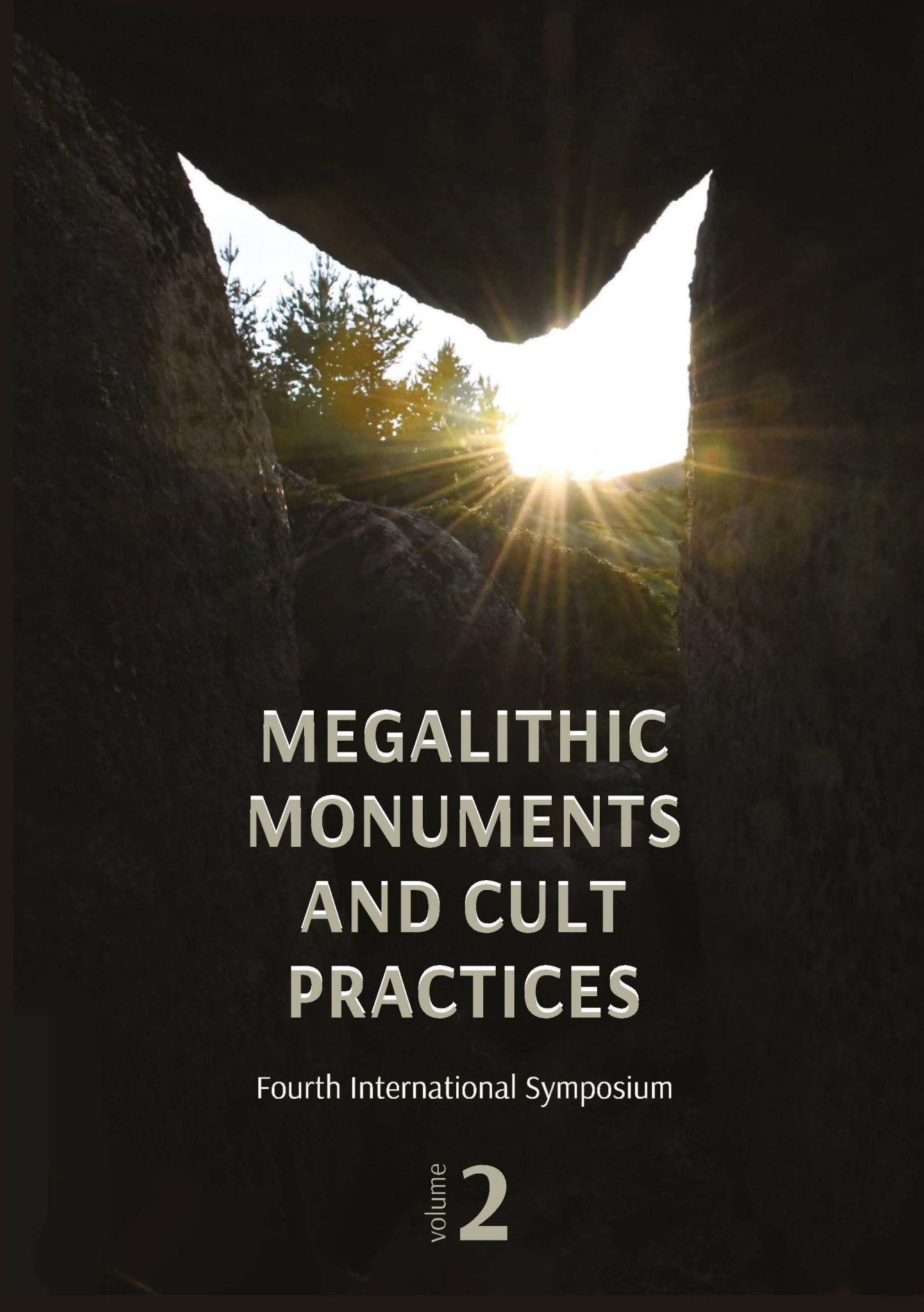

MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS AND CULT PRACTICES

Fourth International Symposium

volume 2

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CREATION MYTHS AND COSMOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: FROM URUK VIA ḪATTUŠA TO ATHENS

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Abstract. This paper brings together recent cosmological interpretations of the silver goblet of ʿAin Samiya, the Hittite rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, the Hittite spring sanctuary of Eflatunpınar and the Hittite ivory plague from Megiddo, which help to establish a geographical and chronological connection between the Near Eastern cultures of third millennium BCE Mesopotamia and second millennium BCE Anatolia. It contextualizes the newly recognized cosmogonic character of these well-known but thus far largely enigmatic iconographic representations within the broader framework of creation myths, from Sumerian sources and Genesis to Plato's cosmology in classical Greece.

Keywords: Cosmology, creation myths, ancient Near East, ʿAin Samiya goblet, Yazılıkaya, Eflatunpınar.

Ancient Near Eastern Creation Myths

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, creation myths recounted the origin of the world as a primordial state of chaos or nothingness. Central to these myths is the idea that the original state of great disordered nothingness was overcome by the creative acts of divine beings (Smoot, 2013, pp. 31–32). The deities founded the cosmos and structured the universe by dividing space, specifically into heaven, earth, and the underworld, with the cardinal points delineating the static framework of cosmic order around an *axis mundi* extending from the point of a temple in the capital (the center of the center) or any place where people dwelt to the celestial pole. These acts also initiated cyclical processes such as the alternation of day and night, the seasonal renewal of nature, the phases of the moon, and the heliacal rising of the fixed stars. This cyclical conception of cosmic time was reflected in human perceptions of life and death: just as the celestial bodies and the natural world

underwent continual rebirth, human existence was understood to be cyclical and to extend beyond earthly life.

In cosmologies of the ancient Near East, the universe was often depicted as having multiple layers or planes, each associated with specific deities or cosmic forces. The principle of correspondence, central to Hermetic philosophy, suggests a connection between the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (individual beings). This idea finds parallels in the cosmological structures of ancient cultures, where the world was often divided into upper, middle, and lower realms. The Hermetic maxim "As above, so below" thus encapsulates a fundamental principle of cosmic order that resonates across various ancient cosmologies (Wright, 2000, p. 28; Smith, 2005, xiii). The cosmos served both as a model and as a temporal framework for human behavior and action (Selz, 2005, p. 34).

Mircea Eliade recognized an "archaic ontology" in various early historical cultures, according to which people strove to create a copy of the heavenly world with the earthly world they had created. In a sense, every human action is a reflection of the original, archetypal action of god the creator: the creation of the world (Eliade [1959] 1991, p. 14). Humans are incapable of existing in chaos; they always need an ordered world, which they perceive as their home—the model for this is the cosmos (Eliade [1959] 1991, p. 15). To live in the cosmos means above all to be in a sacred space that allows contact with the gods (Eliade [1959] 1991, p. 19). The conviction developed that cosmogony could be repeated and that the creation of the world could begin anew in ritual. In the belief that it was possible to return existentially to the beginning of the world, people at some point began to think systematically about the nature of this original state of things in order to fathom the mystery of being as it had been revealed in the original revelation of the world (Eliade [1959] 1991, p. 34).

A shared cosmological understanding of structure and cycles underpinned the cultural identity and cohesion of early societies in the Near East. Through ritual, prayer, and religious practices, a profound spiritual connection was established, uniting the human and the divine. Human activities, especially in ritual contexts, echoed the archetypal deeds of the creator gods, perpetually linking the present with the

primordial origins of the cosmos. This alignment between heaven (the divine, the transcendent) and earth (the human, the immanent) is particularly manifest in creation myths, which not only offered explanations for the external world but also provided a framework for human existence in alignment with cosmic forces. In this way, cosmogonic myths acted as a bridge between the sacred and the profane, imbuing life with meaning and placing human actions within the larger cosmic order.

Sumerian Cosmology: Creation and Order of the World

Cuneiform sources present varying accounts of the world's creation. Ancient scribes and theologians in Mesopotamia often sought to unify these motifs into a cohesive narrative, as seen in the systematic ordering of god lists. The earliest references to a creation myth appear in texts from Abū Ṣalābīḫ, written in the "UD.GAL.NUN orthography" during the 26th century BCE, which remains largely undeciphered (Krebernik, 2019, p. 80). Among these, the phrase "Enlil, […] who separated heaven from earth and earth from heaven" appears frequently. The division of heaven and earth by the central deity Enlil, the supreme deity of the Old Akkadian period (c. 2334–2154 BCE), is thus one of Mesopotamian mythology's earliest themes (Wright, 2000, p. 27). Enlil is said to have caused the first split with a flash of lightning, thereby laying the foundation for order and civilization (Alster, 1976, p. 122; Krebernik, 2019, p. 80). Enlil, as "Lord of History" (*mušim šīmatim*) (Westenholz, 1999, p. 36 n. 105), not only separated the spheres (Wright, 2000, p. 27; Schrott, 2024, p. 224), but also organized the divine hierarchy by dividing the gods into upper (*Igigi*) and lower (*Anunna*) worlds.

The Sumerian world view was thus clearly structured and based on a tripartite cosmology: heaven, earth, and the underworld (Wright, 2000, p. 29). While heaven consisted of the "great above" and the starry sky, the underworld was initially located at the edge of the earth and later became a retreat for demons, who were considered relics of the original chaos (Wiggermann, 1996, pp. 212–214). This dualistic view

profoundly shaped Sumerian cosmology by addressing contradictions such as life and death, the divine, and the demonic.

These conceptual approaches informed later Mesopotamian cultures such as the Babylonians and Assyrians. They also spread to central Anatolia, reinforcing the lasting influence of Sumerian myths on the cultures of the ancient Near East (Kramer, 1961, viii). Particularly striking is the adoption of Sumerian motifs in the *Enūma Eliš*, in which elements of the Sumerian gods Enlil, Ninurta, and Enki were transferred to the Babylonian chief deity Marduk (George, 2016, p. 8; Krebernik, 2019, p. 81).

A Cosmogenic Interpretation of the ʿAin Samiya Goblet (c. 2200 BCE)

The famous silver goblet of ʿAin Samiya, an 8-centimeter-tall cup found in a 23rd century BCE tomb adjacent to the Jordan Valley features a large open arch often referred to as the "Boat of Heaven," the vehicle for heavenly movement (Cohen, 1993, pp. 141–142; 2015, pp. 221–222; Pizzimenti, 2013, p. 267; Schrott, 2024, p. 223). Ancient Near Eastern belief systems claimed that this vessel transported celestial bodies, including the sun, moon, and planets, across the sky. Scholars now recognize the goblet's depiction as the earliest cosmogenic representation, illustrating a division between the primordial chaos and the gods' structured cosmos (Zangger, Sarlo, and Haas Dante, in press).

Contrary to the dominant scholarly perspective over the past fifty years (e.g. Miller, 2014, p. 238; Alderete, 2017, p. 34), the ʿAin Samiya goblet does not portray scenes from the *Enūma Eliš* (Lisman, 2013, p. 184, n. 897), as it predates the Babylonian creation myth by more than a millennium and lacks violent imagery. Instead, the *Enūma Eliš* synthesizes multiple versions of traditional Mesopotamian cosmogony, one of which is also represented on the goblet. The imagery aligns with cosmological ideas common in the ancient Near East during the third millennium BCE, even though the cup was found outside Mesopotamia and has no direct ties to its production.

The decoration on the ʿAin Samiya goblet can be divided into two scenes, representing different stages in the cosmic creation process.

Figure 1. A newly drawn and corrected rendering of the scenes depicted on the ʿAin Samiya goblet, emphasizing the initial scene (left), depicting chaos (Luwian Studies #5037).

Figure 2. The same depiction of the ʿAin Samiya goblet, emphasizing the right scene, showing the structured universe (Luwian Studies #5037).

The left scene depicts the chaotic state before cosmic order was established (Fig. 1). In this primordial world, deities, animals, and plants were fused together, unable to function properly. The chaos is symbolized by a serpent, representing disorder and the lack of separation between the elements of life. Key divisions, such as the separation of heaven and earth and the distinction of sexes and species, had yet to

occur. The artist illustrates the transition from chaos to order through lines where dissecting is needed to divide deities from animals and establish the proper functioning of the cosmos, highlighted by the birth of the sun, symbolized by a rosette.

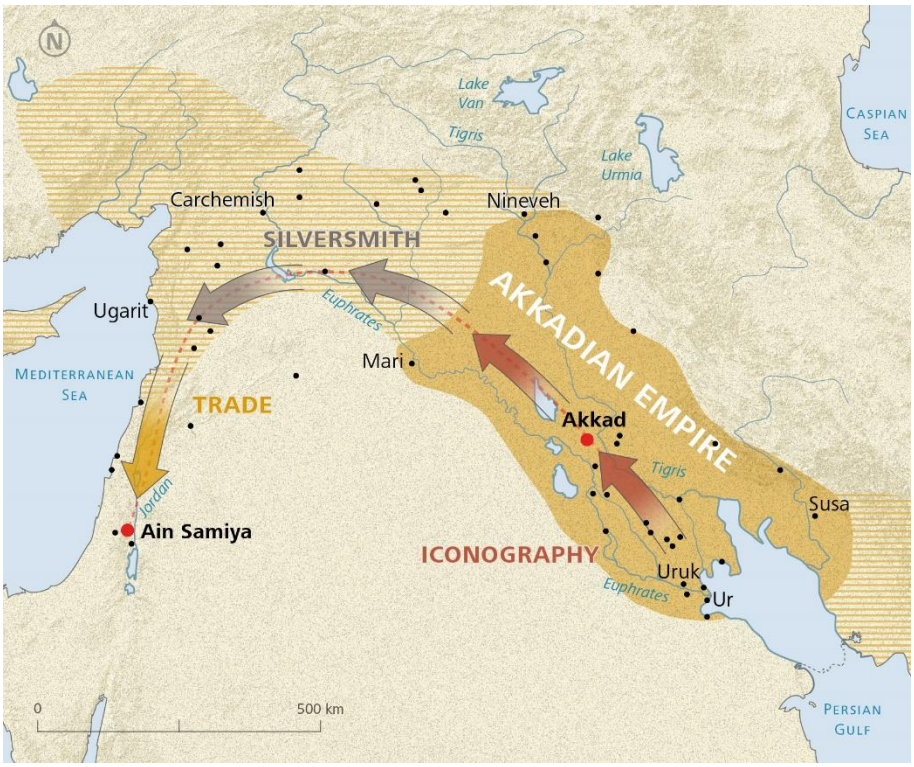

Figure 3. Map of the Akkadian Empire (c. 2334–2218 BCE) illustrating the potential journey of the graphic design featured on the ʿAin Samiya goblet, the origins and/or movements of the silversmith, and the object's transportation route (Luwian Studies #5065).

In contrast, the right scene shows the outcome of this process: cosmic order is now established (Fig. 2). Two anthropomorphic figures, likely deities, hold the "Boat of Heaven," separating the heavenly and underworld realms and maintaining balance. The serpent, now subdued, symbolizes the defeat of chaos, and the sun's regular disappearance and return reflect the preservation of cosmic order. The sun, initially small in the left scene, has grown in size and brightness on the right, while the deities' appearance has evolved, suggesting the passage of time. The

design of the ʿAin Samiya goblet was most likely conceived by someone from Uruk (Zangger, Sarlo, and Haas Dante, in press). The person or idea appears to have journeyed to northern Syria, where the goblet may have been produced (Fig. 3).

Eflatunpınar: A Hittite Depiction of the Cosmos (c. 1250 BCE)

Eflatunpınar, meaning "Plato's Spring" in Turkish, is a Hittite spring sanctuary located on the southwestern edge of the Hittite kingdom near Lake Beyşehir in central Anatolia (Bachmann, 2017, p. 106). Likely built in the 13th century BCE, it consists of a 7 meter high and wide structure made from 19 trachyte stone blocks. The front is adorned with bas-reliefs of mountain and water deities, along with hybrid mythological creatures (Fig. 4). Two seated deities are depicted frontally on the façade: a male figure with a tall headdress on the left and a female deity on the right, wearing a cap-like, cone-shaped hat in profile. Above them, two-winged sun disks are held by six hybrid creatures, arranged in pairs. This composition is topped by a larger winged sun, though the upper part is missing. Flanking the scene are two larger hybrid creatures standing vertically on each side. The sanctuary, still fed by a spring today, likely served to venerate water deities (Hamilton, 1842, p. 351; Balza, 2023, p. 43). In front of the monument, the Hittites built a rectangular basin, approximately 34×31 meters, enclosed by a low wall featuring reliefs of the goddess of streams (Hemeier, 2023, p. 65).

Kurt Bittel, the excavator of Ḫattuša and Yazılıkaya, first proposed an interpretation of this monument in 1941, which remains largely accepted (Bittel, 1941, p. 63). Bittel suggested that the sanctuary symbolizes the cosmos (Bachmann & Özenir, 2004, p. 122; Collins, 2007, p. 192), presenting a simplified representation of the Hittite worldview (see also Haas, 1994, p. 144). The vertical arrangement divides the cosmos into distinct spheres, with the lower sky featuring two winged solar disks and the upper part dominated by an all-encompassing winged sun. The gods and chimeras symbolize the earth

and its connection to the heavens, while the lower section, beneath the surface of the lake, corresponds to the underworld.

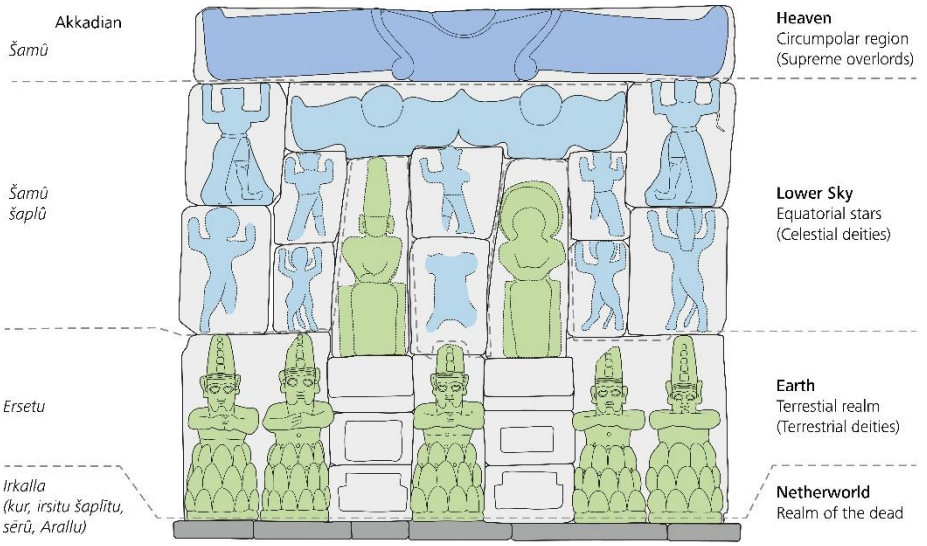

Figure 4. Schematic illustrations of the bas-reliefs at the Eflatunpınar spring sanctuary, emphasizing the cosmic layers they represent (Luwian Studies #1501).

Yazılıkaya: Cosmology and Worldview of the Hittites (c. 1230 BCE)

The function of the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya remained a mystery for almost two centuries after it was first seen by a Central European scholar in 1834 (Texier, 1839, pp. 214–221; Seeher, 2011, pp. 154 and 167; Hemeier, 2023, pp. 20–21). Located just outside the city walls of the Hittite capital Ḫattuša and built around 1230 BCE, Yazılıkaya stands out from other Hittite sanctuaries due to its number, size, and detail of unique relief depictions. In contrast to the usual vertical arrangements, the deities in Yazılıkaya are depicted at eye level, which is due to geographical conditions. Despite this practical constraint, the hierarchical structure remains clearly recognizable: it is evident in the two main chambers, in the spatial distribution of the deities, in the size of the figures, in their attributes—such as wings, scepters, staffs, and swords—and in their elevation by placing some of them on mountain gods or lions, which underlines their divine authority.

Recent studies by an international team of archaeoastronomers have analyzed the complex arrangement of the more than 90 bas-reliefs and shown that these are symbolizing different spheres of the cosmos (Zangger & Gautschy, 2019; Zangger et al., 2021). The sanctuary represents a structured cosmology, divided into three realms: heaven, earth, and the underworld. The heavens themselves are further subdivided into the eternal order of the circumpolar sky and the cyclic return of the equatorial stars. The axis of the world, the meridian, connects these cosmic layers with the earth.

The deities, mostly anthropomorphic, though depicted at similar heights for practical reasons, symbolically embody the vertical cosmic order that encompasses the underworld, earth, sky, and the celestial circumpolar realm (Fig. 5). The shown deities guard each of these cosmic spheres, responsible for natural and social orders—a concept that dates back to Sumerian belief systems. The sanctuary, however, reflects not only the static structure of the cosmos but also its cyclical movements: the course of the sun in the year, the lunar months, the days of a lunar month, and the nights of the full moon, when lunar eclipses can occur.

Yazılıkaya thus projects the Hittite worldview directly onto the natural landscape: Chamber A represents heaven and earth, while Chamber B represents the underworld. The relief carvings in Chamber B, including the underworld god Nergal and twelve identical male deities, reflect the cycle of death and rebirth associated with the movements of the sun and stars. Both main chambers face the circumpolar region of the northern sky, which emphasizes the cosmological significance of the site.

The deities at Yazılıkaya go beyond a mere representation of religious beliefs and serve as a key to understanding the Hittite world view. Like many temples in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Yazılıkaya symbolizes the cosmos and shows how the Hittites and their contemporaries conceived the universe and the place of humans in it. This new interpretation of Yazılıkaya not only offers a deeper understanding of Hittite cosmology but also provides a valuable basis for the analysis of other Hittite artifacts with similar features.

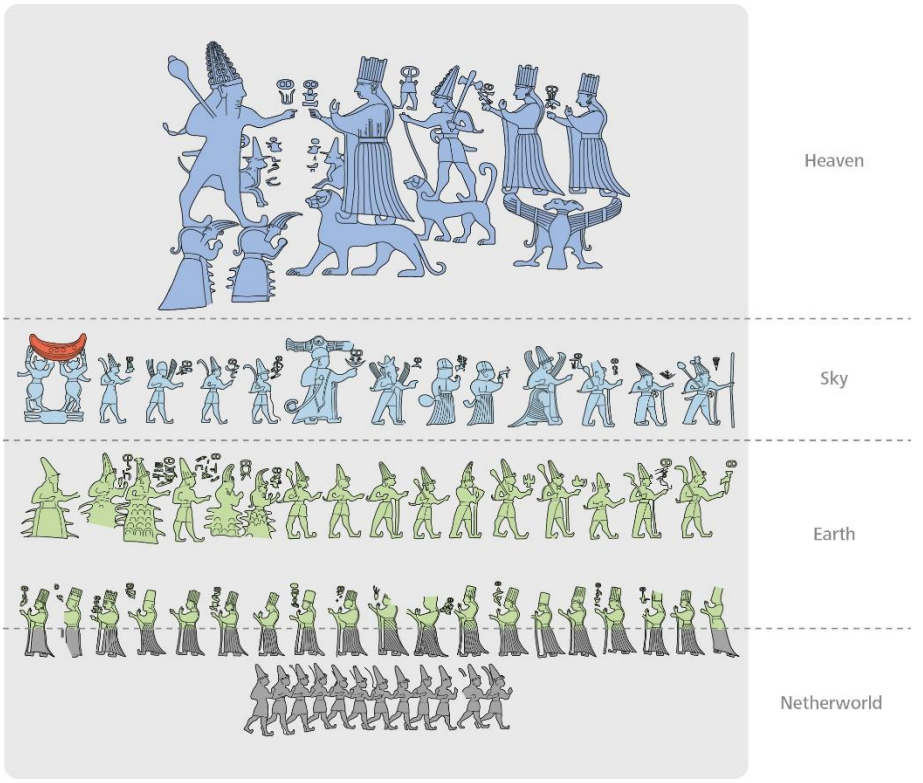

Figure 5. Schematic view of some of the groups of deities in Yazılıkaya according to the cosmic layer to which they belong. The female deities in the second layer from the bottom represent years and thus summer (earth) and winter (netherworld) (Luwian Studies #1419).

Ivory Plague from Megiddo with Hittite and Hurrian Deities (c. 1200–1150 BCE)

A cache of ivory carvings, hidden in the "treasury" of the palace at Megiddo (Israel), was found during excavations in the 1930s in a Late Bronze Age context, likely dating between 1200 and 1150 BCE (Loud, 1939, p. 14, Plate 11). Among these is a tablet measuring approximately 10×9.25 centimeters, featuring five registers of anthropomorphic figures, animals, and chimeras (Fig. 6). The lowest register displays a row of bulls, while the one above preserves three figures, including a sphinx with a lion's head and a bullman. The middle register contains another sphinx. Bullmen with raised arms dominate the fourth register,

seemingly supporting the one above. At the top, two Hittite deities (or kings) stand in antithetical postures (Collins, 2007, p. 136), each wearing a large, winged sun disc, supported by four anthropomorphic figures, some of which appear Janus-faced. The bullmen with outstretched arms and the winged sun discs evoke the iconography of the rock reliefs at Yazılıkaya, while also paralleling motifs from Eflatunpınar (Feldman, 2009, pp. 181–182). The staggered arrangement of deities across different levels may also symbolize the hierarchical structure of the cosmos, with heaven, earth, and the underworld representing distinct conceptual layers (Haas, 1994, p. 144).

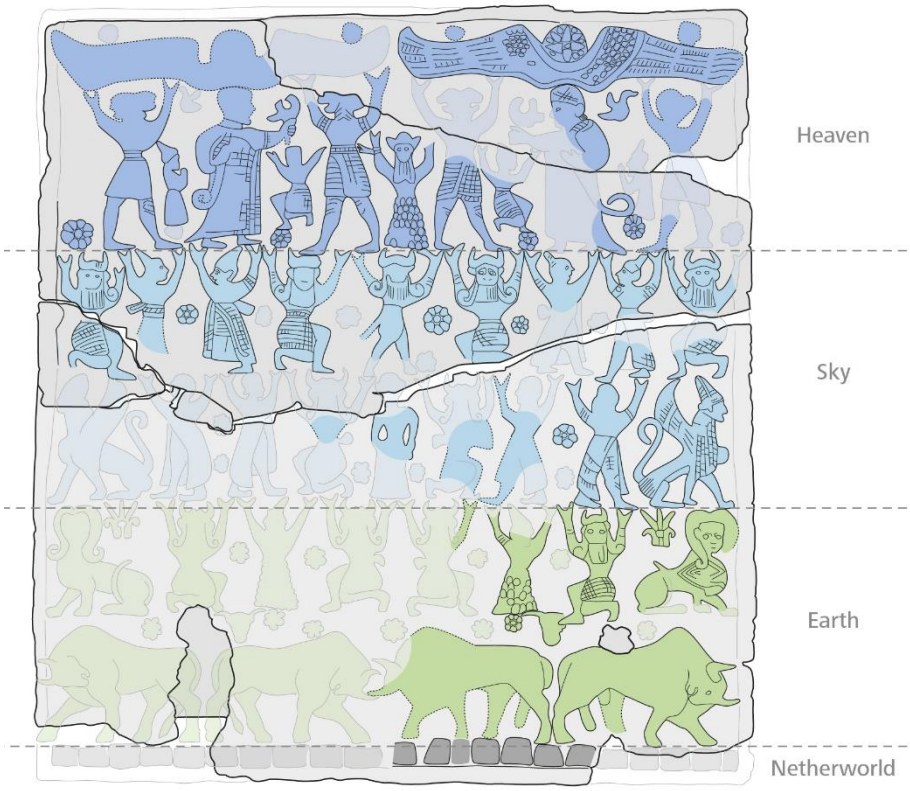

Figure 6. A newly created illustration highlighting the preserved figures on the Hittite ivory plaque from Megiddo, assigning them to their corresponding cosmic spheres (Luwian Studies #1511).

The Babylonian creation myth *Enūma Eliš*

The archetypal Babylonian creation epic *Enūma Eliš* appears relatively late in the chronology of Mesopotamian creation myths, likely written during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon (1126–1104 BCE), who consolidated the kingdom after long struggles. The epic describes the creation of the cosmos through divine conflict, centering on the primordial gods Apsu, representing fresh water, and Tiamat, representing salt water. Their mingling gives birth to the younger gods, whose disruptive presence prompts Apsu to plot their destruction. Ea, however, kills Apsu and captures Mummu, the god of reason, clearing the way for Marduk, his son, to confront Tiamat (Krebernik, 2019, p. 81). In the climactic battle, Marduk defeats Tiamat and splits her body in two, using the upper half to create the heavens and the lower half to form the earth. This act symbolizes the transition from primordial chaos to cosmic order, with Marduk stabilizing creation and establishing the framework for life. Marduk further organizes the cosmos, assigning the stars and constellations their places and making Babylon the cosmic center. Elevated to the supreme god of the pantheon, Marduk's victory not only establishes a new divine hierarchy but also reflects the political order of Mesopotamia, where the rise and fall of states mirrored cosmic struggles (Batto, 2013, p. 33; Maul, 2015, p. 31). Humans, created from Marduk's blood, are tasked with maintaining the temples and cultivating the land, thereby preserving cosmic balance. Thus, the relationship between gods and humanity is clearly defined, and Mesopotamian religious and cultural life remains intimately tied to the rhythms of the cosmos.

Genesis (after 900 BCE)

The oldest version of the biblical creation story, beginning in Genesis 2:4b–25, presents a depiction of the world's origin that emphasizes the cosmic order established by the creator god. This version, likely composed after 900 BCE, focuses on the principle of division, through which opposites emerge and the world is structured. In contrast to the later account in Genesis 1, which outlines a more formal sequence of creation days, Genesis 2:4b takes a more narrative

approach, centering on the relationship between God and humanity. A god shapes the earth, initially described as formless and void, and through his actions creates the foundational structures that make the world habitable for humans and all creatures (Seidl, 2012, p. 2).

> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:4b–7 [NIV])

At the heart of this creation narrative is the act of division as the key to cosmic order. The separation of heaven and earth represents the first critical step in forming a structured world. Further divisions, such as the separation of water from land, establish distinct realms where life can thrive. God intentionally sets opposites—day and night, heaven and earth—to organize the elements of creation into a harmonious whole. The narrative of Genesis 2:4b reflects a profound recognition of the necessity of duality to bring about an ordered universe, where each element, in particular humans and animals, occupies its rightful place (Seidl, 2012, p. 10). Thus, the biblical cosmogony portrays a world defined by clear boundaries and opposites, with God as the organizing creator, who through division establishes the foundation for human existence.

Hesiod, *Theogony* (c. 720 BCE)

Hesiod's *Theogony* presents a cosmogony that begins with primordial chaos, a formless void from which all existence originates (West, 2008, x; Clay, 2003, p. 13; Priou, 2014, p. 235). This depiction of chaos embodies an unformed potential, gradually giving way to order.

The earliest beings to emerge were Chaos (Chasm), followed by Gaia (Earth), Tartarus (the Underworld), and Eros (Desire) (*Theogony* 116–122). These entities arose spontaneously, laying the groundwork for the generation of deities and the organization of the cosmos. From Chaos came Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night), who together brought forth Aether (Brightness) and Hemera (Day). Gaia, embodying the earth as both substance and nurturing power, gave birth to Uranus (Sky), the Ourea (Mountains), and Pontus (Sea) (*Theogony* 126-132). Uranus then mated with Gaia—the two formed a cosmic pair that gave birth to the twelve Titans. The emergence of these entities marks the beginning of a dynamic process where oppositions—earth and sky, light and darkness—are necessary components of creation. The brothers fairly divide the primary domains of the universe: Poseidon rules the sea, Hades rules the underworld, and Zeus presides over the sky (López-Ruiz, 2010, pp. 89–90).

Hesiod's *Theogony* seeks to explain the cosmos as the result of a genealogical progression and a process of individuation, culminating in the establishment of a stable order and fulfilling its ultimate purpose under Zeus's governance (Clay, 2003, p. 13). In contrast to the biblical Genesis, Hesiod's depiction of the cosmos' origins does not involve purposeful conception by a creator god but instead mirrors the procreative dynamics of a human family (Clay, 2003, p. 14). The cosmos is born not through a peaceful ordering but through a cycle of struggle and succession. This cyclical model contrasts with the more linear developments seen in other creation myths, offering a vision of the universe as shaped by tension and transformation.

Homer, *Iliad* 18.483 (Shield of Achilles)

In Homer's *Iliad*, particularly in the description of Achilles's shield (18.478-608), the poet furnishes an implicit cosmogony, expressed through the elaborate representation of the world order and its elements on the shield. In these lines, Hephaestus emerges openly as both the creator of the shield and a divine architect of the world. The parallel to the biblical account in Genesis is strikingly evident (Jung, 2021, pp. 59–60):

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, [...]
> And the gathering of the waters he called the sea. [...]
> To determine times, days and years ...
> [He] made two great lights: ... the day, ... and the night, ...
> And also the stars ... in the firmament of the heaven. (Bible, Genesis 1.1, 1.10, 1.14)f

Hephaestus crafted the shield, which features a multitude of scenes reflecting not only human life in all its facets—war, peace, and festivities—but also the fundamental forces of nature (Jung, 2021, pp. 59–60). At its edge is Oceanus, who serves as a symbolic frame for the entire depiction—an ancient image of the cosmic boundary that is also found in many other ancient myths. Oceanus here embodies a limit beyond which lurk the unknown and the unformed, similar to Chaos in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

The focus of the depiction is not the conflict between gods or creation through violence, as in Hesiod's work, but rather an image of balance and cyclical change. The scenes shown reflect the dualistic structure of the world—peace and war, festivity and everyday life—and thus convey an idea of the cosmic order, which is characterized by the eternal return and change of these states. The absence of an explicit act of creation emphasizes a static but dynamically structured world in which the forces of nature and humans are interwoven. This implicit cosmogony is not so much a narrative about the origin of the world as a representation of the structure and cycle that constitute the essence of creation according to the Homeric understanding.

Genesis 2:4a (Later Version of Creation, c. 550 BCE)

The more recent version of the creation story in the Bible, found in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, offers a structured and ordered cosmogony that radiates a particular clarity in its systematization (Seidl, 2012, p. 13). This so-called Priestly Creation Narrative describes the emergence of the world through the creative word of God, which transforms chaos and emptiness into an ordered universe. In contrast to the more narrative and anthropocentric version in Genesis 2.4b, this is a strictly structured

sequence of days of creation, in which God brings order into the world: day and night, heaven and earth, land and sea, plants and animals. The centrality of the spoken word of God highlights the creative power of the Logos, which operates beyond struggle or conflict—a sharp contrast to the cosmogonic myths of Hesiod, in which creation emerges from violence and separation.

In this version of creation, the numerical and symmetrical order is particularly striking: God creates the world in six days, dedicating the first three days to the creation of living spaces (day/night, sky/water, land/sea) and the following three days to the filling of these spaces with celestial bodies, birds, and fish, as well as terrestrial animals and humans. The seventh day, when God rested, concludes this act of creation and expresses an order in time that is reflected in Jewish tradition in the institution of the Sabbath. This emphasis on order, cyclicality, and rhythm reflects a conception of creation that aims at balance, harmony, and permanence.

> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth […] And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under it from the water above. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day […] And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. (Genesis 1, 1-18, New International Version)

The creation story in Genesis 1 shows remarkable parallels to the Babylonian *Enūma Eliš* and to the depiction on the ʿAin Samiya silver cup. Both texts and the iconographic representation on the goblet begin

with the primeval chaos before creation, which is described in the biblical narrative as tōhū wā-ḇōhū (Genesis 1.2) and is represented in the *Enūma Eliš* by the image of the primeval waters of the goddess Tiamat. But while the biblical creation story brings order to this primordial state through the creative word of God, violence plays a central role in *Enūma Eliš*: Marduk defeats Tiamat in a cosmic battle and forms the heavens and the earth from her shattered body. This cosmic violence as a principle of creation stands in stark contrast to the biblical notion in which God peacefully and methodically calls creation into being through his word.

Another parallel can be found in the structure and emphasis of the temporal order. In the *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk, after his victory over Tiamat, creates the cosmos by creating the moon and the stars and thus structures time through the heavenly motions. Likewise, on the fourth day, God in Genesis 1 establishes the vault of heaven and sets the sun, moon, and stars as "signs of the times." Not only does the creation of the heavenly bodies reflect this order, but the biblical text establishes the Sabbath as a holy day of rest, marking the completion of the creation process. Here, too, parallels can be seen with the ʿAin Samiya silver cup, in which the structures of the organized cosmos that give it stability are depicted in the second representation (Fig. 2).

Plato, *Timaeus*

In Plato's *Timaeus*, cosmogony is not described as the result of the activity of the gods or of violence, but as the creative act of a divine craftsman, the demiurge, who forms the world out of pre-existing chaotic matter. The demiurge acts according to the principle of reason, transforming chaos into an ordered, harmonious world modeled on the eternal, unchanging cosmos. This process differs fundamentally from the creation narratives in Hesiod or the Bible, since the demiurge does not create out of nothing but rather orders and gives form to what already exists. His creation is characterized by the pursuit of perfection—he forms the world as a whole into a living being, a perfect sphere that serves as an image of the eternal world of ideas.

Central to Plato's cosmogony is the concept of harmony and mathematical order. The demiurge is guided by eternal, unchanging ideas—especially the idea of good—to transform the world into an ordered, teleological system. Geometric relationships and proportions link the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—making the world a cosmos, an ordered, living unity, designed according to the best possibility. The introduction of time as a moving reflection of eternity, embodied by the heavenly bodies, is a defining feature of creation in *Timaeus*. The movements of the planets represent the regular cycles of time and bring the principle of cyclic order into the created world. This conception of time and movement gives Plato's cosmogony a dynamic dimension that is closely related to the theory of ideas, since the sensually perceptible world is constantly in flux, while the ideas remain eternal and unchanging.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the cosmogonies in these texts and objects, several conclusions can be drawn that show both similarities and differences, particularly in terms of how the creation and structure of the universe were understood.

One of the most important similarities is that in many of the cosmogonies discussed, creation begins with a state of chaos or formlessness. The Sumerian fragments, the *Enūma Eliš*, Genesis 2.4, and Plato's *Timaeus* each describe a world emerging from an unstructured state—the ʿAin Samiya goblet even provides a depiction showing how someone at the time imagined what this *tōhū wā-ḇōhū*, the condition of the earth immediately before the creation of light (Seidl, 2012, p. 13), might have looked like. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, chaos is named as the first state, and *Enūma Eliš* describes primeval chaos through the personification of the goddess Tiamat. This notion reflects the idea that order arises from dissolution or an indeterminate beginning.

A recurring motif in most of these creation myths is the separation of elements or spheres. In Genesis, heaven is separated from earth; in Hesiod, earth and heaven (Gaia and Uranus) are split apart; and in *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk splits Tiamat's body to create heaven and earth.

On the ʿAin Samiya goblet, the lines where dissection is needed are obvious in the scene depicting chaos. In Yazılıkaya, visitors of religious festivals were able to move between four different spheres. In *Timaeus*, Plato also describes the separation and ordering of the elements of fire, earth, water, and air by the demiurge. These acts of separation are often the beginning of order and mark the transition from chaos to cosmos.

Dualisms such as day and night or light and darkness are universal concepts in these cosmogonies. In Yazılıkaya, the cycles of renewal and rebirth (day/night, lunar phases, summer/winter) are emphasized. The bullmen stand between the waxing and waning days of the moon, and celestial deities connected to the equatorial constellations are shown on a separate panel while those connected to the circumpolar region are emphasized. In Genesis 1, the separation of light and darkness is stressed on the first day of creation. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, such dualisms also play a central role, since the birth of the gods often marks the emergence of opposites such as light and shadow. The cyclical order of day and night similarly appears in *Timaeus*, where time and movement are represented by the heavenly bodies.

In many of these narratives, the cosmos is presented as a system of cycles and repetitions. Cyclic principles can be found in Yazılıkaya and Eflatunpınar, where the representation of the sky and the seasons points to a cosmic understanding of recurrence. In Yazılıkaya the nineteen-year solar cycle (*enneadecaeteris*, later: Metonic cycle) was observed, and the lunar phases are indicated through the days of the lunar months. In Plato's *Timaeus*, the movement of the planets and stars embodies time and the cyclical nature of the cosmos. Hesiod's *Theogony* and Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* also see the world as cyclical and dynamic, with war and peace, day and night, and life and death in a constant state of flux.

Differences in the cosmogonies can be found, for example, in the mechanism of creation, which follows distinct theological and metaphysical approaches. In the theogony of *Enūma Eliš* and Hesiod, creation is realized through violence and struggle between divine powers. Order emerges as a result of conflict and power struggles. Marduk defeats Tiamat, and Kronos disempowers Uranos. The cosmos

is dynamic and full of conflict. Gods succeed each other through shifts in power.

In contrast, creation in Genesis and *Timaeus* occurs peacefully through the creative word (Logos) of God or the reason of the demiurge. The cosmos can unfold peacefully and rationally and appears rather static. Plato sees the cosmos as a perfect, static image of the world of ideas, whose ordered movements are eternal and unchanging. The biblical image of creation completed in seven days reflects a similar idea of perfection and harmony.

In polytheistic cosmogonies such as *Enūma Eliš* or Hesiod's *Theogony*, numerous gods play a role in the creation of the world, with the gods themselves often changing in the process of creation. By contrast, Genesis and *Timaeus* emphasize the role of a single creative principle, whether it be the monotheistic god of the Bible or the demiurge, who acts as an expression of reason. In these narratives, the divine is immutable and sovereign.

In *Timaeus*, Plato introduces the idea of time as an "agitated image of eternity," which is expressed through the cyclical movements of the heavenly bodies. This concept differs from the more linear ideas in Genesis, where time begins with creation and ends in an eschatological framework. The cosmogony of Hesiod and Homer, on the other hand, is rather cyclical and emphasizes the change and repetition of cosmic and human conditions.

All things considered, these newly identified cosmological representations—Yazılıkaya, Eflatunpınar, the ʿAin Samiya goblet, and the Megiddo ivory plague—broaden our understanding of creation myths in the ancient Near East. They do so both geographically, by situating Anatolia as a cultural intermediary between Mesopotamia and Greece, and chronologically, by placing the Hittite kingdom at a pivotal point between the early civilizations of Mesopotamia and the intellectual developments of Greek antiquity. Anatolia, in particular, emerges as a critical region where cultural influences converged and where creation myths from diverse traditions were absorbed, adapted, and reinterpreted within the Hittite religious framework.

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