

International Conference

New trends in the study of the history at the onset of the 21st century: Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Crossroads Conference (ANEMCC)

4-5 February 2011, Tbilisi, Georgia

The Conference is organized as the second act of the project “Conceptions of ‘Eternal Capitals’ – From Ancient Cosmopolitan Cities to Modern Megapolises”

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Tbilisi Iv. Javakhishvili State University, Faculty of Humanities.

When Fernard Braudel wrote his pioneering book on the history of the Mediterranean region, the study of large-scale entities (spatial and temporal) constituted a theme of central importance for all scientific disciplines, especially the humanities. At the time, social sciences operated under the rubric of what is broadly known as the "modernist" paradigm, which professed to have developed effective criteria for clearly defining units of analysis and for explaining the historical trajectory of these units. A cardinal element of this intellectual tradition has been the firm belief that the units established by science were not only epistemologically but also ontologically valid. In Braudel's case for instance, "environment", "institutions" and "individuals" were "real" and not "fictive" classificatory distinctions. Of pivotal significance on the other hand, has been the acknowledgement that the writing of "history" had greater analytical potential in so far as it could prioritize large-scale over small-scale units; it is for this reason precisely that Braudel's core concept of the "long durée" involved the meticulous diachronic study of "institutions" and the "environment" but to a lesser extent, of "individuals".

Over the past few decades however, this mode of thinking has been put under severe scrutiny and in certain respects, has been heavily criticized. At the same time, the birth of a new paradigm -that of "postmodernism"- has lead to a shift of attention from the "general" to the "particular". The reasons for this paradigmatic shift are to be traced in contemporary concerns on (i) the conscious neglect of social diversity in social studies, (ii) the empowerment of the "whole" and the simultaneous "disempowerment" of the "individual", (iii) the tendency to attribute an obvious surplus of analytical weight on "global" as opposed to "local" processes, (iv) the great emphasis laid on the reconstruction of a single "history" and the denial of the possibility that multiple "histories" are actually at work and (v) the belief that so far, all aforementioned trends were seen as an achievement and guarantee of scientific "objectivity" and "truth". At the onset of the 21st century, the "postmodern" paradigm has taken an entirely different trajectory. Its main aim has been to create an arena of scientific discourse which:

1. encourages epistemological and ontological multivocality instead of absolutist/monolithic narratives
2. sees boundaries as the product of social negotiation and practical performance and not as predetermined, arbitrary constructs

3. and finally, chooses to emphasize movement and fluidity (in our ways of thinking and in our ways of living) as opposed to stasis.

In the light of all these developments, the idea of an "Ancient History", appears to require some degree of modification; indeed, for some scholars, it would even necessitate the abandonment of the term altogether. The Conference : "New trends in the study of the history at the onset of the 21st century" embarks on the investigation of this very issue: how has the "postmodern" paradigm affected our understanding of the past and to what extent should we allow the further penetration of its principles (diversity, fluidity, mobility, macro-social processes, urbanism) to the practice of the general history?

For the purposes of this conference, two broad thematic sessions have been established. Scholars are invited to contribute papers pertinent to issues such as cultural diffusion and indigenous development, local identity and global process, actor-network theory, world-systems theory, time-geography, population movement, object biographies, trade and gift exchange, islandscapes vs. landscapes, travel and transport technologies, colonization, colonies vs. empires, issues of social urbanism and etc. The second session broadens the conference themes and adopts an interdisciplinary debate concerning the sociopolitical implications of the "postmodern" agenda in the present and the impact of this agenda on the study of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean past.

The aim of this conference is to bring together researchers working on different aspects and to encourage the sharing and examination of a wide spectrum of themes and problems. Moreover, it will provide an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration and will hopefully help to forge and identify new methodologies for dealing with the now widely acknowledged complexity of the Ancient Studies.

The conference will take place in Tbilisi, Iv. Javakhishvili State University, 4-5 February 2011.

Presentations will be 20 minutes in length and will be followed by additional time for discussion. The proceedings of the Conference will be published.

Organizing Committee:

Prof. Eka Avaliani, Iv. Javakhishvili State University, Georgia
 Prof. Gocha Tsetskhladze, The University of Melbourne, Australia
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