into a social spectacle, in which the staging of bodily violence and pain was placed under public view.

In the exercise of violence, the body plays a complex role. Physical violence turns the body into a suffering victim, but the body serves at the same time as an instrument for exerting violence. In the context of public display of violence, the violence exercised and suffered by the body is also to be perceived by an audience, for whom the body serves as a discursive center that reflects contemporary concepts linked to the (il-)legitimacy and the aesthetics of violence and pain.



Mosaic with a gladiator from the Place Coislin (Metz), today in Musée de la Cour d'Or-Metz Métropole.

In order to reconstruct the Roman discourse of public bodily violence it is necessary to take into consideration many different visual and textual sources. However, both types of media and, for their part, the individual types of text and images bring up quite different images of the body, not only in terms of style, but also in terms of the intention behind the production and reception of physical violence. This paper aims at shedding light on selected constellations of public bodily violence and pain related to the arena and the tragic stage, from an archaeological and philological perspective. It

will explore different types of texts and images from the late republican and early imperial era (2nd Century BC-1st Century AD) The main question of the paper is to what extent violence and pain are to be viewed and understood as phenomena of a media-specific discourse and which aspects (e.g., visibility, explicitness, agency of the body) turn out to be dominant within which context. Lastly, the possibilities of adopting an emic perspective by means of reception theory will also be a subject of discussion.

Prof. Paul Pettitt (Durham University)

What were Neanderthals doing in deep caves? A psychological approach to their imaginary worlds

In recent years, Middle Palaeolithic excavations across Europe have revealed increasing evidence that Neanderthals possessed visual culture of a similar form to their African contemporaries and successors, *Homo sapiens*. Much of this evidence takes the form of the production, curation and use of coloured pigments, indicating that at least non-figurative visual culture was part of their adaptation across their Eurasian range. In addition, we now know they were active in the depths of caves, way beyond the natural light zone, in areas where no edible/potable resources could be found. I explore the examples we have in terms of a nascent imaginary world - one on the edge of their natural experience - and interpret them in specific terms of ritual(ised) behaviours.

Anthropomorphism, Anthropopragsmatism and Anthropopathism of Nature in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond: Socionatural Entanglements as Universals?

In 1973, Hans Walter Wolff claimed in his famous “Anthropology of the Old Testament” a “synthetic thinking” of the Old Testament. He showed that body parts were also used to express their “function” (e.g. the word “hand” is also used to express “power”). Cognitive linguistics disclosed that this phenomenon is universal and that all languages use body parts as abstracta in some way. It is thus not surprising that expressions such as the head of the mountain (*rō`ś hāhār*), the heart (*leb*) and lips of the sea (*śəpat hayyām*), the bones of heavens (*kə`ešem hasšamayim*), or the navel of the earth (*tabbūr hā`āreš*) are frequent. However, in the Hebrew Bible, “nature” is also subject of actions and emotions: the earth mourns (Isa 24:4; 33:9 Jer 4:48, 12:11; 23:10), the hills rejoice, the valleys shout for joy (e.g. Ps 65:13–14; 96:11), waters tremble (e.g. Ps 77:17, 19), and sun and moon are ashamed (e.g. Isa 24:23). These human attributions to “nature” stand in a tension between a metaphorical and a more literal understanding and their interpretation is controversial. Instead of offering a new interpretation this paper will focus on socionatural entanglements and raise the question as to how these expressions may have shaped the ancient conceptualization of nature and what it means to understand “nature” bodily and emotionally.



Anthropomorphe Landschaft, Frauenkopf, 1550/1600, Öl auf Holz, 50,5 × 65,5 cm, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique Inv. 10828, Brüssel; Creative-Commons-Lizenz, Wikimedia Commons, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Scuola_dei_paesi_bassi_medidionali,_paesaggio_antropomorfo,_donna,_1550-1600_ca._02.JPG.

Tierkunde(n) des Mittelalters. Konkurrenz und Interferenz von Naturkonzepten

Ohne das tierkundliche Wissen der Bauern, Jäger, Fischer und Metzger hätten die Menschen des Mittelalters ihr Zeitalter nicht überlebt. In die Schriftlichkeit findet dieses dominant mündlich tradierte Wissen freilich erst spät. In der gelehrten Naturkunde dominiert über lange Zeit das Wissen der Theologen. Sie verbinden mit der Natur besondere Konzepte und Interessen. Als vollkommen aus dem Wort des Schöpfers hervorgegangene Welt, die allenthalben Auskunft über das Heil bietet, als Gegenstand der Exegese natürlicher Dinge in der Heiligen Schrift, als Option paränetischer Wissensvermittlung anhand von naturkundlichen Allegorien in der Predigt erfolgt eine sehr spezifische Appropriation der Natur. Zugleich sind Natur- und mithin auch Tierkunde der Kleriker alles andere als homogen. Neben schöpfungstheologischen Vorstellungen und exegetischen Reflexionen koexistieren vom Sprachbefund ausgehende etymologische Sinnbildungen (Isidor-Rezeption). Geistliche Naturkunde ist zugleich Medium der Rezeption antiker Naturkunden und der Aufwände der Integration dieser (mitunter inkompatiblen) Wissensbestände. Mit dem Aristotelismus des 13. Jahrhunderts wird eine Naturwissenschaft relevant, die Natur als autochthonen Raum des Wirkens der Ursachen und der Prozesse des Werdens und Vergehens fasst und die mehr oder minder manifest Spannungen zu einem Schöpfungsverständnis aufweisen kann. Der Vortrag versucht anhand verschiedener Beispiele solcher wissenschaftlichen Überlagerungen und Interferenzen von Naturkonzepten Pluralität und Dynamik mittelalterlicher Tierkunde gegen stereotype Vorstellungen einer Vorgeschichte der Naturwissenschaft zu akzentuieren.



Konrad von Megenberg: Buch der Natur (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg Cod. Pal. Germ. 300)



Hugo von Trimberg: Der Renner (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg Cod. Pal. Germ. 471)

Nicky van de Beek & Benny Waszk

Human-animal interactions in the prehistoric Near East and North Africa: Case studies from Göbekli Tepe and Hierakonpolis

The prehistoric site of Göbekli Tepe (Anatolia, ca. 10.000 BC) was the starting point of the so called “Neolithic Revolution”. Because of the lack of written sources, the researcher has to find other ways of analyzing the features. The special buildings at the site are rich in animal depictions, which are linked to the architecture and the viewer's perception of space. These human-animal interactions and the zooarchaeological record can be connected to the surrounding landscape and the hunting activities taking place there.

Similar interpretative problems are faced at the predynastic site of Hierakonpolis (ancient Egyptian Nekhen, ca. 3400 BC). This site contains not only the oldest known Egyptian painted tomb, but also a 'zoo' of wild animals that were kept and buried near the settlement. Both the iconography and zooarchaeological data point to human interaction with wild and semi-domesticated animals. The site was connected to the floodplain of the Nile, but also stretched out into the desert, making it a strategic location for hunting purposes.

This paper will explore the concept of human-animal interactions at both sites, the way these are expressed through architecture, iconography and zooarchaeological remains, and the universality or cultural specificity of these expressions.



3D-Modell des Pfeilerschaftes von Pfeiler 27 mit vollplastisch ausgearbeiteten Leopard und Wildschwein im Flachrelief. Foto: Benny Waszk

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