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## HORSES, WHEELS, LANGUAGES: GREEK, MESOPOTAMIAN AND INDIC EPIC ON THE EURASIAN STEPPE\*

### ABSTRACT

*A motif in the Cypria is sometimes explained as borrowed in the seventh century from the Akkadian epic Atra-ḫašīs, sometimes as inherited from a third-millennium Indo-European poetic tradition surviving also in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. These explanations seem incompatible, but they are not. Narrative traditions often cross linguistic boundaries through multilinguals, and linguistic and archaeological evidence suggests that some speakers of Proto-Indo-European were also speakers of Semitic languages. Indo-European and Ancient Near Eastern comparative approaches are therefore halves of a single enterprise: the Cypria, Mahābhārata and Atra-ḫašīs belong to a Eurasian-Steppe tradition, and must be read together.*

**Keywords:** Indo-European Studies; Ancient Near Eastern Studies; Cypria; Mahābhārata; Atra-ḫašīs<sup>1</sup>

### 1. SOLVING THE HUMAN PROBLEM IN GREECE AND MESOPOTAMIA

One famous case for Mesopotamian influence on Greek poetry rests on the resemblance of the Greek *Cypria* to the Babylonian *Atra-ḫašīs*.<sup>2</sup> Both are extended narrative poems about a catastrophe that ends the age of myth and begins our own epoch. Each presents

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<sup>1</sup> Frequently cited: Anthony = D.W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, 2007); Ballesteros = B. Ballesteros Petrella, 'The relieved earth in Greek, Babylonian, and Sanskrit myths of destruction', in I. Calini (ed.), *Les Récits de destruction en Méditerranée orientale ancienne* (Paris, 2023), 71–93; Burkert = W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Davies = M. Davies, *The Cypria* (Washington, DC, 2019); Gamkrelidze and Ivanov = T.V. Gamkrelidze and V.V. Ivanov, *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans: A Reconstruction and Historical Analysis of a Proto-Language and a Proto-Culture*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1995); Kelly and Metcalf = A. Kelly and C. Metcalf (edd.), *Gods and Mortals in Early Greek and Near Eastern Mythology* (Oxford, 2021); Lambert and Millard = W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-ḫašīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford, 1969); Pace = J. Pace, *Mythopoeia, ou l'art de forger les "mythes" dans l'"aire culturelle" syro-mésopotamienne, méditerranéenne et indo-européenne* (Helsinki, 2018); West *EFH* = M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997); West *IEPM* = M.L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007); Wikander = O. Wikander, *Unburning Fame: Horses, Dragons, Beings of Smoke, and Other Indo-European Motifs in Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Kilmer, 'The Mesopotamian concept of overpopulation and its solution as reflected in the mythology', *Orientalia* 41 (1972), 160–77, at 175; G.S. Kirk, 'Greek mythology: some new perspectives', *JHS* 92 (1972), 74–85, at 79; R. Scodel, 'The Achaean wall and the myth of destruction', *HSPH* 86 (1982), 33–50, at 40–3; S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, 1989), 5; Burkert, 100–3; W. Burkert, *Babylon Memphis Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 37–40; West *EFH*, 480–2; L.M. Slatkin, *The*

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this catastrophe as the chief god's plan to cull the burgeoning human population. In *Atra-ḫasīs*, the catastrophe is a series of plagues and famines, followed by a flood. In the *Cypria*, it is the Trojan War.

In *Atra-ḫasīs* (earliest manuscript seventeenth century B.C.E.), humans multiply. As their noise keeps the chief god, Enlil, from sleeping, he decides to wipe them out (*Atr.* I.352–60):

[ú-ul il-li-ik-ma 600].600 MU.ḪL.A  
 [ma-tum ir-ta-pí-iš] ni-šu im-ti-da  
 m[a-tum ki-ma li]-<sup>f</sup>i i-ša<sup>1</sup>-ab-bu  
 i-na [ḫu-bu-ri-ši-na] i-lu <sup>f</sup>i<sup>1</sup>-ta-<sup>f</sup>a'-da<sup>1</sup>-ar  
 [<sup>d</sup>en-líl iš-te-me] ri-<sup>f</sup>gi-im<sup>1</sup>-ši-in  
 [is-sà-qar a]-na i-li <sup>f</sup>ra<sup>1</sup>-bu-tim  
 [ik-ta-ab-ta] <sup>f</sup>ri-gi-im<sup>1</sup> a-wi-lu-ti  
 [i-na ḫu-bu-ri-ši]-na ú-za-<sup>f</sup>am<sup>1</sup>-ma ši-it-ta  
 ... šu-r[<sup>f</sup>u-up-pu-ú li-ib-<sup>f</sup>ši<sup>3</sup>

There passed not 600 and 600 years  
 before the population grew, and humankind became abundant:  
 the population was bellowing like a bull.  
 At their clamour the god grew irritated.  
 Enlil heard their noise.  
 He said to the great gods:  
 The noise of humans has become aggravating.  
 Because of their clamour I am deprived of sleep.  
 ... let there be plague ...

Fortunately, Enlil does not succeed in eradicating humankind. Thanks to the god Enki and his favourite mortal, *Atra-ḫasīs*, humans survive not only the plague but drought and a series of famines. Finally, Enlil sends a great flood. But Enki warns *Atra-ḫasīs* to build a boat, and he again escapes destruction.

The *Cypria* too began with divine population control (fr. 1):

ἦν ὅτε μυρία φύλα κατὰ χθόνα πλαζόμεν' αἰεὶ  
 ἀνθρώπων ἐβάρυνε βαθυστέρνου πλάτος αἴης.  
 Ζεὺς δὲ ἰδὼν ἐλέησε, καὶ ἐν πυκιναῖς πραπίδεσσι  
 κουφίσαι ἀνθρώπων παμβώτορα σύνθετο γαῖαν,  
 ῥπίσσαις πολέμου μεγάλῃν ἔριν Ἰλιακοῖο,  
 ὄφρα κενώσειεν θανάτω βᾶρος, οἳ δ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ  
 ἦρωες κτείνοντο, Διὸς δ' ἐτέλειετο βουλή.<sup>4</sup>

Once upon a time, thousands of tribes of people, wandering ever  
 over the land, weighed down the breadth of the deep-chested earth.  
 And Zeus, seeing this, took pity, and in his tight-packed mind  
 decided to relieve the all-nourishing earth of human beings  
 by inflaming the great conflict of the Trojan War,  
 in order to empty out the weight by death. And in Troy  
 the heroes began to be killed, and Zeus's plan was coming to its accomplishment.

*Power of Thetis and Selected Essays* (Washington, DC, 2011), 92–5; M. Clarke, *Achilles beside Gilgamesh: Mortality and Wisdom in Early Epic Poetry* (Cambridge, 2019), 160–2.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Lambert and Millard. I borrow freely from their translation.

<sup>4</sup> Text following M.L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); cf. A. Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci* (Stuttgart, 1996), ad loc.; H. van Thiel, *Aristarch, Aristophanes Byzantios, Demetrios Ixion, Zenodot: Fragmente zur Ilias gesammelt, neu herausgegeben und kommentiert* (Berlin, 2014), 1.45–6; Davies, 23–9, 40–8.

We have this from a scholium on *Il.* 1.5, explaining ‘Zeus’s plan’ to relieve the earth by a cull of mortals (Schol. [D] *Il.* 1.5, van Thiel):

φασὶ γὰρ τὴν γῆν βαρουμένην ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων πολυπληθείας, μηδεμιᾶς ἀνθρώπων οὔσης εὐσεβείας, αἰτήσαι τὸν Δία κουφισθῆναι τοῦ ἄχθους. τὸν δὲ Δία πρῶτον μὲν εὐθύς ποιῆσαι τὸν Θηβαϊκὸν πόλεμον δι’ οὗ πολλοὺς πάνυ ἀπώλεσεν· ὕστερον δὲ πάλιν, συμβούλῳ τῷ Μώμῳ χρησάμενος, ἦν Διὸς βουλὴν Ὅμηρός φησιν, ἐπειδὴ οἴος τε ἦν κεραυνοῖς ἢ κατακλυσμοῖς ἀπαντας διαφθεῖρειν.

For they say Earth, weighed down by the vast number of human beings, since not one of these humans was pious, begged Zeus to be lightened of her load. And Zeus first immediately brought about the Theban War, through which he utterly destroyed many, and again after that, having consulted his advisor Momus, which Homer calls ‘the plan of Zeus’, since Zeus could have destroyed them all by thunderbolts or floods.

Some of this information is not apparent in the *Cypria* fragment. First, Earth made an embassy to Zeus: she complained of the weight of mortals, and asked him to lighten her burden. Second, Zeus’s actions were justified not only by practical necessity but also by the impiety of human beings.<sup>5</sup> Third, the plan of Zeus was tempered by Momus: the scholiast goes on to explain that Momus advised Zeus to marry Thetis to a mortal, and to father Helen. The birth of Helen and Achilles brought on the Trojan War, which relieved the earth of her burden by mass death (ἀφ’ οὗ συνέβη κουφισθῆναι τὴν γῆν πολλῶν ἀνααιρεθέντων)—but not by the complete eradication of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Momus is not otherwise attested as Zeus’s advisor, but in name and function he matches Apsu’s vizier Mummu (*Enūma eliš* 1.30–72).<sup>7</sup> Shortly before this episode in *Atra-ḫasīs*, three gods cast lots for dominion of the sky, the earth and the underworld sea (1.11–18), and this matches an Iliadic scene in which Poseidon tells how he, Hades and Zeus cast lots for their domains of sea, underworld and sky (15.184–93).<sup>8</sup> Finally, there is a straightforward route of transmission. *Atra-ḫasīs* circulated widely in the Neo-Assyrian empire during the eighth and seventh centuries (Lambert and Millard, 31–6); precisely ‘that epoch when Cyprus, though rich and powerful, was still formally under Assyrian domination . . . the commemorative steles of Assyrian kings were erected in the cities of Cyprus’. No wonder, then, that the motif found its place in the *Cypria*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On moral wrong in *Atra-ḫasīs*, see G. Pettinato, ‘Die Bestrafung des Menschengeschlechts durch die Sintflut’, *Orientalia* 37 (1968), 165–200; V. Afanasieva, ‘Der irdische Lärm des Menschen (nochmals zum Atramḫasīs-Epos)’, *ZfAs* 86 (1996), 89–96.

<sup>6</sup> I take no view as to whether the account in the scholia gets the *Iliad* right (C.M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* [Oxford, 1930], 12–13; W. Kullman, ‘Ein vorhomerisches Motiv im Iliasproömium’, *Philologus* 99 [1954], 167–92; A. Severyns, ‘Sur le début des Chants Cypriens’, *MAWBL* 28 [1965], 285–97; J.S. Burgess, ‘The non-Homeric *Cypria*’, *TAPhA* 126 [1996], 77–99; J. Strauss Clay, ‘The whip and will of Zeus’, *Literary Imagination* 1 [1999], 40–60, at 40–3; Davies, 10–16, 48–53; Ballesteros, 79), or even the *Cypria* (Davies, 31–4; cf. however M. Finkelberg, ‘The *Cypria*, the *Iliad*, and the problem of multiformity in oral and written tradition’, *CPh* 95 [2000], 1–11). It is enough that these motifs were known in early Greek tradition; cf. *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 204 M–W, with M.L. West, ‘Hesiodea’, *CQ* 11 [1961], 130–45, at 132–6 and Scodel [n. 2], 37–40), *Eur. Or.* 1639–42, *Hel.* 36–41.

<sup>7</sup> Burkert, 103.

<sup>8</sup> Burkert, 89–91; for objections A. Kelly, ‘The Babylonian captivity of Homer: the case of the Διὸς Ἀπάτη’, *RhM* 151 (2008), 259–304, at 262–73.

<sup>9</sup> Burkert, 103–4; cf. A.C. Gunter, *Greek Art and the Orient* (Cambridge, 2009), 17–34. For the connection of the *Cypria* to Cyprus, see B. Currie, ‘*Cypria*’, in M. Fantuzzi and C. Tsagalis (edd.), *The Greek Epic Cycle and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge, 2015), 281–305, at 281–2.

A formidable case, but the matter is not as simple as it appears. *Cypria* fr. 1 has long played a role in another comparative project: Indo-Europeanists have noted its resonances with a very different poem.

## 2. SOLVING THE HUMAN PROBLEM IN GREECE AND INDIA

The *Mahābhārata*, greatest of Indian epics, took form between the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. and the middle of the first millennium C.E. The core of the poem is a succession dispute in the Kingdom of Kuru.<sup>10</sup> Two branches of the ruling dynasty, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, claim the throne, leading to a great battle and the ultimate victory of the Pāṇḍavas. But, as in the Trojan cycle, the battle has a double cause: war between mortals is the gods' device to cull the population. Earth is crawling with human avatars of demons (Dānavas), so numerous that she is sinking gradually beneath the sea (12.202.10):

*prthivīm cārtarūpām te samapaśyan divaukaśaḥ |*  
*dānavair abhisamkīrṇām ghorarūpair mahābalaiḥ |*  
*bhārtām apakṛṣṭām ca duḥkhitām sannimajjatīm ||*

And the heaven-dwellers saw the earth looking distressed,  
covered all over with mighty, hideous Dānavas,  
weighted and dragged down, miserably submerged.<sup>11</sup>

Desperate, she makes an embassy to the chief god, Brahmā. He decides that the gods will descend to earth in human form, and slaughter the Dānavas in a great war between Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas (*Mbh.* 1.58.1–52).

The theme is repeated many times throughout the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>12</sup> In another version Earth begs the gods to relieve her great burden, and Viṣṇu assures her that they will initiate a war involving the King of Kuru (11.8.25–6a):

*tasyārthe prthivīpālāḥ kurukṣetre samāgatāḥ*  
*anyonyam ghātayiṣyanti dṛḍhaiḥ śāstraiḥ prahāriṇaḥ*  
*tatas te bhavitā devi bhārasya yudhi nāśanam*

On his account kings, having come together on the plain of Kuru,  
will make killers of each other, striking with mighty weapons—  
then there will be destruction of your burden in battle, Goddess.

Thus the elements that pointed to a relationship between the *Cypria* and *Atra-ḥasīs* are also present in the *Mahābhārata*.

The Greek poem shares more with its Indic than with its Mesopotamian counterpart. The *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* agree that the weight of humankind is the cause of the cull, while in *Atra-ḥasīs* their noise disturbs Enlil. In *Atra-ḥasīs*, the chief god acts from personal annoyance; in the *Mahābhārata* and the scholium on *Il.* 1.5, because of Earth's embassy. And while Enlil visits plague, famine and flood on the human race, Zeus and

<sup>10</sup> For synopses, G. Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée* (Paris, 1995), 62–70; J. Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden, 1998), 28–34.

<sup>11</sup> Edd. V.S. Sukthankar, S.K. Belvalkar and P.L. Vaidya, *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited* (Pune, 1933–66). Translations mine.

<sup>12</sup> For instances in the *Mahābhārata* and other Indian texts: W. Ruben, *Die homerischen und die altindischen Epen* (Berlin, 1973), 50–5.

Brahmā prefer a great war. The *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* also evince a richer structural correspondence than any we can draw between the *Cypria* and *Atra-ḥasīs*. Both are long-form epics, covering the full course of the final war of the heroic era preceding our own.<sup>13</sup> In both, a council of gods sets the war in motion, though there is a proximate cause in the world of mortals (the abduction of Helen and Yudhiṣṭhira's dice-game with Duryodhana). Both narrate the adventures of the heroes prior to the war, the build-up to the conflict, the gathering of the troops, and the battle itself.

It is not plausible to assert that a Mesopotamian story of the flood travelled west into the Aegean, east to the Indus Valley, and underwent identical metamorphoses in both of its new homes.<sup>14</sup> Nor is there a plausible route of transmission between India and Greece in the era of the *Cypria*. For these reasons, the motif of the overburdened earth has long been a canonical parallel for Indo-Europeanists.<sup>15</sup> The Greek and Sanskrit languages (along with many other languages of ancient Eurasia) evince correspondences explained by their descent from a common ancestor, Proto-Indo-European (PIE).<sup>16</sup> Indo-Europeanists treat the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* as divergent developments of a poetic tradition current among prehistoric speakers of PIE. Just as Greek and Sanskrit reflect a proto-language, so do the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* reflect a proto-story.

This explanation seems to obviate the theory that the *Cypria* has borrowed from *Atra-ḥasīs*. If the features shared between the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* are inherited into both poems, they must predate the divergence of Greek and Sanskrit into independent languages. The complex of motifs is older than Assyrian presence on Cyprus, indeed, older than *Atra-ḥasīs* itself.

### 3. EASTS AND WESTS

Two incompatible genealogies of the *Cypria*'s aetiology of the Trojan War are therefore current. On one account, the motif of a divine cull was imported from a Mesopotamian flood narrative around the seventh century, and incorporated into a mature and developed epic tradition about the Trojan War. On the other, the motif is no younger than the third millennium: it was part of the Trojan cycle from its inception, since the stories of the Trojan and Kurukṣetra Wars each evolved from some ancestral story of a cataclysmic battle to relieve the overburdened earth.

The puzzle neatly illustrates a tension in the priorities of these fields: in Indo-European Studies, the organizing principle of research is inheritance; in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, it is diffusion. From the Bronze Age on, the Eastern Mediterranean was a

<sup>13</sup> The Kurukṣetra War marks the transition from Dvapara Yuga to Kali Yuga (*Mbh.* 1.2.9; cf. Brockington [n. 10], 289); the *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 204.96–119 M–W) presents the Trojan War as the end of an age of heroes, though see J.M. González, 'The Catalogue of Women and the end of the heroic age (Hesiod fr. 204.94–103 M–W)', *TAPhA* 140 (2010), 375–422, at 382–91.

<sup>14</sup> As West *EFH*, 482 (cf. West *IEPM*, 23); rightly criticized by Ballesteros, 85.

<sup>15</sup> So notorious that Dumézil (n. 10) entitled his treatment of the *Mahābhārata* '*La Terre soulagée*'. First observed by R. Köhler, 'Zu den Kyprien', *RhM* 13 (1858), 316–17; see further V. Pisani, 'Indisch-griechische Beziehungen aus dem *Mahābhārata*', *ZDMG* 103 (1953), 126–39, at 127–8; M. Marcovich, 'Bedeutung der Motive des Volksglaubens für die Textinterpretation', *QUCC* 8 (1969), 22–36; J.W. de Jong, 'The over-burdened earth in India and Greece', *JAOS* 105 (1985), 397–400; C. Vielle, 'Les correspondances des prologues divins de la guerre de Troie et du *Mahābhārata*', in L. Isebaert and R. Lebrun (edd.), *Quaestiones Homericae: Acta Colloquii Namurensis* (Leuven, 1998), 275–90.

<sup>16</sup> For method, H.M. Hoenigswald, *Language Change and Linguistic Reconstruction* (Chicago, 1960); for history, A. Morpurgo Davies, *History of Linguistics, Volume IV: Nineteenth-Century Linguistics* (London, 1994).

highly networked region in which cult, myth, art and technique travelled widely. For scholars of Greece and the Ancient Near East, diffusion within this environment is the object of research. But for Indo-Europeanists it is an obstacle. To recover material inherited from a common ancestor, external influences on descendants must be identified and excised: Greek material is therefore complicated by its Near Eastern elements.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, some scholars object that IE Studies distorts Greek culture, overvaluing ‘inherited’ material and dismissing Eastern Mediterranean influences. ‘The Indo-European abstraction’, in the words of López-Ruiz, ‘has become a method for isolating what is “purely Greek” (another abstraction) and thereby enforcing an artificially sharp dichotomy with the “non-Indo-European” other, the oriental, the Semitic, the East.’<sup>18</sup>

These suspicions are justified; IE Studies has served racist political projects within and beyond the academy since it began.<sup>19</sup> But this contemptible history accompanies a record of concrete discovery. The comparative method in linguistics is sound. Greek is an IE language, and aspects of Greek literature have been illuminated by comparison to other literatures composed in IE languages.<sup>20</sup> Especially in the last few decades, Greek literature has re-emerged as a core concern of Indo-Europeanists, and anyone interested in the prehistory of Greek literature must integrate this research with the ongoing renaissance of work on Greece and the Near East.<sup>21</sup> The puzzle of the *Cypria* shows, if nothing else, that scholars in one field cannot ignore results in the other. How then should we bring the two together?

One approach was modelled by West. Learned both in the literatures of the Ancient Near East and in IE Studies, West wrote two compendia of parallels between Greek and other literatures. In *The East Face of Helicon* (1997), he set Greek material beside texts from ancient Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Levant, and argued that Near Eastern culture had shaped Greek literature through contact beginning in the mid second

<sup>17</sup> E.g. D. Briquel, ‘Mahābhārata, crépuscule des dieux et mythe de Prométhée’, *RHR* 193 (1978), 165–85, at 165–6; C.S. Littleton, ‘The problem that was Greece: some observations on the Greek tradition from the standpoint of the new comparative mythology’, *Arethusa* 13 (1980), 141–59; J. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1989), 22–3, 37–8.

<sup>18</sup> C. López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 11–12; cf. C. López-Ruiz, *Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge, MA, 2021), 65; E. van Dongen, ‘The study of Near Eastern influences on Greece: towards the point’, *KASKAL* 5 (2008), 233–50, at 242.

<sup>19</sup> S. Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago, 2006); B. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> One clear case is metrics: A. Meillet, *Les Origines indo-européennes des Mètres grecs* (Paris, 1923); R. Jakobson, ‘Studies in comparative Slavic metrics’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 3 (1952), 21–66; C. Watkins, ‘Indo-European metrics and archaic Irish verse’, *Celtica* 6 (1963), 194–249.

<sup>21</sup> Between the 1940s and the 1980s most work focussed on a core of Indo-Iranian, Germanic and Italic material (with important exceptions, e.g. R. Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanische Zeit* [Wiesbaden, 1967]; G. Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* [Cambridge, MA, 1974]). Some important works since 1990: G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990); S. Jamison, ‘Draupadī on the walls of Troy: *Iliad* 3 from an Indic perspective’, *CLAnt* 13 (1994), 5–16; S. Jamison, ‘Penelope and the pigs: Indic perspectives on the *Odyssey*’, *CLAnt* 18 (1999), 227–72; C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford, 1995); C. Vielle, *Le mytho-cycle-héroïque dans l’aire indo-européenne: correspondances et transformations helléno-aryennes* (Leuven, 1996); N.J. Allen, *Arjuna—Odysseus: Shared Heritage in Indian and Greek Epic* (London, 2020). The current wave of research on Greece and the Near East began with Burkert; S.P. Morris, *Daedalus and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton, 1992); M. López Salvá, ‘La literatura del próximo-oriente en la literatura arcaica y clásica griega: estudios y estado de la cuestión’, *Tempus* 8 (1994), 5–48; A. Bernabé, ‘Influences orientales dans la littérature grecque: quelques réflexions de méthode’, *Kernos* 8 (1995), 9–22; West *EFH*. For a recent if incomplete survey, see T.H. Davies, ‘Beyond the parallel: the *Iliad* and the Epic of Gilgameš in their macro-regional tradition’, *TAPhA* 153 (2023), 1–42, at 7–9.

millennium B.C.E. In this book, West explained parallels by diffusion from a culturally generative centre to a culture-poor periphery: ‘Culture, like all forms of gas, tends to spread out from where it is densest into adjacent areas where it is less dense’ (1). Ten years later came *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (2007), which drew on ancient texts in Greek, Latin, Hittite, Sanskrit and Avestan, medieval texts in Celtic, Slavic and Germanic languages, and nineteenth-century folklore and poetry in Lithuanian, Latvian, Armenian and Ossetic. In this later work, West employed the Indo-Europeanist method of treating features found in more than one of these languages as inherited from the prehistoric speech community ancestral to them all.

West’s diptych offers an attractive solution. There are two distinct strata in Greek culture, equally important, but each demanding methods of its own.<sup>22</sup> There is first the pre-Aegean stratum, ‘a heritage from the past, not a continuing tradition’ (*IEPM*, v); second, a period of development within the Aegean, during which cultural material was transmitted to the Greeks from neighbouring civilizations. Up to the moment the speakers of Proto-Greek enter the south Balkan peninsula, they belong to Indo-Europeanists, who use other IE-language texts to determine what they brought with them. On arrival, they become property of specialists in the Ancient Near East, who chronicle how Eastern Mediterranean influence gradually transformed them into the Greeks of the alphabetic period. Hellenists need only attend to both fields and consolidate their results, revealing how IE patrimony conditioned the reception of Near Eastern material, or how diffusion from the East altered inheritance.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, there are complications: some literatures are linguistically IE but geographically Near Eastern, and it is not always possible to tell a hoary theme of PIE antiquity from a more recent areal development. But it is no objection to a programme of research that it encounters difficult cases, and Hellenists with a hand in each field may even decide such territorial disputes.<sup>24</sup>

This article argues that this approach, however attractive, is fundamentally misguided. There are no separate Indo-European and Near Eastern strata in the prehistory of Greek literature. This is not a matter of our inability to sort the material into appropriate categories. There is nothing to sort it into. The conditions that justify a distinction between IE and non-IE phenomena in linguistics do not apply in the historical study of literature.

My case is as follows. In section 4, I argue that narratives are frequently transmitted across speech communities by multilingual individuals. Consequently, lines of linguistic descent do not predict lines of narrative descent: poems preserved in unrelated languages may share ancestry. In section 5, I argue that current models predict that, throughout the Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Ages, many speakers learned PIE as a second language, and that the language functioned as a medium for the transmission of cultural

<sup>22</sup> West planned a great book synthesizing his work on Indo-European and Ancient Near Eastern elements in Homer (*EFH*, vii). Sadly he did not live to write it.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. D. Briquel, ‘La *Théogonie* d’Hésiode. Essai de comparaison indo-européenne’, *RHR* 197 (1980), 243–76, at 246; R.D. Woodard, ‘Hesiod and Greek myth’, in R.D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge, 2009), 83–165; J.T. Katz, ‘The prehistory and analogues of Hesiod’s poetry’, in A.C. Loney and S. Scully (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod* (Oxford, 2018), 61–78; A. Kelly, ‘Sexing and gendering the succession myth in Hesiod and the Ancient Near East’, in Kelly and Metcalf, 276–91, at 277–9.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. A.T. Zanker, ‘A dove and a nightingale: *Mahābhārata* 3. 130. 18–3. 131. 32 and Hesiod, *Works and Days* 202–13’, *Philologus* 153 (2009), 10–25; A. Lardinois, ‘Playing with traditions: the Near Eastern background to Hesiod’s story of the five human races’, in Kelly and Metcalf, 109–25, at 111–16; S. Vanséveren, ‘Influence and inheritance: linguistics and formulae between Greece and the Ancient Near East’, in Kelly and Metcalf, 229–42.

material in a sphere centring on the Eurasian Steppe. In section 6, I present evidence that this sphere extended into Mesopotamia, and that some speakers of PIE also spoke Semitic languages. Finally, in section 7, I argue that this gives us resources for a more satisfactory solution to the puzzle of the *Cypria*. The *Mahābhārata* and *Atra-ḥasīs* are not alternative and incompatible sources of the Greek poem. All three share ancestry in a Eurasian-Steppe tradition.

#### 4. SPEECH TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

The Indo-Europeanist approach to Greek literature is founded on the comparative method in linguistics. By identifying systematic correspondences among languages, we can prove that they share an ancestor, determine the sequence of changes by which each has diverged and, by reversing these changes, recover features of that ancestor. In linguistics, this method is relatively uncontroversial.<sup>25</sup> A more difficult question is how far the method extends beyond language. Culture is less predictable than phonology. Greek Ζεὺς πατήρ corresponds phonetically to Sanskrit *Dyáuṣ pitṛ*, and the sound changes that produced each are regular and expressible as laws. But when we reconstruct PIE *\*Dyḗus ph<sub>2</sub>tér* ‘Sky Father’, we are dealing with more than sounds: if speakers of PIE passed down this name, a Sky Father must have figured in their pantheon. Yet no law explains why earth appeals to Zeus in the *Cypria*, but to Brahmā, not Dyaus, in the *Mahābhārata*.

This is not in itself an objection to cultural comparison. Syntactical, lexical and semantic changes are also irregular and unpredictable, but it is legitimate for linguists to compare these phenomena in an Indo-European framework, for their shared ancestry is proved by systematic phonetic correspondence. Just so, two IE-speaking cultures sang of an epoch-marking war, brought on by the chief god to relieve the earth of mortals. Do these then descend from a proto-epic, sung by people who spoke the language ancestral to Greek and Sanskrit? Can we compare extant narratives of IE-speakers to reconstruct a PIE narrative?

An affirmative answer requires a minimum of three inferences. The first two are explicitly articulated in many introductions to the field, most succinctly by Puhvel: ‘Protolanguage implies protocommunity, protocommunity entails protoculture.’<sup>26</sup> Languages exist in speech, so PIE must have been spoken by a historical group of people—the protocommunity—and, like all such groups, PIE-speakers must have had beliefs, values, rituals, stories, and so on: the protoculture.<sup>27</sup> But it is not enough that PIE-speakers had a culture—we must be sure that we can access it through our sources. So we need a third inference, less often expressed, but crucial to the project of IE cultural

<sup>25</sup> Skepticism about the existence of an ancestral language (e.g. N.S. Trubetskoy, ‘Gedanken über das Indogermanenproblem’, *Acta Linguistica* 1 [1939], 81–9) is no longer tenable. But B. Schlerath, ‘Ist ein Raum/Zeit-Modell für eine rekonstruierte Sprache möglich?’, *ZVS* 95 (1981), 175–202 argues convincingly that, while a proto-language has a time and place in history, our reconstruction is only ‘ein Erklärungsmodell . . . Es ist abstrakter und unwirklicher als die Rekonstruktion im engeren Sinne’ (193); cf. J. Clackson, ‘Time depth in Indo-European’, in C. Renfrew, A.M. McMahon and R.L. Trask (ed.), *Time Depth in Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2000), 2.441–54, at 2.449–50.

<sup>26</sup> Puhvel (n. 17), 13; cf. J. Haudry, *Les Indo-Européens* (Paris, 1981), 4; E. Campanile, *La ricostruzione della cultura indoeuropea* (Pisa, 1990), 11 (‘ogni lingua implica l’esistenza di una cultura’); Watkins (n. 21), 7; West *IEPM*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Critics of IE cultural comparison have shown how political projects determine visions of the protocommunity and its protoculture (see B. Sergent, ‘Penser—et mal penser—les Indo-Européens’, *Annales* 37 [1982], 669–81; Lincoln [n. 19]; J.-P. Demoule, *The Indo-Europeans: Archaeology, Language, Race, and the Search for the Origins of the West* [Oxford, 2023]). I am sympathetic to this critique, but will make a different point here.

comparison: that we may reconstruct the protoculture by the same methods as the protolanguage—namely, comparison of extant descendants. As noted, Indo-Europeanists select these descendants on the basis of their language of composition: poems in Greek and Sanskrit are fair game; poems in Akkadian are not. This is sound method if, and only if, linguistic ancestry is a good proxy for cultural ancestry.

‘Culture’ is a broad category, and the relation between speech traditions and cultural traditions is unsettled in anthropology.<sup>28</sup> Some cultural phenomena are closely bound to language, and so resist transmission between speech communities: in the study of IE metre or wordplay, the third inference is sound.<sup>29</sup> But the case for an IE origin of the *Cypria* depends wholly on narrative parallels.<sup>30</sup> Narratives and narrative devices, characters, images and ideas of all sorts are expressible in any natural language, and frequently spread between different speech communities. Here lines of descent do not track linguistic descent, and the third inference is mistaken.

Internal language change occurs when native learners imperfectly replicate some element of the older generations’ speech, but such changes only take hold in the speech community at large if they are common to a whole cohort.<sup>31</sup> Contact-induced change occurs when native speakers of one language import features of their second, or when second-language learners impose features of their native language onto their target—but again such changes only generalize within a significant bilingual population over a long period.<sup>32</sup> It is, therefore, difficult for outliers to impact the development of a language. Not so for the narrative arts. Everyone speaks, but not everyone tells tales: active bearers of any narrative tradition are vastly outnumbered by passive recipients, and the inventory of tales in any speech community is held by a small number of outliers.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, individual storytellers can have an enormous impact on cultural traditions, and stories can leap from one speech community to another through individuals at home in both. Even where multilingualism is not widespread, one multilingual can make a narrative available in a new language, after which monolinguals can inherit and transmit it by exactly the same mechanism as their ‘native’ tradition. A rich body of scholarship demonstrates that

<sup>28</sup> Some key works: F. Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* (New York, 1940), 243–59; L.L. Cavalli-Sforza et al., ‘Reconstruction of human evolution: bringing together genetic, archaeological, and linguistic data’, *PNAS* 85 (1988), 6002–6; J. Terrell, ‘History as a family tree, history as an entangled bank: constructing images and interpretations of prehistory in the South Pacific’, *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 642–57; J.H. Moore, ‘Putting anthropology back together again: the ethnogenetic critique of cladistic theory’, *American Anthropologist* 96 (1994), 925–48; R.E. Dewar, ‘Of nets and trees: untangling the reticulate and the dendritic in Madagascar’s prehistory’, *World Archaeology* 26 (1995), 301–18; P. Bellwood, ‘Phylogeny vs reticulation in prehistory’, *Antiquity* 70 (1996), 881–90; S.J. Greenhill, T.E. Currie and R.D. Gray, ‘Does horizontal transmission invalidate cultural phylogenies?’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 276 (2009), 2299–306; bibliography in M.C. Towner et al., ‘Cultural macroevolution on neighbor graphs: vertical and horizontal transmission among Western North American Indian societies’, *Human Nature* 23 (2012), 283–305.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, cognate formulas such as the Homeric ὄκέες ἵπποι and the Vedic *āsavas āsvās* are still best explained as reflecting a PIE jingle \**h<sub>1</sub>ókēwes h<sub>1</sub>ékwōs*, ‘swift horses’; see R. Platte, *Equine Poetics* (Washington, DC, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. S. Vanséveren, ‘La reconstruction culturelle du monde indo-européen et la question de l’Orient’, *RAnt* 7 (2010), 253–60.

<sup>31</sup> W. Labov, ‘Transmission and diffusion’, *Language* 83 (2007), 344–87, at 345–6.

<sup>32</sup> G.R. Guy, ‘The sociolinguistic types of language change’, *Diachronica* 7 (1990), 47–67; M.D. Ross, ‘Redefining Guy’s sociolinguistic types of language change’, *Diachronica* 8 (1991), 119–29; S.G. Thomason and T. Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley, 1988), 46–65 and *passim*; Y. Matras, *Language Contact* (Cambridge, 2009), 57–60, 193–271; D. Winford, ‘Social factors in contact languages’, in P. Bakker and Y. Matras (edd.), *Contact Languages: A Comprehensive Guide* (Berlin, 2013), 362–416.

<sup>33</sup> C.W. von Sydow, *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen, 1948), 12–18, 48–52.

the norm in this domain is continuous and multilateral transfer between geographically proximate communities, regardless of language.<sup>34</sup>

Thus stories preserved in unrelated languages can share an ancestor in a story that travelled between speech communities. In the narrative domain, ancestry should be examined in a regional rather than linguistic framework. The IE language family diverged into its main surviving branches in Central and Western Eurasia. The section following argues that at every stage in this process PIE and its descendants were spoken by at least some multilingual speakers of other languages of this region.

## 5. THE SPREAD OF PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN

Every linguist knows William Jones's momentous inference that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin were 'sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists'.<sup>35</sup> Less famous, but no less influential, is his inference about the speakers of these languages: 'we may fairly conclude that they all proceeded from some central country' (3.46).<sup>36</sup> At the dawn of comparative linguistics, migrations from a common homeland were a speculative solution to the puzzle of IE distribution: an IE language was spoken in some region because PIE-speakers once migrated there, and their speech subsequently diverged. Most linguists recognized that migration and divergence could not be the whole story, but accepted it as the normal case: in the mid 1980s Indo-Europeanists could still state that 'a group of related languages is formed when an original linguistic system disintegrates due to disruption of contacts between speakers of individual dialects; the languages are spread to their historically attested territories by migrations of the speakers'.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> E.g. S. Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1946), especially 13–20; von Sydow (n. 33), 11–59; A.B. Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle* (Lund, 1951), to cite only a handful of classic works in the comparative study of folktales. Many foundational studies in this field are based on the historic-geographic method formulated in K. Krohn, *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode* (Oslo, 1926), since criticized on various grounds: C. Goldberg, 'The historic-geographic method: past and future', *Journal of Folklore Research* 21 (1984), 1–18; R.A. Georges, 'The pervasiveness in contemporary folklore studies of assumptions, concepts, and constructs usually associated with the historic-geographic method', *Journal of Folklore Research* 23 (1986), 87–103. But the thesis that folktales diffuse geographically across linguistic borders remains robust: J.J. Tehrani, 'The phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood', *PLOS One* 8 (2013), e78871; R.M. Ross, S.J. Greenhill and Q.D. Atkinson, 'Population structure and cultural geography of a folktale in Europe', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 280 (2013), 1–9; R.M. Ross and Q.D. Atkinson, 'Folktale transmission in the Arctic provides evidence for high bandwidth social learning among hunter-gatherer groups', *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 37 (2016), 47–53; G.S. Martini, J. Kendal and J.J. Tehrani, 'Cinderella's family tree: a phylomemetic case study of ATU 510/511', *Fabula* 64 (2023), 7–30. Pace, on similar grounds, argues for an IE-ANE cultural sphere: 67–9, 207–8.

<sup>35</sup> W. Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones*, 13 vols. (London, 1807), 3.34 (lecture given in 1786 and first published in 1788).

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln (n. 19), 76–100.

<sup>37</sup> Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (Russian original 1984), 1.civ. J. Schmidt, *Die Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Weimar, 1872) is an influential early critique; see Mörpurgo Davies (n. 16), 285–7; more recently A. Garrett, 'A new model of Indo-European subgrouping and dispersal', in S.S. Chang, L. Liaw and J. Ruppenhofer (edd.), *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, February 12–15, 1999* (Berkeley, 2000), 146–56; 'Convergence in the formation of Indo-European subgroups: phylogeny and chronology', in P. Forster and C. Renfrew (edd.), *Phylogenetic Methods and the Prehistory of Languages* (Cambridge, 2006), 139–51; for assessment, see D. Ringe, 'Indo-European dialectology', in J. Klein, B. Joseph and M. Fritz (edd.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Berlin, 2017), 62–75, at 65–7.

Since the mid 1980s this model has come in for critique.<sup>38</sup> Linguists reassessed IE distribution in light of empirical research on how speakers adopt new linguistic behaviours.<sup>39</sup> In the same period, archaeologists were settling on a broad consensus that IE spread from the Western Eurasian Steppe, during and after the fourth millennium B.C.E., with the rise of mobile pastoralism.<sup>40</sup> We now have a better understanding not only of the social and economic circumstances under which IE came to occupy its historical range but also of the mechanisms of language spread plausible in such circumstances.

The Eurasian Steppe was opened to human exploitation by a suite of technologies developed in the fourth millennium B.C.E. Horseback-riding allowed humans to traverse greater distances and control larger herds than they could on foot.<sup>41</sup> The development of milking made herds a source of renewable protein and, with the advent of the woolly sheep, of textiles.<sup>42</sup> Wheeled wagons, pulled by animal traction, could transport shelter, food and water into previously uninhabitable regions, and enabled trade in bulk and at long distance.<sup>43</sup> A new form of subsistence, transhumant pastoralism, was now possible and indeed lucrative: booming textile industries linked urban centres to networks of mobile herders.<sup>44</sup> Horse- and cattle-breeding grew to meet commercial, agricultural and military demand.<sup>45</sup> Taste for metals, precious stones and exotica among emerging elites generated mining outposts and entrepôts—and between them roamed the nomadic stock-breeders and herders now exploiting the vast pasturelands of the Eurasian Steppe, interacting with settled communities along the river valleys and over the mountain passes.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> I.M. Diakonoff, 'On the original home of the speakers of Indo-European', *SAA* 23 (1984), 5–77, at 65–7. C. Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London, 1987) rejected 'migrationist' models, proposing IE spread by demic diffusion (99–177): objections were immediately raised (J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* [London, 1989], 177–81), and processualist scepticism about migration soon met with a counter-reaction (K. Kristiansen, 'Prehistoric migrations—the case of the Single Grave and Corded Ware cultures', *Journal of Danish Archaeology* 8 [1989], 211–25; D.W. Anthony, 'Migration in archaeology: the baby and the bathwater', *American Anthropologist* 92 [1990], 895–914); migrations are today acknowledged to be frequent in human history and prehistory (P. van Dommelen, 'Moving on: archaeological perspectives on mobility and migration', *World Archaeology* 46 [2014], 477–83; P. Heather, 'Migration', *Networks and Neighbours* 3 [2015], 1–21; M.J. Daniels [ed.], *Homo Migrans: Modeling Mobility and Migration in Human History* [Albany, 2022], D.W. Anthony, 'Ancient DNA and migrations: new understandings and misunderstandings', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 70 [2023], 1–6), and a cause of language spread (M. Van de Velde et al. [edd.], *The Bantu Languages* [London, 2019<sup>2</sup>], 4–5). But after Renfrew the migration-divergence account had to be defended rather than asserted.

<sup>39</sup> J. Nichols, 'Modeling ancient population structures and movement in linguistics', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 359–84.

<sup>40</sup> Mallory (n. 38); Anthony; E.E. Kuzmina, *The Prehistory of the Silk Road* (Philadelphia, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> D.W. Anthony and D.R. Brown, 'The secondary products revolution, horse-riding, and mounted warfare', *Journal of World Prehistory* 24 (2011), 131–60. P. Librado et al., 'The origins and spread of domestic horses from the Western Eurasian Steppes', *Nature* 598 (2021), 634–40 and 'Widespread horse-based mobility arose around 2200 BCE in Eurasia', *Nature* 631 (2024), 819–24 argue that horse-riding came much later, but against this see M. Trautmann et al., 'First bioanthropological evidence for Yamnaya horsemanship', *Science Advances* 9 (2023), 1–13.

<sup>42</sup> S. Wilkin et al., 'Dairying enabled Early Bronze Age Yamnaya steppe expansions', *Nature* 598 (2021), 629–33.

<sup>43</sup> For the secondary-products revolution, see A. Sherratt, *Economy and Society in Prehistoric Europe: Changing Perspectives* (Edinburgh, 1997), 158–228, and for an early model of its relation to IE dispersal A. Sherratt and S. Sherratt, 'The archaeology of Indo-European: an alternative view', *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 584–95 (reprinted in Sherratt [this note], 471–85).

<sup>44</sup> A. Porter, *Mobile Pastoralism and the Formation of Near Eastern Civilizations: Weaving together Society* (Cambridge, 2012), 241–50.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony, 341–3.

<sup>46</sup> G. Algaze, *The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization* (Chicago, 1993); Kuzmina (n. 40), 25–38.

Such an economy spreads mobile pastoralist speech traditions not only by conquest but also as settled populations shift language in response to new incentives. To the nomads of the Chalcolithic, farmers could be useful allies. Pastoralism is high-risk—plague or severe weather can devastate herds—and good relations with farming groups insure against disaster.<sup>47</sup> Pastoralists also trade with farmers to secure agricultural products and outlets for their own goods, and such trade is advantageous to mobile groups, who can access multiple markets and control exchange between them. Since the speech of horseback nomads is learned as a second language by settled populations across a wide territory, it often functions as a *lingua franca* in the region: farmers have good reasons to teach their children nomad.<sup>48</sup> Population transfer in either direction favours pastoralist speech traditions: dispossessed pastoralists settle among agriculturalists in large kin-groups, where their language lives on in the home, while herders absorb agriculturalists as individuals: farmer women may marry steppe men, and farmer men seeking fortune may turn nomad, but both must acculturate to their new speech community.<sup>49</sup> Even hostile relations spread pastoralist speech: when settlements are raided and abandoned, displaced farmers must integrate into a mobile economy under the patronage of wealthy herders.<sup>50</sup> These dynamics are so powerful that the rapid spread of a language family across the Steppe by a horse-riding, nomadic, pastoralist culture has recurred many times in Eurasian history. After PIE, the Iranian, Oghuric Turkic, Common Turkic and Mongolic language families spread one after another westward over the Steppe, in each case as settled populations shifted to the language of an expanding nomadic pastoralist group.<sup>51</sup>

The spread of PIE has therefore been linked to a Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze-Age expansion of nomadic horse-riders and stock-breeders, visible in the archaeology of the Steppe. The case is made in extensive detail in Anthony's *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language* (263–457), whose title I have pluralized for this article. Anthony associates PIE with a cultural complex that developed between the Don, Volga and Ural Rivers in the early and middle fourth millennium. Between about 3300 and 2500, this cultural complex spread a package of customs and technologies across the Steppe and beyond: pottery-making and bronze-working techniques, kurgan cemeteries without accompanying settlements, brief and episodic use of sites, the use of horses and wagon transport and transhumant grazing of herds. This assemblage, known as the Yamnaya horizon, not only tracks the expected sequence and direction of PIE spread but also explains it in terms of the processes outlined above: during this period of expansion, PIE probably functioned as a language of interregional communication. Travellers could expect to find PIE-speakers in every entrepôt and urban centre, and interregional utility encouraged language shift.<sup>52</sup> At the frontiers

<sup>47</sup> Porter (n. 44), 21–4; Anthony, 238–9.

<sup>48</sup> A. Pereltsvaig and M.W. Lewis, *The Indo-European Controversy: Facts and Fallacies in Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2015), 144, 210–14.

<sup>49</sup> J. Nichols, 'Forerunners to globalization: the Eurasian Steppe and its periphery', *SSGL* 38 (2011), 177–95, at 180–1.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony, 259–60.

<sup>51</sup> Nichols (n. 49).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. F. Kortlandt, 'General linguistics and Indo-European reconstruction', *Rask* 2 (1995), 91–109, at 105; for parallels, C. Sather, 'Sea nomads and rainforest hunter-gatherers: foraging adaptations in the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago', in P. Bellwood, J.J. Fox and D. Tryon (edd.), *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Canberra, 2006), 245–85, at 257–64. R.A. Pooth, 'A typological overview of Proto-Indo-European' (2015, draft accessed on academia.edu, otherwise unpublished), 3 proposes that the ancestor of extant IE languages was in fact 'a more or less inhomogeneous and increasingly diverging variant or dialect cluster which was mainly used as a second *lingua franca*'. An interregional IE might even facilitate communication between IE dialect communities: speakers of Māori, Tahitian, Marquesan and Hawai'ian used a Common Polynesian into

where Yamnaya pastoralists interacted with settled agriculturalists, local variants developed among bilingual populations. The model explains many linguistic features of the IE family: the distribution of innovations in the central clades suggests a long period of areal development within a dialect continuum; the unusually large number of primary branches is a typical result of gradual differentiation within such a continuum (as opposed to sequential splitting of populations); and the ‘substrate’ features of many IE clades are common outcomes of language shift involving communal bilingualism.<sup>53</sup>

The model is therefore a powerful explanation of IE distribution, and a significant advance in our understanding of Eurasian prehistory. But its implications for cultural comparison have not been fully appreciated. PIE spread as a medium of interregional exchange, and early IE speech communities were composed partly of second-language learners who did not necessarily abandon their own cultural traditions or even their other language(s) in shifting to PIE. Such communities are perfect incubators for multilingual transmission. There is no reason to assume that narratives current in this cultural continuum were bound to one speech tradition, nor to look for their descendants in IE languages exclusively.

It remains only to see how this bears on our focus, the relation between IE narrative traditions and those of the Ancient Near East. The puzzle of the *Cypria* concerns specific speech traditions: *Atra-ḥasis* is written in Akkadian, a Semitic language, and emerged from an intellectual culture where diglossia with Sumerian was typical. In the model above, PIE would have interacted most intensely not with Sumerian or Semitic, but with unknown languages it replaced in the course of its spread. Still, there is linguistic and archaeological evidence of interaction—less intense but still significant—between PIE-speakers and speech communities in Mesopotamia.

## 6. PIE–MESOPOTAMIAN INTERFACES IN THE LATE ENEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGES

PIE and its earliest-attested descendants evince a number of isoglosses with the Semitic languages of West Asia, indicating borrowing in one direction or another.<sup>54</sup> Some show very early contact: PIE *\*k̑(e)r-n(o)-* ‘horn’ (Vedic *śṛṅga-*, Latin *cornū*, Proto-Germanic *\*hurnq*, etc.) matches Proto-Semitic *\*karn-* ‘horn’ (Akkadian *qarnu*, Ugaritic *qrn*, etc.).<sup>55</sup> Others indicate continuing interaction during the process of divergence: Proto-

the nineteenth century: E.J. Drechsel, *Language Contact in the Early Colonial Pacific: Maritime Polynesian Pidgin before Pidgin English* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Proposed by J. Nichols, ‘The epicenter of the Indo-European linguistic spread’, in R. Blench and M. Spriggs (edd.), *Archaeology and Language I: Theoretical and Methodological Orientations* (London, 1997), 122–48; J. Nichols, ‘The Eurasian spread zone and the Indo-European dispersal’, in R. Blench and M. Spriggs (edd.), *Archaeology and Language II: Archaeological Data and Linguistic Hypotheses* (London, 1998), 220–66; and Garrett (n. 37); modelled by M.D. Ross, ‘Social networks and kinds of speech community event’, R. Blench and M. Spriggs (edd.), *Archaeology and Language I: Theoretical and Methodological Orientations* (London, 1997), 209–61. Cf. B. Drinka, ‘Phylogenetic and areal models of Indo-European relatedness: the role of contact in reconstruction’, *Journal of Language Contact* 6 (2013), 379–410. For substrate effects, see Guy (n. 32), Ross (n. 32), and M.D. Ross, *Proto Oceanic and the Austronesian Languages of Western Melanesia* (Canberra, 1988), 7–9; Pereltsvaig and Lewis (n. 48), 135–8.

<sup>54</sup> I mention only the unassailable cases. For more proposals, see Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 2.768–79 (assessment in Diakonoff [n. 38], 28–50); Nichols (n. 52 [1998]); Wikander, 19–31, 97–114. Proposed PIE–Sumerian isoglosses (surveyed by Pace, 47–9) are numerous but unconvincing.

<sup>55</sup> For head and horn words in IE, A.J. Nussbaum, *Head and Horn in Indo-European* (Berlin, 1986), especially 11–13.

Semitic \**tawr-* ‘bull’ (Akkadian *šūru*, Aramaic *tōr*, Ugaritic *ṯr*, etc.) is the source of a widely-attested word for ‘bull’ in IE languages (Greek *ταῦρος*, Umbrian *turuf*, Albanian *ter*, Old Irish *tarb*, Old Church Slavonic *тоуръ*, Latvian *taurs*, etc.).<sup>56</sup> But while these words point to PIE \**táuros* or \**téh<sub>2</sub>wros*, apparent cognates in Germanic (Gothic *stiur*, Old English *stēor*, etc.) lead us to expect Proto-Germanic \**steuraz* < PIE \**stéuros*; and the Indo-Iranian evidence is also unusual (Avestan *staora-* shows initial \**s* but not \**-eu-*).<sup>57</sup> This variety of forms indicates multiple borrowings: several Indo-European speech communities adopted Semitic words for bull, and spread them by diffusion within a dialect continuum.<sup>58</sup> A similar pattern of wandering is evident in a word for wine, attested in the central IE clades (Hittite *wiyan(a)-*, Mycenaean *wo-no*, Latin *vīnum*, etc.), in Proto-Kartvelian (Georgian *yvino*, Laz *ǧvini*, etc.) and in Semitic (Ugaritic *yn*, Hebrew *yayin* < \**wayin*, etc.).<sup>59</sup> These words show that PIE existed and began to diverge in a region characterized by long-range cultural and technological exchange between speech communities. They are, however, no proof of multilingualism, only labels borrowed for novel items.

We are, therefore, fortunate to know the PIE word for wheel, \**k<sup>w</sup>ek<sup>w</sup>lo-*.<sup>60</sup> This noun is formed by reduplication of the verbal root \**k<sup>w</sup>el-* ‘turn in a circle’ (an English equivalent would be ‘turny-turn’). Words for wheel across West Asia match \**k<sup>w</sup>ek<sup>w</sup>lo-* in sound and construction: Hebrew *gilgal* and *galgal* ‘wheel’ as well as Aramaic *galgal* ‘wheel’ are formed by reduplication of a Semitic root meaning ‘turn’; Georgian *gorgali* ‘wheel’ is a reduplicated deverbal from Proto-Kartvelian \**gor-* ‘roll’; these forms are matched phonetically (and perhaps derivationally) by Sumerian *gigir* ‘chariot’.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, the word travelled with a new technology, the wheeled vehicle, whose spread can be

<sup>56</sup> R. Rosól, *Frühe semitische Lehnwörter im Griechischen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013), 153–4. Latin *taurus* seems to be a late loan, though the source is unclear: M. de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages* (Leiden, 2008), s.v. *taurus*.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden, 2010), s.v. *ταῦρος*; G. Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden, 2013), s.v. \**steura-*.

<sup>58</sup> O.J. Szemerényi, ‘Recent developments in Indo-European linguistics’, *TPhS* 83 (1985), 1–71, at 41; cf. Diakonoff (n. 38), 43.

<sup>59</sup> J.P. Brown, ‘The Mediterranean vocabulary of the vine’, *VT* 19 (1969), 146–70; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 2.557–64; R. Beekes, ‘On Indo-European “wine”’, *MSS* 47 (1987), 21–6; Rosól (n. 56), 148–50; L. Gorton, ‘Revisiting Indo-European “wine”’, *JIES* 45 (2017), 1–26; R. Lipp, ‘The word for wine in Anatolian, Greek, Armenian, Italic, Etruscan, Semitic and its Indo-European origin’, in R.I. Kim, J. Mynářová and P. Pavúk (edd.), *Hrozny and Hittite: The First Hundred Years* (Leiden, 2020), 195–229; H.K. Martirosyan, *Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Inherited Lexicon* (Leiden, 2010), 214–15, s.v. *gini*, cf. 212, s.v. *gi*. For Anatolian, see further H.C. Melchert, *Studies in Hittite Historical Phonology* (Göttingen, 1984), 12 n. 17; M. Weeden, ‘The good god, the wine-god and the storm-god of the vineyard’, *WO* 48 (2018), 330–56. The eastern IE clades (Tocharian and Indo-Iranian) lack this word; the western clades borrowed it from Latin (Proto-Germanic \**wīnq*, Proto-Celtic \**wīnom*, cf. non-IE Etruscan *vīnum*; Lipp [this note], 205).

<sup>60</sup> Attested in Greek (*κύκλος* ‘wheel’), Indo-Iranian (Sanskrit *cakrá*, Avestan *caxra*, Ossetian *цалх* ‘wheel’), Germanic (Old Norse *hvél*, Old English *hweogl* ‘wheel’) and Tocharian (A *kukäl*, B *kokale* ‘chariot’).

<sup>61</sup> See Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 2.621–3; Mallory (n. 38), 163; H.H. Hock, ‘Language contact and Indo-European linguistics’, in J. Klein, B. Joseph and M. Fritz (edd.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 2017), 1.7–14, at 1.8–9. A. Murtonen, *Hebrew in its West Semitic Setting. A Comparative Survey of Non-Masoretic Hebrew Dialects and Traditions. Part I. A Comparative Lexicon*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 1986–9), 3.134, s.v. GL(L) gives an extensive survey of Afro-Asiatic cognates (cf. D. Cohen et al., *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques ou attestées dans les langues sémitiques* [Paris, 1970–2012], 2.118–3.129); G.A. Klimov, *Etymological Dictionary of the Kartvelian Languages* (Berlin, 1998), 17, s.v. \**br-*, 31, s.v. \**gor-*: *gr-* gives the Kartvelian evidence. J.A. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon* (Los Angeles, 2006), 81 explains *gigir* as reduplication of *gur/gir* ‘roll’. Cf. Wikander, 123–4.

dated to the latter half of the fourth millennium.<sup>62</sup> But this is not just a borrowed label: in the Semitic, Kartvelian and Indo-European forms, a native verbal root has been reduplicated to form a noun which characteristically does the action of the verb. That is, the construction of the word in one language has been repeated (and phonosemantically matched) in others.<sup>63</sup> This requires multilingual agents of transfer, capable of morphosemantic analysis of both source and target language.<sup>64</sup> Some speakers of PIE were also speakers of Semitic languages of West Asia.

The likeliest zone of interaction was the western range of the Caucasus mountains. This natural barrier between the Steppe and the river valleys was broken when Mesopotamian urban centres to the south sought mineral resources to the north. In the Middle and Late Uruk periods, there developed in the Caucasus a cultural assemblage whose sites are characterized by the blending of Mesopotamian artistic traditions with Yamnaya burial practices: the Maikop culture (c.3700–3100). Northern miners and herders traded with southern farmers through the Maikop passes; it was by this route that the wheeled wagon was introduced to the Steppe (Anthony, 282–99). Thus, while there was no direct interface between large groups of steppe herders and Mesopotamian settled populations, there was an active trade route along which goods, technologies and people travelled between them, and along it, an interstitial culture which blended elements of steppe and floodplain. Exchange lasted for half a millennium, beginning in the formative period of the late-PIE speech community and continuing through the early phases of its expansion, simultaneously with the divergence of Proto-Semitic into its primary East and West branches.<sup>65</sup> We should not expect widespread multilingualism, but we have every reason to think that throughout this period some individuals were at home in both PIE and Proto-Semitic.

Anthropological, archaeological and linguistic evidence, therefore, converges on the hypothesis that for a relatively long period a PIE dialect continuum linked the Steppe from the north Caucasus into the southern Balkans and up the Danube valley, with extensions into Northwest Mesopotamia and around the coast of the Black Sea.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the period in which PIE diverged into its earliest descendants, many speakers of IE languages were also speakers of non-IE languages, and PIE itself was a medium for interregional transmission of culture between speech communities—including the speech communities of West Asia. These circumstances are ideal for the kind of narrative diffusion described in section 4.

## 7. TRANSMISSION OF NARRATIVES ON THE EURASIAN STEPPE

I close by returning to the puzzle of the *Cypria*. On the Westian model of distinct inheritance and diffusion strata in the prehistory of Greek literature, our candidate

<sup>62</sup> The PIE lexicon for wheeled vehicles is a key link between linguistic and archaeological evidence, though the details are disputed: Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 2.627–41; Anthony, 63–75; A. Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization* (Oxford, 2015), 39–50.

<sup>63</sup> Semitic is the likeliest source: reduplicated deverbal agent nouns are common in Semitic (see A.M. Butts, ‘Reduplicated nominal patterns in Semitic’, *JAOs* 131 [2011], 83–108), rare in early IE (e.g. Hittite *asalpatalla-* ‘cosmetician’ < *salpai-* ‘smear’). Vedic reduplicated agent nouns (e.g. *jágmī-* ‘one who goes’ < *√gam-* ‘go’) inherit their reduplication from the perfect stem of the verb: see R. Lazzeroni, ‘Fra semantica e morfologia: i deverbali vedici raddoppiati del tipo *cákri-*’, *SSL* 50 (2012), 7–24.

<sup>64</sup> See Wikander, 133–8 and O. Wikander, ‘L’s and S’s in the Land of Israel: ‘Ereš Yiśrā’el, Jeremiah 10:11, Isaiah 1:5, and lateral and breathy snake killing’, *SEÁ* 86 (2021), 39–72, at 65–70 for two speculative but tempting cases for PIE-Semitic phonosemantic matching in a poetic figure.

<sup>65</sup> J. Huehnergard and N. Pat-El (edd.), *The Semitic Languages* (London, 2019<sup>2</sup>), 1. Cf. Pace, 55–8, who rightly sees contact extending (in new forms) into the Bronze Age.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Nichols (n. 53 [1997]), 134–6.

sources were incompatible. Although the *Cypria* shares much with *Atra-ḥasīs*, parallels with the *Mahābhārata* are more numerous and exact. If this indicates inheritance from an Indo-European tradition older than *Atra-ḥasīs*, we must give up the Near Eastern parallels as coincidence. But the alternative model I have outlined shows that here the distinction between ‘Indo-European’ and ‘Near Eastern’ is unwarranted. Cultural exchange with the Near East did not begin after the spread of Proto-Greek in the Aegean, or even after the differentiation of PIE. It was continuous from the initial expansion of PIE itself: the *Cypria*, *Mahābhārata* and *Atra-ḥasīs* may all share ancestry through multilingual transmission during the mid fourth to mid third millennia.

If all three poems emerged from a common Steppe tradition, they are unlikely to be its sole surviving reflexes. Setting them against a broader background of Greek, Indic and Mesopotamian cataclysmic narratives may reveal a richer set of relations among all three traditions.

The strongest point in favour of the *Cypria*’s IE origin was that in *Atra-ḥasīs* the chief god culls by flood; in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Cypria*, by war. But in a study of Sumerian and Akkadian sources, Chen has shown that, although the motif of a lost golden age is very old in Mesopotamian literature, its termination in a flood is securely attested only from the second millennium B.C.E.<sup>67</sup> Several texts predating or contemporary with *Atra-ḥasīs* show the chief god bringing a golden age to an end with a war. *The Cursing of Akkad* (late third millennium) begins in a period of prosperity and wisdom, but when king Naram-Sin demolishes the temple of Enlil at Nippur, Enlil takes vengeance by sending an army from the highlands to raze his city.<sup>68</sup> The fragmentary *Lament for Uruk* (twentieth century B.C.E.) begins when a divine council is called to address the multiplying human population. Here Enlil decrees the destruction of Uruk, which first falls into chaos and violence as its people pillage their own city, then suffers a military assault by foreign invaders.<sup>69</sup> Thus the flood is only one possibility attested in Mesopotamian narratives of the epoch-marking catastrophe: elsewhere, motifs familiar from the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* (the council of the gods, the burgeoning human population, the chief god’s cull) are joined with war.<sup>70</sup>

What is more, some Indian sources divide cosmic history by a divinely ordained flood.<sup>71</sup> The *Mahābhārata* itself tells the story of Manu (3[37a]185), a pious man who lived in the blessed first age of human existence. Manu takes a small fish into his care. As the fish grows larger and larger, Manu moves it into ever greater vessels, finally releasing it into the ocean. To reward his kindness, the fish tells Manu that a great flood is coming, and instructs him to prepare a ship and outfit it with the seeds of all creatures. As the world recedes beneath the waters, the fish guides Manu’s ship to the peak of the highest

<sup>67</sup> Y.S. Chen, *The Primeval Flood Catastrophe: Origins and Early Development in Mesopotamian Traditions* (Oxford, 2013); see also D. Hämmerly-Dupuy, ‘Some observations on the Assyro-Babylonian and Sumerian flood stories’, in A. Dundes (ed.), *The Flood Myth* (Berkeley, 1988), 49–59; N. Wassermann, *The Flood: The Akkadian Sources* (Leuven, 2020).

<sup>68</sup> J.S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore, 1983): on the date, 11–12.

<sup>69</sup> M.W. Green, ‘The Uruk lament’, *JAOS* 104 (1984), 253–79.

<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Chen argues that the deluge motif was prompted by the frequent figuration of invading armies as a ‘flood’ (201–21); cf. M. Lang, ‘Floating from Babylon to Rome: Ancient Near Eastern flood stories in the Mediterranean world’, *KASKAL* 5 (2008), 211–31, at 222–5.

<sup>71</sup> On the *Mahābhārata* as cosmic history, see Vielle (n. 21). The system of four *yugas* is a late development in the poem, but the division of a golden past from a degraded present is older; see V. Eltschinger, ‘On the early history of the Brahmanical Yugas’, in P.W. Kroll and J.A. Silk (edd.), ‘*At the Shores of the Sky*’ – *Asian Studies for Albert Hoffstädt* (Leiden, 2020), 38–53. For a survey of Indian flood texts, see P. Magnone, ‘Matsyāvatāra. Scenari Indiani del diluvio’, in O. Botto (ed.), *Atti del nono convegno nazionale di studi sanscriti (Genova 23–24 ottobre 1997)* (Pisa, 1999), 125–36, at 126–7.

mountain of the Himalayas, and finally reveals itself as Brahmā.<sup>72</sup> Here we have many elements familiar from *Atra-ḥasīs*: a wise mortal is warned by a patron god of the coming deluge, builds a ship to preserve all species, lands on a mountain peak, and offers a sacrifice. Other elements, however, are missing: the Manu tale gives no reason for the flood and does not connect it to the motif of overpopulation.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, Mesopotamian flood tales influenced several literatures of Iron Age Eurasia, most famously north-west Semitic traditions (Genesis 6–9), but also Greek ones.<sup>74</sup> The flood myth involving Deucalion and Pyrrha, first attested in Pindar (*Ol.* 9), bears a close resemblance to *Atra-ḥasīs*: one mortal man is warned of the flood by his divine patron, the trickster god Prometheus.<sup>75</sup> He saves himself and his wife from destruction, and they survive on the peak of Mt Parnassus, whence they descend to repopulate the earth. By the time the *Cypria* was composed, Greek poets were certainly familiar with the mytheme of a flood as a divine punishment.<sup>76</sup>

Thus the apparent strength of the Greco-Indic parallel turns out to be an artefact of the texts selected for comparison. Although the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* are about war and *Atra-ḥasīs* about a great flood, each poem emerges from a tradition which generated both war and flood tales. In all three traditions we see several configurations of elements selected from a common stock, used to tell the same story: the end of an early phase of cosmic history in a disaster sent by the gods.

In a treatment of this issue in Greek and Mesopotamian literatures, Haubold has argued that the real parallel is a shared set of generic alternatives.<sup>77</sup> In the flood tablet of the Standard Babylonian *Gilgameš*, Ea scolds Enlil for choosing the flood when milder alternatives were available: he might have sent a great beast, a famine, or Erra, god of pestilence and war (11.188–95). The scholiast on *Il.* 1.5 likewise notes that Zeus chose the Trojan War, ‘since he could have destroyed them all by thunderbolts or floods’. For Haubold, these texts confirm that ‘the flood narrative of Mesopotamia can be translated into the war narrative of Greece (and *vice versa*)’, and testify that Greek and Mesopotamian poets worked within ‘one and the same *international* genre of literature’: a cycle of narrative poetry treating cosmic history from the birth of the gods down to the cataclysm, conceived as a war or flood (54–8).<sup>78</sup> It is only necessary to expand the scope of Haubold’s analysis. The matrix in which this international genre took shape includes India, and the Indian material reveals aspects of its development not apparent from the Greek and Mesopotamian material alone.

<sup>72</sup> This story is preserved much earlier in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.8.1.1–6), though the fish is not here identified with any god. Y. Vassilkov, ‘Birds as scouts above the waters: an extended commentary on a motif in the Near Eastern flood myth’, in M. Lisiecki, L.S. Milne, N. Yanchevskaya (edd.), *Power and Speech: Mythology of the Social and the Sacred* (Torun, 2016), 163–79 presents evidence for Bronze-Age versions of the myth in India.

<sup>73</sup> Magnone (n. 71) argues for autonomous development; Y. Vassilkov, ‘Some observations on the Indian and the Mesopotamian flood myths’, *Aramazd* 8 (2013–14), 262–81 for assimilative influence. Pace, 41 gives extensive bibliography for cultural exchange between Mesopotamia and India.

<sup>74</sup> G.A. Caduff, *Antike Sintflutsagen* (Göttingen, 1986).

<sup>75</sup> Deucalion and Pyrrha are attested in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, but there is no evidence of a flood myth in this poem: see M.L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins* (Oxford, 1985), 55–6; D.E. Gerber, *A Commentary on Pindar Olympian Nine* (Stuttgart, 2002), 47 on 50–3. S. West, ‘Prometheus orientalized’, *MH* 51 (1994), 129–49 argues for early assimilation of Prometheus and Enki.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 16.384–93; Scodel (n. 2).

<sup>77</sup> J. Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia: Dialogues in Literature* (Cambridge, 2013), 51–71.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. J. Haubold, ‘Greek epic: a Near Eastern genre?’, *PCPhS* 48 (2002), 1–19, at 18.

Though Haubold avoids speculating on dates and mechanisms of transmission, his genre of cosmic history in Greece depends on the formation of a Hesiodic and Cyclic canon, not long before the sixth century. There is no question that the Greek flood narratives depend (if only indirectly) on a mature Mesopotamian tradition. If we looked only to Greek and Mesopotamian sources, it would be reasonable to guess that the Greek parallels formed under the influence of the Mesopotamian literary canon in the Iron Age—that is, through late and basically unilateral Near Eastern transmission. But attending to India shows that the epoch-marking cataclysm is very old in Greece. Greek tradition has not adopted a Mesopotamian conception of cosmic history wholesale: precisely because the two traditions shared this broad narrative framework, motifs arising in one were easily attracted into the other. The features of the Trojan Cycle that made a Near Eastern origin so persuasive—the identification of Zeus’s advisor Momus with the divine vizier Mummu from *Enūma eliš*, and the *Iliad*’s adaptation of *Atra-ḥasīs*’ myth of the gods casting lots for their domains—need not be given up as coincidences. These details do appear to reflect an Iron Age Greek encounter with Mesopotamian tradition, in the form of a textualized canon of Akkadian literature. But it was not a first encounter: both traditions were already shaped by mutual assimilation.

The manifold resemblances between the *Cypria*, *Mahābhārata* and *Atra-ḥasīs* have no single explanation. They evolved in a recurring pattern of areal diffusion, independent development and reassimilation.<sup>79</sup> Greek, Indian and Mesopotamian traditions each inherited from Early Bronze-Age Steppe tales the framework of an epoch-marking battle, decreed by the king of the gods to reduce the human population. Parallels multiplied over several phases of contact. When flood variants arose within this macro-region, they spread: in the Aegean, the motif of a divinely ordained flood was readily integrated into an existing tale of an epoch-marking catastrophe, the Trojan Cycle.

A comprehensive study could not stop with Greek, Mesopotamian and Indian sources: it would have to take into account Northwest Semitic flood narratives, the myth of human overpopulation preserved in the Avestan *Vendidad* and much else besides. Such a study is beyond the scope of this article, but I hope to have shown that it is a *desideratum* for prehistorians of Greek literature.<sup>80</sup> The processes that brought about this mosaic of correspondences are regional, ongoing through several millennia and are not bound to any speech tradition. They are not neatly divisible into strata of inheritance and transmission, and we cannot simply collate the results of Indo-European and Ancient Near Eastern comparative studies. We must bring their material within the scope of one enquiry.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Wikander, 15, 56–67, 139–46. Multiphase models are well developed in comparative studies of Greek and Near Eastern material: see A. Bernabé, ‘La lucha contra el dragón en Anatolia y en Grecia: el viaje de un mito’, *Huelva Arqueológica* 19 (2004), 129–45; M. Bachvarova, *From Hittite to Homer: The Anatolian Background of Ancient Greek Epic* (Cambridge, 2016); I.C. Rutherford, *Hittite Texts and Greek Religion: Contact, Interaction, and Comparison* (Oxford, 2020), 85–6; B. Ballesteros, ‘On Gilgamesh and Homer: Ishtar, Aphrodite and the meaning of a parallel’, *CQ* 71 (2021), 1–21; Davies (n. 21), 26–33.

<sup>80</sup> This is not to discount existing studies which take a broad approach: motifs associated with this tradition are treated in regional terms in H. Schwarzbaum, ‘The overcrowded earth’, *Numen* 4 (1957), 59–74; K. Mayer, ‘Helen and the Διὸς βουλή’, *AJPh* 117 (1996), 1–15; Ballesteros.