

A Comparative Approach to the Oannes Narrative in Mesopotamia and the Prometheus Myth in the Ancient Greek World

Ercüment Yıldırım*

Abstract

The belief systems in Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece were based on the idea that knowledge was transferred from gods to humans. The common belief regarding the source of knowledge in both societies was somehow different. While Mesopotamian societies believed that knowledge was transferred from gods to humans through a being called Oannes, Ancient Greek society believed that Prometheus stole fire, which was the first knowledge, from Zeus. As written in cuneiform scripts, coming ashore as a half-fish and half-man creature, Oannes was thought to teach Mesopotamians various skills, ranging from building houses to agriculture. On the other hand, it is mentioned in the works of Hesiod and Aeschylus in Ancient Greece that Prometheus created humans and taught them all necessary knowledge to continue their lives. The present study compares different beliefs regarding the source of knowledge in two different societies which existed in two different geographical regions and time periods. Additionally, it aims to reveal the ways in which both societies shaped their world views through divine knowledge. For a closer analysis of both belief systems, Mesopotamian cuneiform scripts and Ancient Greek manuscripts were used as primary sources. After each source was examined in detail, modern interpretations of these sources were also analyzed. Finally, common points in both primary sources were identified in order to characterize the present study based on these common points.

Keyword: Oannes, Prometheus, Berossus, Aeschylus, Polyhistor.

* Assoc. Prof., Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of History, Kahramanmaraş/TURKEY, neshali@gmail.com
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Mezopotamya'daki Oannes Anlatımı ile Antik Yunan'daki Prometheus Mitosunun Karşılaştırması

Öz

Mezopotamya'daki ve Antik Yunan'daki inanç, bilginin tanrılardan insanlara ulaştırıldığı fikrine dayanmaktaydı. Fakat, her iki toplumda bilginin kaynağına dair bu ortak inançta bazı farklılıklar bulunmaktaydı. Mezopotamya'da bilginin Oannes isimli bir varlık tarafından tanrılardan insanlara getirildiğine dair bir inanç vardı. Antik Yunan'da ise Prometheus'un ilk bilgi olan ateşi, Tanrı Zeus'tan çaldığına inanılmaktaydı. Denizden gelen yarı balık biçimli bir canlı olan Oannes'in, Mezopotamya insanlarına ev yapmaktan tarıma kadar birçok bilgiyi öğrettiğine çivi yazılı metinlerde rastlanılmaktadır. Antik Yunan'da ise özellikle Hesiod ve Aeschylus'un eserlerinde Prometheus'un insanları yaratıp, yaşamlarını sürdürmek için gereken bilgiyi verdiği bahsedilmektedir. Bu çalışma, birbirinden farklı zaman dilimlerinde ve coğrafyalarda yaşayan bu iki toplumun bilginin kökenlerine dair inançlarını kıyaslamaya odaklanmıştır. Bunların ötesinde her iki toplumun tanrılardan gelen bilgi ile dünyayı nasıl anlamlandırdıkları ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışmamızda, Mezopotamya çivi yazılı metinleri ile Antik Yunan yazmaları ana kaynak olarak kullanılmıştır. Her kaynak ayrıntılı biçimde okunduktan sonra bunlar üzerinde yapılmış modern yorumlar incelenmiştir. Her iki ana kaynakta yer alan ortak yönler tespit edilmiş ve çalışma bu ortak yönler üzerinden kurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Oannes, Prometheus, Berossos, Aeschylus, Polyhistor.

Introduction

Ancient communities which integrated their religious beliefs into their daily life believed that there was the divine power behind every knowledge. They thought that the divine power, which offered all materials necessary for the survival of humankind in the world, also provided human beings with necessary knowledge for the continuity of life. Prior to the agricultural period, humans usually benefited from verbal narratives in order to transfer their practical knowledge on hunting and gathering activities for the survival of following generations. However, the invention of writing expanded the borders of human knowledge beyond human mind and memory during an agriculture-centered sedentarization process. Such knowledge involved answers to numerous questions such as the right time for sowing seeds over the soil, various herbal solutions to headaches, the existence of sun and stars and unknown underground materials and treasures, all of which gradually turned into the humanity's abstract cultural heritage. Although written sourc-

es existed in different Mesopotamian communities, the most developed forms of manuscripts dated back to Assyrian period. These sources were later maintained and transferred to the following period through libraries in order to preserve long-standing human knowledge.

During the millennia following the invention of writing, a new question was raised as far as the accumulation of great human knowledge was concerned: "Where did human knowledge come from?" Members of clergy, who were also considered as scientists of ancient societies, ensured people that the answer to this question was divine knowledge. It can be observed in various heroic narratives in different ancient societies, religious stories and mythoi that the source of knowledge was always claimed to be a divine one. However, narrative details and heroes regarding the source of divine knowledge in these ancient societies usually differed from each other depending on geographical regions and historical periods. In this respect, the present study compares Oannes Narrative in Mesopotamia, which argued that the source of knowledge was a divine source, and The Myth of Prometheus in Ancient Greece in order to underline the transformation of knowledge in this period.

The primary sources of the present study entail cuneiform scripts in Mesopotamia and ancient Greek sources. It is not possible to ascertain when and by whom cuneiform scripts informing about Oannes were written. In addition, narratives which have been preserved until today are considered as rewritings of ancient scripts during Ancient Babylonian and Assyrian period. It can be estimated that they were written during the first millennium BC. On the other hand, narrative style and elements in Oannes narrative imply that the script dated back to Sumerian period. Apart from cuneiform scripts, the only existing ancient source about Oannes narrative is the work of Berossus. Although the period in which this work was written in Greek is a controversial issue, it is very likely that it was written between 290 and 278 BC. However, the work of Berossus did not reach the present day, and it was Alexander Cornelius Polyhistor (100 - 36 BC) who helped transfer Oannes narrative. Similarly, Theogony by Hesiod and Prometheus Vincetus by Aeschylus inform us about The Myth of Prometheus. Theogony by Hesiod, which introduces the origins of Greek gods, is known to have been written in a period between 730 and 700 BC. Prometheus Vincetus by Aeschylus was estimated to have been written in a period between 479 and 424 BC. These dates strengthen the assumption that historians who wrote about The Myth of Prometheus were probably familiar with Oannes Narrative.

The present study mainly focuses on the comparison of Oannes Narrative in Mesopotamia and The Myth of Prometheus in Ancient Greek. It also aims to describe how belief systems in Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece were shaped and how ancient societies perceived the world in these periods. Finally, how lifestyle changes resulting from the transformation of production methods characterized world views in both societies was also discussed.

1. Oannes Narrative

Mesopotamia is the first geographical region with an urban culture centered on an agricultural lifestyle. Mesopotamian urban culture has pioneered the first steps of various developments until today. Among these developments are both concrete and abstract elements such as pottery wheel and an understanding of god. More importantly, Mesopotamian societies successfully transferred their abstract thinking to the upcoming millennia through a writing system invented by them. This narrative tradition encouraged people to question their existence, which paved the way for the emergence of mythoi as the most developed forms of abstract thinking related to the religious beliefs in Mesopotamia¹.

Mesopotamian mythoi are basically answers to humans' questions about creation and gods. It must have soon become a necessity to add new gods, beings and events to the existing ones in order to fill the gaps in these answers. It is also very likely that they needed a being which was neither a human nor a god to ensure a healthy communication between humans and gods. Therefore, various beings such as Oannes, Apkallu, Abgal and Uanna, who were believed to be endowed with divine wisdom, emerged within the course of the time. These mythical beings were depicted as a semi-man and semi-god with a bird head in some reliefs, and they were always associated with wisdom. The number of these wise beings was seven, with each of them having their own names, titles and missions².

- 1 Robert Adams, "Strategies of Maximization, Sability, and Resilience in Mesopotamian Society, Settlement, and Agriculture," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 122 / 5, (1978), pp. 329 - 335.; Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State. Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations*, Cambridge 2004, p. 44 - 90.; Seth Richardson, "Early Mesopotamia: The Presumptive State," *Past & Present*, 215 / 1 (2012), pp. 3-49.; Rivkah Harris, "The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Mesopotamian Myths," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 / 4 (1992), p. 621 - 635.
- 2 Mehmet Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 149 - 150.; Gwendolyn Leick, *Mesopotamia: The Invention of the City*, London 2002, pp. 25 - 26.; Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom in the Ancient World*, London, 2010, pp. 39-41.; Gebhard J. Selz, "Of Heroes and Sages: Considerations on the Early Mesopotamian Background of Some Enochic Traditions" *The*

“U-Anna, who accomplishes the plans of heaven and earth, U-Anne-dugga, who is endowed with comprehensive understanding, Enmedugga, for whom a good destiny has been decreed, Enmegamma, who was born in a house, Enmebulugga, who grew up in a pastureland, An-Enlilda, the conjurer of the city of Eridu, Utuabzu, who ascended to heaven, (...) the seven of them, the seven sages, who originated in the river, who control the plans of heaven and earth”³

According to the text above which is composed of cuneiform narratives in Mesopotamia, it can be understood that wise beings had a special division of labor among themselves. This resulted from Mesopotamian societies' belief that those living in the sky and on the earth existed in a specific order to prevent chaos. Mesopotamians must have thought that these beings too had a particular division of labor and order in their own realms. Mesopotamian belief system was based on the idea that no beings were created without a specific purpose. In this sense, these wise beings transferred the knowledge sent by gods to people without allowing any problems. They were also obliged to remain in their area of responsibility as assigned by gods. Thus, no chaos would happen, and humans would acquire knowledge from these wise beings, which was necessary for them to survive⁴.

Wisdom consisted of two main parts for Mesopotamians. The first part of the wisdom was to recognize gods and know their wishes. This kind of knowledge can only be acquired by understanding the functioning of the universe as created by gods. It also extends to treating diseases and understandings the causes of natural events. The second part of the wisdom is to know how to make practical life easier

Dead Sea Scrolls, Editörler, Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, ve Matthias Weigold, Leiden 2011, pp. 777 - 800.; Erica Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the “Seven Sages”,” *Orientalia*, 30 / 1 (1961), pp. 1-11.; Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods*, Chicago 1995, pp. 246-249.; Don Nardo, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, New York 2009, p. 256.

3 Rykle Borger, “The Incantation Series Bit Meseri and Enoch’s Ascension to Heaven” *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, Editörler, Richard S. Hess ve David T. Tsumura, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 1994, p. 4.; Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 19 / 4, (2010), pp. 277 - 320.

4 Sophus Helle, “The Role of Authors in the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”: Canonization and Cultural Contact,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 77 / 2 (2018) pp. 219-234.; Alan Lenzi, “The Uruk list of kings and Sages and Late Mesopotamian Scholarship,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, 8 / 2 (2008) pp. 137 - 169.; Helge Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic*, Leiden 2011, pp. 107-158.; W. F. McCants, *Kültür Mitleri Tanrıları Yaratmak Ulusları İcat Etmek*, Çev: Merve Tabur, İthaki, İstanbul 2018, pp. 23 - 47.

in the world. Encompassing nearly everything about humans, it involves necessary experiences for the continuation of agricultural life and urban culture⁵.

Mesopotamian wisdom, which acknowledges the belief that a mortal human could never reach divine knowledge, was also initiated by divine wisdom. In the simplest form, gods gave humans a part of their knowledge as a help for continuing their daily lives. A being who acted as a messenger between gods and humans completed this transfer process.

“Where are the seven sages of the primeval ocean? The sacred carp who like their master Ea. With sublime wisdom have been endowed?”⁶

A text extracted from a poem belonging to the Middle Assyrian period (1392-1056 BC) mentions seven wise men sent by God Ea. The first striking point in the text is that these seven wise men came from deep seas which were unfamiliar to humans. Although it is not surprising that these half-fish beings came from seas, it is observed that their wisdom was given by God Ea. It is acknowledged that through writing, these seven wise men gave people the knowledge which they received from God Ea, since Mesopotamian wisdom meant possessing knowledge which extended beyond human life. Knowledge which was forgotten in human mind could only be protected through writing. Therefore, wisdom only existed among people living in the city where writing was widely used⁷.

When the first Sumerian city states were founded, they were governed by administrators which were elected by citizens. These administrators were obliged to obey traditional verbal laws to which the citizens were subjected. However, Mesopotamian city administrators started to enact various laws which they would not obey in the following years. In other words, laws were enacted by kings for the citizens.

- 5 Giorgio Buccellati, “Wisdom and not: The case of Mesopotamia,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101 / 1 (1981), pp. 35-47.; A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Chicago, 2013, pp. 194 - 224.; Erica Reiner, “Fortune-telling in Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 19 / 1 (1960) pp. 23 - 35.
- 6 Benjamin R. Foster, “Wisdom and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Orientalia*, 43 (1974) pp. 344 - 354.
- 7 Yushu Gong, Haiying Yan ve Yinghui Ge, “The Accounts of the Origin of Writing from Sumer, Egypt and China—A Comparative Perspective,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 99 (2009), pp. 137-158.; Hannes D. Galter, “The Mesopotamian God Enki/Ea,” *Religion Compass*, 9 / 3 (2015), pp. 66-76.; Jane McIntosh, *Ancient Mesopotamia: New Perspectives*, Santa Barbara 2005, pp. 70-72.; Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom: A History*, London 2015, pp. 29-34.; F. A. M. Wiggermann, “The Mesopotamian Pandemonium” *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, 77 (2011), pp. 298 - 322.

Mesopotamian kings thus separated themselves from their citizens by a clear line. This could only be achieved by making the claim that the king was the first authority to decide in any matter⁸.

“The god Marduk, the sage among gods, offered me as a present vast understanding and profound intelligence. The god Nabu, scribe of the universe, gave me as a gift the precepts of wisdom. The gods Ninurta and Nergal endowed my body with heroic power and physical strength without equal. I studied the art of the sage Adapa, the hidden knowledge of the entire art of the scribe. I know the ominous signs of heaven and earth. I can discuss them in the assembly of scholars. I am able to debate the series “If the liver is the reflection of heaven” with the expert diviners. I can solve the complicated divisions and multiplications that have no solution. I have read complex texts, the Sumerian version of which is encrypted, and the Akkadian version, difficult to clarify. I have examined inscriptions on stone from before the flood, whose meaning is hidden, obscure, and murky⁹.”

One of the Mesopotamian scripts which clearly drew the line between the king and citizens belong to Ashurbanipal. In this text, the king stated that gods endowed him with various wisdoms such as reading and understanding ancient texts, fortune telling, seeing ominous signs, discussing with other wise men and solving the secrets of numbers. In addition, as he claimed that he could understand stones belonging to the period before the Flood, it can be inferred that he reached an ancient wisdom. This narrative demonstrates that despite acknowledging gods as the source of knowledge, a king could also reach a great wisdom on his own.

Mythoi, which are immortal memories of humankind, were first written in Mesopotamia. Later, they were copied and revised many times depending on the political conditions and understanding of god in the given period. Such revisions can be evidently seen in many copies of Gilgamesh mythos. The work of Berossus is accepted as one of the latest copies of Mesopotamian mythoi. Although he was one of the most important members of the clergy in the Great Esagila Temple in

8 Albrecht Goetze, “Mesopotamian Laws and the Historian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 69/3 (1949), pp. 115-120.; S. A. Jackson, *A Comparison of Ancient Near Eastern Law Collections Prior to the First Millennium BC*, New Jersey, 2008, pp. 1-17.; Ercüment Yıldırım, *Eskiçağ Mezopotamiasında Liderler Krallar Kahramanlar*, Arkeoloji Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, pp. 61-75.; Thorkild Jacobsen, “Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 2/3 (1943), pp. 159-172.; D. P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi*, Oxford 2009, pp. 3-7.

9 Dominique Charpin, *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia*, Chicago 2010, p. 9.

Babylonia, his work did not reach the present day. However, ancient authors such as Eusebius, Syncellus, Josephus, Pliny and Vitruvius quoted from Berossus¹⁰.

“In the first year there made its appearance, from a part of the Erythraean sea which bordered upon Babylonia, an animal endowed with reason, who was called Oannes. (According to the account of Apollodorus) the whole body of the animal was like that of a fish; and had under a fish’s head another head, and also feet below, similar to those of a man, subjoined to the fish’s tail. His voice too, and language, was articulate and human; and a representation of him is preserved even to this day. This being in the day-time used to converse with men; but took no food at that season; and he gave them an insight into letters and sciences, and every kind of art. He taught them to construct houses, to found temples, to compile laws, and explained to them the principles of geometrical knowledge. He made them distinguish the seeds of the earth, and showed them how to collect fruits; in short, he instructed them in everything which could tend to soften manners and humanize mankind. From that time, so universal were his instructions, nothing has been added material by way of improvement. When the sun set, it was the custom of this Being to plunge again into the sea, and abide all night in the deep; for he was amphibious¹¹.”

Alexander Cornelius Polyhistor, who was one of the authors to have quoted from Berossus, offers detailed information about Oannes. One of the main details about Oannes is that this being had the body of a fish and a human head and came from the sea. Various reliefs depicting Oannes have been found over the last century in archeological excavations in Mesopotamia. Oannes reliefs found in these excavations are very similar to those of Polyhistor, which also verifies his depiction of the being. Although the work of Polyhistor states that this being had the

- 10 Geza Komoróczy, “Berossus and the Mesopotamian Literature,” *Acta Antiqua Académica Scientiarum Hungarica*, 21, (1973), pp. 125-152.; Geert De Breucker, “Berossus and the Mesopotamian Temple as Centre of Knowledge during the Hellenistic Period” *Learned Antiquity Scholarship and Society*, Editörler, A. A. MacDonald, M. W. Twomey ve G. J. Reinink, Leuven, 2003, pp. 13-24.; W. G. Lambert, “Berossus and Babylonian Eschatology,” *Iraq*, 38 (1976), pp. 171-173.; Christophes Tuplin, “Berossus and Greek Historiography” *The World of Berossus*, Editörler, J. Haubold, G. B. Lanfranchi, R. Rollinger ve J. Steele, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 177-179.
- 11 Isaac Preston Cory, *The Ancient Fragments: Containing what Remains of the Writings of Sanchoniatho, Berossus, Abydenus, Megasthenes, and Manetho*, London 1828, pp. 25-28.; Cristina Bacchilega ve Marie Alohani Brown, *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*, New York, 2019, pp. 3-5.; Edward Richmond Hodges, *Cory’s Ancient Fragments of the Phoenician, Carthaginian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Other Authors*, London 1876, pp. 57-58.

ability to speak, it is not clearly stated which language it spoke. It is only informed that it gave people knowledge about literature, science and art. Constituting a large part of human body of knowledge, literature, science and art also form the basis for a civilized life. Therefore, it can be said that Oannes taught humans how to become a civilized citizen. In addition, building houses and temples, which are the most significant indicators of a civilized and settled lifestyle, were also taught by Oannes.¹²

Oannes also explained the way in which laws would be brought together as a necessity for the existence of a social community. Laws were listed in Mesopotamian societies for the first time as a requirement of a civilized life. Mesopotamian laws mainly consisted a list of potential punishments for crimes which had not been committed yet. In this respect, their main goal was to turn the society into a civilization. In addition to teaching people how to make necessary adjustments for a civilized life, Oannes also helped them improve their agricultural knowledge, which occupies a central role for the survival of humankind. Therefore, the transition to a settled life resulted in the birth of trial and error method that would improve agricultural knowledge, which passed from father to son through experiences such as the right time for sowing seeds or frequency of irrigation. This body of knowledge is of vital importance for humankind. The question of how first agricultural knowledge was acquired by people was answered by this narrative. Polyhistor explained the first signs of civilization in Mesopotamia through quoting from Berossus and shed light on the basis and emergence of a civilized life by referring to a Mesopotamian mythos and a divine being such as Oannes. Polyhistor's extraordinary narrative is based on quotes from Berossus, who was a Mesopotamian himself¹³.

- 12 Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, Malibu, 1978, p. 6-7.; Robert Drews, "The Babylonian Chronicles and Berossus," *Iraq*, 37/1 (1975), pp. 39-55.; Johannes Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia: Dialogues in Literature*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 147-157.; Lauren Ristvet, *Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 191-194.
- 13 Geert De Breucker, "Alexander Polyhistor and the Babyloniaca of Berossus," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 55 / 2 (2012), p. 57-68.; Arthur Waugh, "The Folklore of the Merfolk," *Folklore*, 71/2 (1960), pp. 73-84.; John Dillery, *Clio's Other Sons: Berossus and Manetho*, Michigan 2015, pp. 58-61.; Lewis Spence, *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria*, New York 2010, p. 112-114.; Robartus Johannes van der Spek, "Debates on the World of Berossus," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte*, 24 (2018), pp. 137-151.; Jeremy McInerney, "Fish or Man, Babylonian or Greek? Oannes between Cultures" *Interactions between Animals and Humans in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Editörler, T. Fögen ve E. Thomas pp. 253-273, De Gruyter, Berlin 2017.

2. Prometheus Mythos

Unlike other creatures living in the nature, humans felt a need to interpret the world around them. People living in different geographical regions attempted to make sense of the world depending on their regions and lifestyles. The first step to making sense of the world is to familiarize oneself with the universe and creation of humankind. Various creation mythoi emerged from the beginning of religious beliefs in Mesopotamia. In these mythoi, gods first created the universe and the life on Earth began. Creation mythos in Mesopotamia has been developed for millennia and reached its most complex form through Enuma Elish mythos. Extending its effect beyond Mesopotamian region, Enuma Elish is considered to have strongly characterized Greek creation mythoi. Theogonia by Hesiod, who is considered to have produced the most developed Greek mythos, narrates creation mythos in Greek belief system. Similar to Enuma Elish, the emergence of gods in an order following a period of chaos is narrated in this work. It standardized Greek belief system, determined a divine hierarchy, and became a reference source for numerous texts written following it¹⁴. Let us now focus on Hesiod's narrative of Prometheus.

In ancient Greek belief system, creations started with a chaos period which continued during the battle of gods. The battle was ended by Zeus when he left underworld to Hades and seas to Poseidon and settled down in the sky as the greatest god. Afterwards, Zeus punished Atlas, Menoetius, Epimetheus and Prometheus, who were from a tyrant generation, and dismissed them. As a result, Prometheus created humankind from clay mixed with his tears in order to take revenge from Zeus and end his domination¹⁵.

- 14 Paul Monaghan, "Péladan's Symbolist "Prométhéide" and the Transformation of the World in" Fin De Siècle" Paris," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 126 (2013), pp. 401-414.; Charles Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod*, New York 1997, pp. 1-12.; Stephanie Dalley ve A. T. Reyes, "Mesopotamian Contact and Influence in the Greek World" *The Legacy of Mesopotamia, Editör*, Stephanie Dalley, Oxford 1998, pp. 107-124.; Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88/1 (1968), pp. 104-108.; Ian Rutherford, "Hesiod and the Literary Traditions of the Near East" *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, Editör, Franko Montanari, Leiden 2009, pp. 9-35.; Walter Burkert, "Oriental and Greek Mythology: the Meeting of Parallels" *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, Editör, Jan N. Bremmer, London 1987, pp. 10-40.
- 15 Carol Dougherty, *Prometheus*, New York 2006, pp. 15-20.; Stephanie West, "Prometheus Orientalized," *Museum Helveticum*, 51/3 (1994), pp. 129-149.; Carl Kerényi, *Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Existence*, Princeton 2020, pp. 88-89.

“But Zeus, being angered in his heart, hid it away from us, having been crookedly deceived by sly Prometheus. He, on account of this, devised for humans pain and dole, Concealed the fire, which the noble son of Iapetos stole. In a hollow stalk of fennel back for mankind’s use, Unheeded by the wise counselor, thunder-delighting Zeus. Then the Cloud-Gatherer in rage addressed the Titan thus: Your schemes surpass all other schemes, son of Iapetos; Now you rejoice at having stolen fire, outwitting me: Much misery both for yourself, yourself and men to be. To them in recompense for fire, I shall bequeath a woe, which they will cherish in their hearts, although it lays them low¹⁶.”

The work of Hesiod mentions that although fire was hidden from humans by Zeus, it was taken to humans by Prometheus. The use of fire was humans’ first step towards a more civilized life as human beings. In other words, it is considered as the first indication of humans’ superiority to other beings with which they lived together. In this respect, the work of Hesiod clearly stresses the fact that the most basic life knowledge was given people by gods. Humans managed to control the fire to eliminate their need to adapt to their natural surroundings, i.e. at least a certain part of it. The journey which started with the use of fire in daily life was the precursor of another journey which took humans to other planets.

As can be seen in the work of Hesiod, the universe was not created by a single creator in Greek mythology. Instead, existing gods struggled with one another in order to dominate the universe. For instance, Zeus did not create the fire; he hid it to prevent people from reaching it. Similar to Oannes narrative in Mesopotamia, humans in Ancient Greece belief system could only reach knowledge which gods allowed them to reach. The fact that Prometheus brought fire, which was to the best knowledge of gods, to humans can be counted as a symbolic transfer of divine knowledge to humans. Even today, the fire depicted as a torch is shown as the symbol of knowledge¹⁷.

16 Hesiod, *Theogony*, pp. 45-55.; Catherine Schlegel ve Henry Weinfield, *Hesiod, Theogony: And, Works and Days*, Michigan 2006, pp. 58-59.

17 B. C. Sproul, *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World*, San Francisco 1979, pp. 157-165.; John D. Beazley, “Prometheus Fire-lighter,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, 43 / 4 (1939), pp. 618 - 639.; James G. Frazer, *Myths of the Origin of Fire*, London 2019, pp. 193-197.; Alexander C. Loney, “Hesiod’s Incorporative Poetics in the” *Theogony*” and the Contradictions of Prometheus,” *American Journal of Philology*, 135 / 4 (2014), pp. 503-531.; Sarah Kofman ve Winnie Woodhull, “Prometheus, the First Philosopher,” *Substance*, 15/2 (1986), pp. 26-35.; David Grene, “Prometheus Bound,” *Classical Philology*, 35 / 1 (1940), pp. 22 - 38.

In Hesiod's Theogony, Zeus takes revenge from Prometheus, who steals fire and creates the humankind, and humans by ordering the creation of woman. Woman is created through collaboration of several gods and sent to Epimetheus, who is Prometheus' brother, in a box to marry him. Later, Pandora, the first woman to be created, is overwhelmed by her curiosity and opened the box. Various troublesome evils such as illnesses, sorrow, misery, lies and hypocrisy escaped from the box and spread among people. Thus, Zeus took his revenge from Prometheus and humans whom he created. Thanks to Hesiod's narrative, humankind and everything about humans started to exist. The only power except gods which humans could use against all evils sent by Zeus was the knowledge symbolized by fire stolen from Zeus. This narrative bears importance in terms of stressing the critical position of human knowledge in overcoming all evils sent by gods¹⁸. While the main plot revolves around the main character, Zeus, in Hesiod's Theogony, "Prometheus Vincitus", a work of Aeschylus, vocalizes Prometheus' thoughts.

"Humans could see at first, but they saw in vain; hearing they did not hear, but like shapes of dreams, in all they did through their lives they acted at random. They knew no woodwork, nor to build a house so its bricks kept off the sun. An anthill life, dug underground in the sunless nooks of caves. When winter came, it was like they'd had no warning. Spring's flowers, summer's fruit—a complete surprise. They lived without thinking at all, until I taught them the hard-to-distinguish stars, how they rise and set¹⁹."

A text belonging to Aeschylus' "Prometheus Vincitus" depicts a life preceding the period when the wisdom was given to humans by Prometheus. First, it is stated that humans led a reckless life which they did not understand. This life was not a settled and accidental life based on hunting and gathering. If it is assumed that a planned life is possible only through a settled life, Prometheus taught humans

- 18 S. M. Adams, "Hesiod's Pandora," *The Classical Review*, 46/5 (1932), pp. 193-196.; Charles Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod*, New York 1997, pp. 166-192.; Richard P. Martin, "Hesiodic Theology" *The Oxford Handbook of Hesiod*, Editörler, Alexander Loney ve Stephen Scully, Oxford 2018, pp. 125-142.; Edgar F. Beall, "Hesiod's Prometheus and Development in Myth," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1, (1991) pp. 355-371.; Jonathan L. Ready, "Homer, Hesiod and the Epic Tradition" *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece*, Editör, H. A. Shapiro, Cambridge 2007, pp. 111-140.; F. Carter Philips, "Narrative Compression and the Myths of Prometheus in Hesiod," *The Classical Journal*, 68 / 4 (1973), pp. 289 - 305.
- 19 Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, pp. 450-470.; Augusta Webster, *The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus*, London 1866, pp. 35-36.

living in a cave how to build a house. The first cities, which were founded as a great symbol of civilization, was the continuation of houses and villages. After a while, humans started to establish settlements and understand the nature instead of just seeing it. As also stated in the text, humans who managed to understand the cycle of seasons also started to forecast the future. They also realized the fact that vegetables were grown depending on the cycle of seasons. Thus, they started to control the growth of vegetables which were grown without any human intervention, which might have initiated agricultural life. Taking these as a departure point, the work of Aeschylus describes the transition from a hunting-gathering lifestyle to an agricultural lifestyle. However, it does not offer an answer to the question of how humans acquired the knowledge necessary for urban life shaped by an agricultural lifestyle²⁰.

“And I taught numbers to them, best wisdom of all, and how ordered letters can store any memory— how writing can be the mother of all art; and I was first to yoke wild beasts for them, to make them servants under strap and saddle, that they might bear great loads for mortal men; I first broke in wild horses to chariot traces, and so began that craze of their pampered rich. And before me no one else made the sea-wanderers, the ocean-vessels, fly with their rippling sails. I invented all these things for the use of men, yet left no scrap of wisdom to contrive a means for myself, to make my sufferings end, a method of escape to keep myself alive. (...) In one brief line learn all of it at once: every human art comes from Prometheus²¹.”

In the work of Aeschylus, Prometheus explains how humans improved their knowledge. First, he states that he taught humans how to count. Counting is the key to possession. Humans learned to count and possess objects around them after they had started a settled life. They counted and possessed various things ranging from animals to vegetables. The notion of property emerged in the period when humans measured different parts of the world and possessed them under the name of property.

20 David Grene, “Aeschylus: Myth, Religion, and Poetry,” *History of Religions*, 23 / 1 (1983), pp. 1-17.; William K. Prentice, “Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus,” *The Classical Weekly*, 15 / 4 (1921), pp. 26-29.; Ian Ruffell, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, London 2012, pp. 57-78.; C. J. Herington, “Introduction to Prometheus Bound,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 1 / 4 (1973), pp. 640-667.; Martin L. West, “The Prometheus Trilogy,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 99 (1979), pp. 130-148.

21 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, pp. 475-490.; Augusta Webster, *The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus*, London 1866, pp. 35-36.

Prometheus also states that in addition to counting, he also taught people how to record what they counted. Until the invention of writing in Mesopotamia, the accumulation of knowledge was limited to what human mind remembered. This was the biggest obstacle to the proliferation of accumulated knowledge in the world. However, with the invention of writing, humans managed to preserve their knowledge for a period much longer than their lives. Because a life without writing is unthinkable, it is reasonable to say that writing has been the most vital part of a civilized life for humans.

Prometheus also mentions that he taught people how to travel faster in the land and on the sea. Humans possessed only local knowledge at the beginning of their agricultural life, as they were not familiar with the world outside their villages. In addition, they were not introduced to an invention or knowledge in another village. In the early ages when knowledge sharing was quite limited, humans started to be acquainted with other societies' lifestyles and habits thanks to their commercial activities. Various developments in the field of transportation contributed to the accumulation of knowledge shared among humans. Thus, they learned to count, write and travel faster from Prometheus and became developed beings in the age of Aeschylus²².

Oannes and Prometheus were the sources of knowledge for Mesopotamian and Ancient Greek societies. Although both societies believed that their knowledge came through different channels, they agreed that it was given them by their gods.

Conclusion

Archeological studies indicate that the fire was first controlled by humans in the period nearly 1.000.000 or 800.000 years ago. After humans started to learn how to use the fire, they were able to cook and lead a healthier life. They also managed to protect themselves against all terrifying animals. The fire also lay the grounds for the birth of mythoi, as humans told one another various stories around the fire. Thus, the development of humans as social beings gained momentum. One of

22 H. S. Long, "Notes on Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 102 / 3 (1958), pp. 229-280.; Anthony C. Yu, "New Gods and Old Order: Tragic Theology in the 'Prometheus Bound'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39/1 (1971), pp. 19-42.; O. J. Todd, "The Character of Zeus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound," *The Classical Quarterly*, 19 / 2 (1925), pp. 61-67.; Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Sin of Knowledge: Ancient Themes and Modern Variations*, Princeton 2000, pp. 32-42.; David H. Larmour, "Eyes, Knowledge and Power in the Prometheus Bound," *Scholias: Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 1 / 1 (1992), pp. 28- 37.

the most critical stages in this social development process initiated by the fire was the emergence of a settled and agricultural life. As humans met a certain share of their physiological needs in their settlements, they attempted to observe and understand the nature. This observation process turned into an effort for making sense of it and humans tried to explain the existence of the universe. Most of their explanations were centered on a superior being, which paved the way for the understanding of worshipping a god. As a result, humans started to explain all elements in the universe through their gods.

Ancient humans explained what they were familiar or unfamiliar with through their gods at the beginning of everything in the universe. Among these, the most detailed and comprehensive explanations were about the creation of humankind. Humans explained gods and their deeds through the invention of cuneiform writings in Mesopotamia, which is called *mythos* today. These *mythoi* were copied and revised many times within time, passed from one society to another to reach the present day.

Mythoi aimed to inform humans about gods and their deeds. Mesopotamian *mythoi* written in cuneiform on clay tablets were taken out of temple storages during festivals and recited in company with music before the believers. A different version of this tradition was also witnessed in Ancient Greece. The visualization of a specific text along with songs in front of an audience, which is called theatre today, was very popular. Therefore, while clay tablets about Oannes, who came from the sea, were read in Mesopotamia, Prometheus in the work of Aeschylus was visualized on the stage in Ancient Greece. The objective of both texts was to inform people about how divine knowledge reached them.

Although *mythoi* in Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece were realistic and credible, they still bore the traces of supernatural elements which could not be fully understood by humans. Additionally, the consistency of *mythoi* was also important since they would answer humans' various questions about beliefs. In this respect, it can be said that Oannes narrative and *mythoi* about Prometheus meet the necessary criteria for credible sources.

The most basic connection between Oannes narrative and Prometheus *mythos* is the fact that both texts refer to gods as the source of knowledge, indicating the inferior status of humans before their gods. In addition, it also provided members of the clergy with a social superiority because they were supposed to possess

divine knowledge. State formation in Mesopotamian societies gave the kings the courage to claim that they were closer to gods compared to their citizens. They also claimed that gods gave them knowledge which were unfamiliar to ordinary people. Thus, they avoided facing revolts and accountability before the citizens. In Ancient Greece, similarly, despotic administrators claimed to have spoken on behalf of gods. Thus, thanks to the texts which stated that knowledge was given by gods, administrators were able to give orders to their citizens.

Another striking similarity between Oannes narrative and Prometheus mythos is the fact that only a certain part of divine knowledge was given to humans. Members of the clergy in both societies persuaded humans about the impossibility of understanding divine knowledge completely. Therefore, humans who thought that they possessed insufficient knowledge obeyed the orders of gods. It seems reasonable that Oannes narrative and Prometheus mythos must have been written to force people to obey the orders of gods.

There are also some differences between Oannes narrative in Mesopotamia and Prometheus mythos in Ancient Greece. The main difference between two societies is their understanding of god. The differentiation of agricultural lifestyle in Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece can be linked to the dominance of an agricultural society in Mesopotamia and a marine society in Ancient Greece. Even though both Mesopotamian and Ancient Greek societies benefited from divine knowledge in order to survive in their daily lives, they were provided with their knowledge for different reasons. Knowledge in Mesopotamia was given as a favor of god for humans, whereas, in Ancient Greece, Prometheus created humankind to take revenge from Zeus and gave them knowledge for their lives as a society. Therefore, unlike Ancient Greece, the battle of gods was not intervened by humans in Mesopotamia.

Another difference between Oannes narrative and Prometheus mythos is that while Mesopotamian societies reached knowledge only through the will of gods, Ancient Greek society reached knowledge thanks to Prometheus without any prior approval of Zeus. Nevertheless, knowledge aimed to explain humans how to survive in their daily lives in both societies. Wisdom, on the other hand, reached clergy and kings, who were considered as special people chosen by gods.

Another intriguing detail in Oannes narrative is the existence of a law sent by gods. All laws were given kings by gods in Mesopotamian societies. Thus, it is not

surprising that Oannes made a law with the order of gods in order to regulate humans' lives. However, laws were made by the society in Ancient Greece. While divine laws formed the basis of a legitimate law in Mesopotamia, they were an integral part of administrative mechanism in Ancient Greece.

Despite their visible similarities and differences, Oannes narrative and Prometheus mythos bear importance in terms of shedding light on the source of knowledge in the ancient world. Ancient people who attributed their knowledge to their gods seem to have attempted to make sense of the world thanks to their knowledge.

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