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MIGRATION AND NARRATION: HOW EUROPEAN HISTORIANS IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES TOLD THE HISTORY OF HUMAN MASS MIGRATIONS OR *VÖLKERWANDERUNGEN*

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ABSTRACT

Historians' interest in the history of human migrations is not limited to recent years. Migrations had already figured as explanatory factors in connection with cultural and historical change in the work of classical and ancient studies scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the writings of these scholars, migrations acted as historical landmarks or epochal thresholds and played a key role in the construction of geo-historical areas. This model has been called "migrationism" and cannot be explained simply on the basis of the history of individual disciplines, but must be seen in its complex interaction with scientific and historical contexts. However, "migrationism" does not relate to fixed political and scientific positions or movements. For this reason, it cannot be explained adequately by using a historically or ideologically based approach. Relying on narratological approaches, this article examines migration narratives that historians of this period used to explain the rise and fall of ancient civilizations. Referring to contemporary historiographical representations of the ancient Near East, it distinguishes three main narratives that are still common today: narratives of foundation, narratives of destruction, and narratives of mixtures. In this sense, analyzing older migration narratives helps us to sharpen the critical view on the genealogy of our own views on the history—and present—of human migrations.

Keywords: history of historiography, narratology, migration history, migrationism, ancient Near Eastern studies, paradigm of rise and fall

There can be little doubt about the importance of human migrations in our present world. Political discourses in the European countries have increasingly been shaped by the free movement of workers, refugee crises, and anti-migration campaigns. Because of these developments in our very recent past and present, migrations have advanced to being one of the focal subjects of historiography. Historians of all disciplines and epochs are studying the history of human migrations, using a wide range of tools and methods to do so. It has become almost impossible to keep up with even the main works in this highly dynamic and

1. This article is based on research made possible by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, project WI 4102/2-1 (2014-2017) at the Institut für Altorientalistik, Freie Universität Berlin. All translations from German sources are mine. Where expressions or phrases posed translation difficulties, I have included the original German wording in parenthesis.

diversified field.[2] A look at the history of historiography, however, makes clear that historians' interest in migrations is anything but new. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, certain fields of ancient and classical studies in particular, such as archaeology, prehistory, and ancient Near Eastern studies, focused on questions relating to the origins and the wanderings of certain peoples, races, and nations. Anthropology and archaeology were dominated by contemporary approaches such as diffusionism, which put forth the "wanderings of people"[3] as general explanations for cultural and historical change.[4] Far from being restricted to anthropology and prehistory, migrations played a vital role in other historiographical fields too—albeit they were not associated with claims to such general explanatory relevance. Classicists, for instance, traced the rise of ancient Greece back to the invasion of the Indo-European Dorians,[5] and Assyriologists and Egyptologists were eager to reconstruct the migration history of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt in their endeavors to explain the genesis of the first civilizations in human history.[6] Of course, the obvious example of historical scholarship in this vein is that on the three hundred years of European history that we still refer to as the migration period or *Völkerwanderung*—a period that has been used for centuries to mark the divide between late antiquity and early medieval history.[7]

However, historiographical "migrationism,"[8] having come under heavy fire by the 1960s at the latest, gave way to different approaches. In archaeology, structuralism and so-called processual approaches dominated, and most scholars either focused completely on synchronicity or tried to explain cultural and historical change with reference to internal rather than external factors.[9] As a

2. See, for an overview, Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, *What is Migration History?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009); Sylvia Hahn, *Historische Migrationsforschung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2012).

3. Alfred C. Haddon, *The Wanderings of Peoples* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

4. See, on cultural diffusionism, Woodruff D. Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 140-161; Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 201-216.

5. See Hans-Joachim Gehrke, "Griechische Wanderungsnarrative und ihre Wirkung," in *Vom Wandern der Völker: Migrationserzählungen in den Altertumswissenschaften*, ed. Felix Wiedemann, Hans-Joachim Gehrke, and Kerstin P. Hofmann (Berlin: Ed. Topoi, 2017), 41-66, https://edition-topoi.org/articles/details/griechische-wanderungsnarrative-und-ihre-wirkung.

6. See Felix Wiedemann, "Völkerwellen und Kulturbringer: Herkunfts- und Wanderungsnarrative in historisch-archäologischen Interpretationen des Vorderen Orients um 1900," *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 51 (2010), 105-128.

7. There is a large body of literature on the historiography of the migration period. See, for instance, Alexander Demandt, *Der Fall Roms: Die Auflösung des römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt* (Munich: Beck, 1984); Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Walter A. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Roland Steinacher, "Wanderung der Barbaren? Zur Entstehung und Bedeutung des Epochenbegriffs 'Völkerwanderung' bis ins 19. Jahrhundert," in Wiedemann, Gehrke, and Hofmann, eds., *Vom Wandern der Völker*, 67-95, https://edition-topoi.org/articles/details/wanderung-der-barbaren-zur-entstehung-und-bedeutung-des-epochenbegriffs-voe.

8. William Y. Adams, Dennis P. van Gerven, and Richard S. Levy, "The Retreat from Migrationism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978), 483-532.

9. See, in general, Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

result, invasions and migrations fell out of historiographical fashion up to the 1990s. What is more, recent research has exposed some of the major events depicted in the older literature as "invented migrations."[10] In other cases, modern interpretation has changed so much that scholars use the traditional terms with evident ambivalence—most prominently in case of the "Barbarian migration" or *Völkerwanderung*.[11] These new results and the criticism of the old approaches and narratives raise the question of why archaeologists and historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were so fascinated by mass migrations and why references to such incidents appeared sufficient to explain historical developments that were in fact much more complex. As an answer, historians of archaeology and historiography have put migrationism in its political and social context, pointing to the mass movements caused by industrialization, colonization, and wars that scholars in the early twentieth century had witnessed or experienced.[12] Moreover, most of the later critics have emphasized ideological motives, citing the prominence of collective entities, like peoples, nations, and races, in the migrationist literature. There can, of course, be no doubt that European nationalism and racism played a pivotal role in the rise of diffusionism and migrationism. Most prominent in this context is the so-called Aryan myth, with its focus on the supposed dispersion of Indo-Europeans or Aryans as a superior race destined to rule.[13] However, there is no exclusive correlation between archaeological and historiographical migrationism, on the one side, and certain political positions or movements, on the other. Thus, it cannot be explained adequately using historically or ideologically based approaches. As recent studies have shown, neither the nineteenth-century scholarly discourse on peoples and races nor contemporary migrationism can legitimately be reduced to racism and nationalism.[14]

For this reason, I will follow a different path, focusing on the actual historiographical accounts and the way that archaeologists and historians represented and narrated human migrations. Narratological approaches to historiography have convincingly pointed out recurring patterns or plots that historians use to

10. Harald Kleinschmidt, *Menschen in Bewegung: Inhalte und Ziele historischer Migrationsforschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2002), 33-34.

11. See, for instance, Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*; Hubert Fehr and Philipp von Rummel, *Die Völkerwanderung* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2011).

12. John Chapman, "The Impact of Modern Invasions and Migrations on Archaeological Explanation," in *Migrations and Invasions in Archaeological Explanation*, ed. John Chapman and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Hadrian Books, 1997), 11-20; Heinrich Härke, "Archaeologists and Migrations: A Problem of Attitude?," *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (1998), 19-45; Neil Asher Silberman, "The Sea Peoples, the Victorians and Us: Modern Social Ideology and Changing Archaeological Interpretation of the Late Bronze Age Collapse," in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE*, ed. Trude Dothan, Gitin Seymour, Amihay Mazar, and Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998), 268-276.

13. See the classical account of Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (London: Chatto & Windus Heinemann, 1974). For a critique of the term "myth" in this context, see Felix Wiedemann, "The Aryans: Ideology and Historiographical Narrative Type in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascism and Nazi Ideology*, ed. Kyriakos Demetriou and Helen Roche (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 31-59.

14. See Chris Manias, *Race, Science, and the Nation. Reconstructing the Ancient Past in Britain, France and Germany* (New York and London: Routledge 2013).

synthesize different actors, spaces, and events into coherent narratives.[15] Thus I will argue that the persuasiveness and the persistence of historiographical migrationism was closely bound up with the general function of migrations in European narrations of history. I have chosen accounts on migrations in the ancient Near East from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as historiographical examples for several reasons: First, although my focus is chiefly on the German context, contemporary ancient Near Eastern studies were much more international or pan-European than other historiographical fields of the time and, as such, serve the additional purpose of showing the transnational character of historiographical narratives.[16] Second, migration narratives in this field were indeed notably charged with political and ideological meanings and played a vital role in contemporary colonialism and anti-Semitism. Finally, the historiography of the ancient Near East demonstrates how modern writers continued to draw heavily upon traditional narratives, in this case, the Bible and ancient Greek historiography. However, I must first delineate my theoretical approach and the central concepts of the article.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES

Migrations have always been key motifs of fictional and nonfictional—factual[17]—narratives: they have played a vital role in myths and novels, as well as in historiographical accounts, since ancient times.[18] But what makes accounts of human migrations so particularly worth telling? The answer, to some extent, lies in the character of these kinds of occurrences. There are indeed some aspects of migrations that qualify them especially well for narrative representation: A migration is a singular and completed occurrence comprising the departure of a certain person or group from a certain area, the migration itself, and finally, the definitive settlement of the person or group in a new territory. Thus, the narrative

15. Since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative,* 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–1988), a huge number of narratological studies on historiography have been conducted. For an overview of the debate, see Daniel Fulda, *Historiographic Narration*, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/historiographic-narration.

16. On the history of ancient Near Eastern studies in general, see, among others, Svend A. Pallis, *The Antiquity of Iraq: A Handbook of Assyriology* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956); Omar Carena, *History of the Near Eastern Historiography and Its Problems: 1852–1985* (Kevelar: Butzon u. Bercker, 1989); Michael Seymour, *Babylon: Legend, History and the Ancient City* (London and New York: Tauris, 2014). Studies on British and French research on the ancient Near East usually focus on the beginnings of the archaeological excavations in Mesopotamia or on the decipherment of the cuneiform script. See, for instance, *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie: Actes du colloque*, ed. Annie Caubet (Paris: La documentation française, 1995); Mogens T. Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land, 1840–1860* (London: Routledge, 1996); for the German context, see, among others, Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2009); Ursula Wokoeck, *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945* (London: Routledge, 2009).

17. Gérard Genette, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 4 (1990), 755-774.

18. Cf. note 4.

representation of such an event not only meets the basic Aristotelian definition of a story—namely, that it has a discernible beginning, a middle, and an end[19]—but also enables one to connect very different elements. Even in their simplest form, accounts of human migrations stretch over the period between departure and settlement and encompass different spaces and different actors. If stories can be described, with the French philosopher Paul Ricœur, as a "synthesis of the heterogeneous,"[20] migration narratives meet this definition well: they enable us to combine very different characters and spaces, thereby transforming the contingency of events into a more-or-less coherent story.[21]

As narratological approaches to historiography have convincingly shown, the same occurrences can be narrated in very different ways. One way to differentiate among migration narratives is according to their content (real or fictive) or to the status of the narrator (it makes a difference whether the narrator is involved in the story or is external, that is, outside the course of events).[22] In this sense, representations of real or verified migrations differ from mythical or fictional accounts, as personal memories recorded by migrants do from retrospective accounts or scientific studies. However—apart from the fictional or nonfictional status of the content or from the position of the narrator—representations of migrations also feature different narrative patterns or plots. Thus they can be distinguished according to how the narrated events are arranged into a sequential order and how they are formed into "stories of a particular kind."[23] One can therefore identify a relatively limited number of historiographical migration narratives—meaning certain patterns or plots that historians use for the arrangement of the events and the narrative representation of the history of migrations. These narratives turn out to be consistent and constant or flexible and adaptable depending on the historiographical contexts. Contrary to the position taken by Hayden White, who regards narrative structures or plots as universal and unchangeable, it is necessary to embed historiographical narratives in their cultural, political, and ideological contexts. However, even though narratives are always told from a certain point of view and thus are never neutral or objective, they are not usually linked exclusively with fixed political or ideological positions. Rather, as any story can be told from different perspectives, narratives are open to different,

19. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b.

20. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, I, 66.

21. For a more detailed analysis of the attractiveness of (historiographical) migration narratives, see Felix Wiedemann, Kerstin P. Hofmann, and Hans-Joachim Gehrke, "Wanderungsnarrative. Zur Verknüpfung von Raum und Identität in Migrationserzählungen," in Wiedemann, Gehrke, and Hofmann, eds., *Vom Wandern der Völker*, 9-37, https://edition-topoi.org/articles/details/wanderungsnarrative.-zur-verknuepfung-von-raum-und-identitaet-in-migrations.

22. The instance of the narrator and his or her relationship to the author is one of the key questions of narratology. For an overview, see Uri Margolin, *Narrator*, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrator; *Author and Narrator: Transdisciplinary Contributions to a Narratological Debate*, ed. Dorothee Birke and Tilmann Köppe (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2015); for the field of historiography, see Genette, *Narrative*; but see also the critical discussion of this approach by Axel Rüth, *Erzählte Geschichte: Narrative Strukturen in der französischen Annales-Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 32-35.

23. White, *Metahistory*, 7.

even contradictory valuations and positions. As a result, narratives can generate their own counter-narratives.[24]

As we will see, examples of mechanisms like this at work can easily be found in the historiography of migration. In the following, I will focus on three major plots used by historians and archaeologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to represent the very early migrations in the ancient Near East. As already indicated, mass migrations or *Völkerwanderungen* have traditionally been used to mark the emergence or beginning of civilizations or new eras as well as to indicate historical ruptures: they represent, at the same time, beginnings and endings. Thus, historiographical migration narratives of this period can be distinguished into (1) narratives of foundations, (2) narratives of destructions and those narratives used to explain both, beginnings *and* endings. As I would like to show, most important and most interesting in this respect are (3) narratives of mixture.

FOUNDATION NARRATIVES

From ancient mythology to modern historiography, there are numerous examples of migrations being used to mark the birth or foundation of certain social entities. The basic pattern of a foundation narrative can be summed up as follows: a group immigrates into a certain territory (or conquers it), and the succeeding appropriation of the country gives rise to something completely new: a new city, a new state, a new nation, or an entirely new civilization. It is an initial act that transforms the land as well as the invaders, but it also stands at the very beginning of something of general importance—usually a nation, an empire, or a civilization. Essentially, foundation narratives cover the occurrences in the period stretching from the immigration or invasion, through the settlement and the initial acts (for example, the foundation of certain institutions, the promulgation of basic laws, and so on). Since they revolve mostly around the appropriation of a certain land by a certain group, they clearly aim at the legitimization of territorial claims. This is one reason that historiographical foundation narratives particularly flourished during the age of European nationalism and colonialism. Moreover, Europeans' interest in people they supposed to have been the bearers and disseminators of culture mirrored their own colonialist self-perception as the modern bearers of culture, whose duty or burden it was to spread civilization around the globe.[25] However, although the political and ideological context might explain the modern popularity of foundation narratives, it does not explain their genesis: far

24. Terms like "counter-narrative" or "counter-history" were originally coined in Jewish studies: see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); see also, for example, Susannah Heschel, "Jewish Studies as Counterhistory," in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 101-115. Recently, they have gained currency in postcolonial studies as well, for example, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 50.

25. On the colonial background of migrationism, see Neil Asher Silberman, "Promised Lands and Chosen Peoples: The Politics and Poetics of Archaeological Narrative," in *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, ed. Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 249-262; Trigger, *History*, 211-313.

from being genuinely modern, they have a long history that can be traced back to antiquity.[26]

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foundation narratives in particular were used to explain the rise of human civilization. One can find a striking expression of this in the introduction to the first volume of the popular German *Propyläen-Weltgeschichte*, "The Awakening of Humanity" (1931), written by the work's editor, Walther Goetz, a liberal historian and politician:

> It appears always to have been new and immigrant peoples who created the most ancient centers of higher culture, in the Near East, in China and India. The Near East is an example of this: we do not know where any of its peoples originated or how they came to the places that became their new homes—the only assertion we can make with certainty is that they did not originally dwell in the places in which they would one day be permanently settled. But where were their original homes and to what families of nations did they belong?[27]

The idea that the ancient Near Eastern civilizations were founded by immigrants was far from new. Already, Greek historians like Herodotus had given detailed descriptions of what was known—or said—about the origins and wanderings of the peoples they mentioned in their accounts.[28] By far the most important source in this respect is, of course, the Old Testament. In their shortest form, the Biblical Table of Nations (Genesis 10) and the succeeding chapters include several foundation narratives: the descendants of Noah appear as wandering founders of all nations, whereas an insertion tells the story of Nimrod and Asshur, the founding fathers of the cities of ancient Mesopotamia. However, the most prominent biblical migration stories are certainly Abraham's journey from Ur into the Land of Canaan and the conquest of the very same land by his descendants after their Exodus from Egypt (the so-called *Landnahme*). Of course, the Christian historians, archaeologists, and Orientalists of the nineteenth century did not simply reiterate and retell what is written in the Old Testament. However, the extent to which they continued to draw on biblical narratives is remarkable, given how difficult it was to reconcile their central elements with contemporary research.

As an example, I will refer only to the overlaps between the Cushites and Chaldeans, as mentioned in the Bible, with the Sumerians in modern scholarly literature, since their roles as founders of Babylonian civilization are astonishingly similar. Although Babylonia, or "the Land of Shinar," is presented in the Old Testament as a birthplace of human civilization (Genesis 11), the biblical narrative was anything but clear about the identity of its first inhabitants and founders. Whereas the Table of Nations names Nimrod, a son of Cush and "the mighty hunter before the Lord," as founder of the Mesopotamian cities, other chapters point to the so-called Chaldeans. Since the Chaldeans were also known from classical sources, where they are cast as wise people, magicians, and founders of astrology, they seemed to fit perfectly the role of mythical founders of

26. Cf. note 4.

27. Walter Goetz, "Einleitung," in *Propyläen Weltgeschichte. Erster Band: Das Erwachen der Menschheit*, ed. Walter Goetz (Berlin: Propyläen, 1931), xxv. On the importance of the *Propyläen* world-history, see Hartmut Bergenthum, *Weltgeschichten im Zeitalter der Weltpolitik: Zur populären Geschichtsschreibung im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Munich: M Press, 2004), 85-91.

28. Regarding the forms and functions of ancient migration narratives, cf. note 4.

civilization.[29] As late as 1868, the Austrian Orientalist Carl Sax published a long article entitled "On the Early History of Babylonia and on the Nationality of the Cushites and Chaldeans" in which he pointed to the latter as the most mysterious of all the ancient *Urvölker* (original peoples) who had influenced all succeeding civilizations of Asia and Europe.[30] The central questions for contemporary scholars were to what family of nations or to what race[31] the Chaldeans belonged and whence they had come. Sax believed them to be of Indian descent, but most scholars of the time claimed a Semitic origin for the Chaldeans. The decipherment of the cuneiform script in the middle of the nineteenth century complicated the question, however.[32] Although ancient Babylonian and Assyrian (today referred to as two variants of Akkadian) turned out to be Semitic languages, the presence of bilinguals in the Semitic writing system proved that this highly complex form of writing could not have been invented for the representation of a Semitic language.[33] The Irish clergyman Edward Hincks was presumably the first scholar to identify elements of a non-Semitic language, for which the name "Sumerian" became established.[34] Already, guides to the British Museum of the 1880s and 1890s presented the entry of this people as "the beginning of civilization in that country, for they brought with them along with their religion, their legends and traditions, their laws, their art, building knowledge, agricultural skill, and that great civilizer of nations—the art of writing . . . .[35]

This is a striking example of the ongoing appeal of the foundation narrative as delineated above: the founders brought nearly everything from elsewhere—some unnamed place—to southern Mesopotamia, and no invention or development seemed to have taken place in Babylonia itself. Other scholars were more cautious, but that the Sumerians were more or less alone responsible for the genesis of Babylonian civilization was always presented as fact; Eduard Meyer, the most distinguished German historian of ancient history in the early twentieth century, put it quite clearly: "Without doubt, this civilization was essentially created by the Sumerians."[36] Even though most historians and Orientalists did not adhere to

29. See Joachim Oelsner, "Chaldäa," in *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike: Band 2*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 1086.

30. Carl Sax, "Ueber die babylonische Urgeschichte und über die Nationalität der Kuschiten und der Chaldäer," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 22 (1868), 1-69.

31. There was no general difference in the use of terms like "family of peoples" or "family of nations" *(Völkerfamilien)* on the one hand and races *(Rassen)* on the other in nineteenth-century scholarly discourse.

32. On the history of the decipherment, see Pallis, *Antiquity*, 132-187; Maurice Pope, *The Story of Decipherment: From Egyptian Hieroglyphic to Linear B* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975); Peter T. Daniels, "The Decipherment of Ancient Near Eastern Scripts," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East: Vol. 1*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 81-94.

33. On the cuneiform script in general, see Irving Finkel, *Cuneiform* (London: British Museum Press, 2015).

34. On the term and its history, see Jerold S. Cooper, "Sumer, Sumerisch," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie: Band 13* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 291-295.

35. British Museum, *Assyrian Antiquities: Guide to the Kouyunjik Gallery* (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1883), 4.

36. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums Bd. 1.2: Die ältesten geschichtlichen Völker und Kulturen bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Cotta 1913), 435.

the school of thought known as Pan-Babylonism,[37] which held that all achievements of human history could be traced back to Babylonian (meaning Sumerian) origins, the outstanding importance of the Sumerians was beyond question: as inventors of the supposedly oldest system of writing, the cuneiform script, they seemed to have been the first people in human history who had risen above the "natural condition of mankind" and passed the threshold to history and culture.[38] Some scholars even tried to find this historical role reflected in the Sumerian physiognomy: the British anthropologist Arthur Keith identified the Sumerians as a "race of pioneers" by studying skulls from the ancient Sumerian city of Ur that had been excavated by Leonard Woolley in the 1920s.[39]

As mentioned above, European historians usually identified with the founders of civilizations, so the Sumerians were highly esteemed in historiographical accounts of the time. However, the narrative position of cultural founders has always been an ambivalent one and thus offers possibilities for counter-narratives: against the background of contemporary cultural pessimism and the *Angst* about the decline of civilization, historical peoples who exhibit *only* cultural skills could be presented as weak or even decadent. Thus, some authors presented the Sumerians as an over-civilized or unnatural people, unable to defend themselves against their enemies. After the First World War, especially for German scholars like Bruno Meissner, the downfall of the Sumerians became a warning and cautionary example of how "a highly talented, but unhardened people" (*ein hochtalentiertes aber ungestähltes Volk*) would ultimately surrender in the struggle for existence.[40] Of course, he actually meant the supposedly overly culture-oriented modern Germans, who, he felt, were in danger of being subjugated and destroyed by more warlike people from outside.

There was broad consensus among scholars about the question of who was responsible for the disappearance of the Sumerians: the Akkadians. Like all Semitic peoples, the Akkadians were believed to be nomadic invaders from the desert who later founded the first ancient Mesopotamian Empire. Since most scholars agreed that all Near Eastern empires were erected by Semites, their assumed historiographical role can be described as that of founders as well. However, the role of conquerors is not less ambivalent than the role of founders of a culture, as we will see in the following. The Semitic peoples were

37. On Pan-Babylonism, see Michael Weichenhan, *Der Panbabylonismus: Die Faszination des himmlischen Buches im Zeitalter der Zivilisation* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2016); in addition, see Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 236-243.

38. Especially in the German context, this reflected the fundamental distinction historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists drew between the so-called *Naturvölker* and the *Kulturvölker*, since it was the art of writing that marks this sharp distinction. On the history of the concept, see Klaus Grotsch, "Naturvölker/Kulturvölker," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie: Band 6*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1984), 635-641; on the importance for German anthropology, see Zimmerman, *Anthropology*.

39. Arthur Keith, "Report on the Human Remains," in *Ur Excavations: Vol 1: Al-'Ubaid. A Report on the Work Carried out at al-'Ubaid for the British Museum in 1919 and for the Joint Expedition in 1922–1923*, ed. British Museum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 216; see also the famous account by C. Leonard Woolley, *Ur of the Chaldees: A Record of Seven Years of Excavation* (London: Ernest Benn, 1929).

40. Bruno Meissner, *Könige Babyloniens und Assyriens: Charakterbilder aus der altorientalischen Geschichte* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer), 42-43.

initially presented as destroyers in relation to the very early history of ancient Mesopotamia.[41]

NARRATIVES OF DESTRUCTION: THE NOMADIC SEMITES

Human mass-migrations have at least a dual function in modern historiography. Just as they indicate foundations and beginnings, they also mark the destructions and endings of certain empires, nations, or whole epochs. Thus, the basic scheme of historiographical narratives of destruction can be summed up as follows: a certain group enters a certain territory, destroying the previously existing political, cultural, and social structures and institutions there. Usually this narrative is based on acute differences and clear hierarchies between the immigrating and the sedentary populations: Coming from mostly unnamed and untamed spaces, like deserts, steppes, and mountains, the immigrants appear as barbarians attacking and destroying the civilized or cultivated world. One can distinguish two variants or types of destruction narratives: classical invasion narratives, meaning stories about violent and belligerent mass immigrations that led to a sudden destruction of empires and nations, and infiltration narratives. This second type presents the act of immigration as a slow and insidious process, stretching over a certain period of time.[42] However, the result is more or less the same: the end of the pre-existing political, social, and cultural structures. Both narratives reflect anxieties that one might find in all eras and cultures. However, there can be no doubt that the fear of being attacked and the fear of being slowly undercut by alien invaders and immigrants were especially common at the fin de siècle.

By far the best-known example of a destruction narrative in European historiography is, of course, the traditional representation of the *Völkerwanderung*. According to this narrative, Germanic masses immigrated from the north and east into Central Europe, thereby causing the end of the civilized world of classical antiquity. Hence, the *Völkerwanderung* has always numbered among the explanatory factors in historical accounts of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire—although whether this external factor was decisive or merely the straw that broke the camel's back was a subject of some dispute. What is more, Rome, and its fall, has generally come to be seen as epitomizing the fragile and fugitive character of civilization.

As with historiographical representations of beginnings, this narrative—barbaric invaders putting an end to a flourishing or already decayed civilization—was never restricted to the historiography of late antiquity. Whereas in European historiography, the ancient Germans epitomized barbaric or noble invaders, in ancient Near Eastern studies it was usually the Semitic peoples who filled this genuinely ambivalent role. One of the main reasons that destructions and endings in the Near East were associated with Semites was that Semites were regarded as

41. This also applies to representations of the Aryans. Their dominating role as heroic warriors and founders of states and empires in European historiography opens at the same time counter-narratives in which they appear as barbarians and destroyers. Cf. note 12.

42. This distinction is derived from Biblical studies. See Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 72-77.

originally nomadic peoples. The association of nomads with destruction and barbarism, however, is anything but new and can be traced back to antiquity as well. Reflecting such traditional prejudice against nomads, Orientalists, anthropologists, and archaeologists of the early twentieth century considered the role of the Semitic nomads in the Near East in a more general way. In doing so, they usually referred to the highly influential work of the Leipzig geographer and ethnologist Friedrich Ratzel. Ratzel considered sedentariness to be the main condition of human culture and civilization. He emphasized that even after mankind had become sedentary, the deserts and steppes remained a reservoir of wild, nomadic peoples, who would periodically form themselves into threatening human waves: "For such a wave the comparable image of a glowing stream of lava, scorching everything in its path, is not too daring."[43] This was the basis of his general law of migration, according to which the central areas of civilization are periodically overwhelmed or steamrolled by nomadic invaders from surrounding areas. One of the first academic fields to adopt Ratzel's theory was ancient Near Eastern studies. Most important in this respect was the Berlin Assyriologist and archaeologist Hugo Winckler, who developed a whole theory based on the premise that the "starving and rapacious mob of Arabia"[44]—meaning the Semitic nomads—would periodically destroy the Near Eastern civilizations. Thus, he expatiated upon how the uncivilized nomadic tribes of the Arabian Desert had formed themselves into distinct peoples between 3000 BCE and 1000 CE and overrun the so-called Fertile Crescent.[45]

One can reveal how these ideas shaped the interpretation of history by studying the way that Assyriologists and historians discussed the relationship between the Akkadians, supposedly the first Semitic immigrants into ancient Mesopotamia, and the Sumerians, the supposed founders of civilization. For most scholars, there appeared to be no doubt that the Semites had arrived as cultureless barbarians, who simply appropriated the cultural achievements of the Sumerians. Furthermore, based on the assumption that the relationship between the two peoples was antagonistic, most scholars of the late nineteenth century depicted the immigration of the Semites into Mesopotamia as a destructive invasion. It is certainly not a matter of chance that the most comprehensive account of the invasion narrative was published during the First World War, when alien invasion and conquest were real threats. It was the British archaeologist and Assyriologist Leonard King who, in the first volume of his influential *History of Babylonia,* summed up the end of the Sumerians:

> The rise of Babylon to a position of pre-eminence among the warring dynasties of Sumer and Akkad may be regarded as sealing the final triumph of the Semite over the Sumerian. His survival in the long racial contest was due to the reinforcements he received from men of his own stock, whereas the Sumerian population, when once settled in the country, was never afterwards renewed. . . . The great Semitic wave, under which the Sumerian

43. Ratzel, *Ursprung*, 36.

44. Hugo Winckler, *Die Völker Vorderasiens* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899), 10.

45. *Ibid*., 10-15; similar, for example, is Hugo Winckler, "Das alte Westasien," in *Weltgeschichte: Zweiter Band: Westasien*, ed. Hans Helmolt (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1901), 7-10. The theory of the so-called Semitic waves became a standard approach in ancient Near Eastern studies of the early twentieth century. See Wiedemann, *Völkerwellen*.

sank and finally disappeared, reached the Euphrates from the coast-lands of the East Mediterranean.[46]

In contrast, other historians and Orientalists depicted the immigration of the Semites into ancient Mesopotamia not as an open war, but as a slow process. As long ago as 1884, Eduard Meyer emphasized that the settlement of the Akkadians must have been mainly peaceful, referring to later Semitic migrations—by the Aramaeans or Arabs—as well as to the movements of modern Bedouins. Initially, he argued, the Semites had been weak and were unable to dominate the culturally superior Sumerians. Only the continuous infiltration of tiny groups and their quick adoption of civilization led to increasing Semitic influence and, ultimately, domination.[47] However, whether the immigration was represented as invasion or infiltration, those stories always concluded with the end of the Sumerian founders and the ultimate triumph of the Semitic nomads.

One need not subscribe to the opinion that the whole Orientalist discourse on Semitic languages and peoples was skewed by anti-Semitic biases, but anti-Semitism was definitely a central factor that caused these scholars to consider the Semitic peoples to be especially well-suited to the role of destructive immigrants. Generally, the negative figure of the Semitic nomad comprised all Semitic peoples; therefore, it might be said that it was "anti-Semitic" in the literal sense of the word.[48] However, against the backdrop of contemporary European hatred toward Jews, the descriptions of the ancient Semites as a permanent threat to civilization were clearly aimed at their supposed modern heirs and representatives: the Jews. Contemporary evocations of an invasion or infiltration of Germany by migrating Jews from Eastern Europe displayed striking similarities to the scholarly discourse on the invading or infiltrating Semites in ancient Mesopotamia.[49] Most Orientalists and historians confined themselves to insinuations, but the most distinguished of these scholars, the famous Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, was quite explicit in this respect, openly avowing the connection between the Akkadians and the Jews. Delitzsch's praise of the cultural achievements of the Sumerians was followed by a description of how this civilization had been

46. Leonard W. King, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria II: A History of Babylon. From the Foundation of the Monarchy to the Persian Conquest* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), 319.

47. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 160-161.

48. Since the term "anti-Semitism" has come to mean modern hatred toward Jews and has been used exclusively in this sense, it is simply an anachronism to "take anti-Semitism at its word, literally that is, as targeting all Semites and not only the Jews" (Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: The Formation of a Secret," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 7, no. 2 [2009], 136). There has never been a "historically unique, discursive moment, whereby whatever was said about Jews could equally be said about Arabs, and vice versa" (Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008], 18). On the genesis and history of the concept, see Moshe Zimmermann, *Deutsch-jüdische Vergangenheit: Der Judenhass als Herausforderung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 25-50; see also James Renton, "The End of the Semites," in *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?*, ed. James Renton and Ben Gidley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 99-140 (though his almost complete exclusion of nineteenth-century German sources is problematic in this context).

49. On the German discourse on the *Ostjuden*, among others, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness: 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

"sucked in and bled dry" (playing with the German words *aufsaugen* and *aussaugen*) by invading Semites. Thus, he ended with a solemn warning: "Since voluntarily becoming a people with no homeland, the Jewish people have represented at least an equal danger."[50] Given this "historical-archaeological variant of anti-Semitism,"[51] it cannot come as a surprise that the relationship between Semites and Sumerians—the so called "Sumerian question"[52]—became an important reference for anti-Semitic ideologues. The infamous Houston Stewart Chamberlain, for instance, discussed this issue in detail in his *Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, one of the most influential anti-Semitic books of the time.[53]

However, the association of the Semitic with nomadic raiding and destruction was just one possible representation of the Semites. Since the position of nomads in the European—and not only in the European—imagination has always been highly ambivalent, the associations were not all negative. The most important *positive* image in this context is certainly the myth of the noble Bedouin, which should not be confounded with the much more famous myth of the noble Savage.[54] Unlike fantasies about island-dwellers in the South Sea, the Bedouin's appeal was not based on the apparent harmony of life with nature in a land of milk and honey, but on the challenges and hardships of a supposedly uncorrupted life beyond civilization. Originally adopted from Arab sources by European travelers and writers of the nineteenth century, the noble Bedouin became a well-established figure in writings on the history and culture of the Near East.[55] Drawing on this tradition made it possible to present the Semitic migrations in a different way and to establish alternative narratives. Accordingly, for some historians and Orientalists, the Semites advanced to the role of heroic conquerors, hardened by the challenges of the desert, who renewed the decadent civilization of the Sumerians. It is in any case worth noting that although it was not at all uncommon to identify the early Hebrews and the invading Israelites

50. Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die große Täuschung: Kritische Betrachtungen zu den alttestamentlichen Berichten über Israels Eindringen in Kanaan, die Gottesoffenbarung am Sinai und die Wirksamkeit der Propheten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1920), 103.

51. Andrea Becker, "Neusumerische Renaissance? Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Philologie und Archäologie," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 16 (1985), 237.

52. Franz H. Weissbach, *Die sumerische Frage* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1898); on the contemporary debate and its political context, see Jerold S. Cooper, "Sumerian and Aryan: Racial Theory, Academic Politics and Parisian Assyriology," *Revue d'Histoire de Religions* 210, no. 2 (1993), 169-205; Netanel Anor, "Joseph Halévy, Racial Scholarship and the 'Sumerian Problem,'" *Philological Encounters* 2, no. 3-4 (2017), 321-345.

53. Houston S. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ungekürzte Volksausgabe. Band 1* [1899] (Munich: Bruckmann, 1932), 421-423.

54. On the noble Savage, see, among others, Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Entzauberter Blick: Das Bild vom Guten Wilden und die Erfahrung der Zivilisation* (Berlin: Medusa, 1981); Terry J. Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

55. See Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "Der edle Beduine," in *Der Alteritätsdiskurs des Edlen Wilden: Exotismus, Anthropologie und Zivilisationskritik am Beispiel eines europäischen Topos*, ed. Monika Fludernick (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2002), 281-296; in general, see Kathryn Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Felix Wiedemann, "Zwischen Völkerflut und Heroismus: Zur Repräsentation der Beduinen in kulturhistorischen Deutungen des Vorderen Orients um 1900," in *Die Begegnung mit Fremden und das Geschichtsbewusstsein*, ed. Judith Becker and Bettina Braun (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 207-228.

of the Old Testament with the noble Bedouins,[56] German scholars, in particular, were eager to separate them from the Jews of later times. Most important in this respect was the concept of "post-exilic Judaism" introduced previously, in the early nineteenth century, by Martin W. L. de Wette, one of the founding fathers of German biblical or "higher" criticism: according to this notion, it is essential to distinguish clearly between the Hebrews or Israelites of the early period and the later Jews (the so-called *Spätjudentum*).[57] Theories like this enabled scholars to prevent Jews from become the objects of romanticization, and to restrict the role of noble Semitic warriors to the Arabs or to their supposed precursors, such as the Akkadians.[58] This narrative pattern was also applied to the Sumerian question. Hence the Breslau Assyriologist, Bruno Meissner, contrasted the "sedate" and even degenerate Sumerians with the invading Semites, mentioning the invaders' supposed strong bodies and brave physiognomy.[59] Although the Semitic immigrations still put an end to the—decadent—Sumerians in stories like Meissner's, they also represent the beginning of something new. By marking both an ending and a (new) beginning, these migration narratives come full circle, suggesting that the incidents narrated form part of a cyclical chain of events. Winckler's wave theory displays just such a cyclical character, delineating an ongoing process of destruction and recovery through the periodic invasions of Semitic nomads.[60] In this sense, this narrative clearly fits into the classical rise-and-fall paradigm and has often been used to explain the beginnings and endings of civilizations or empires or—in a more general way—to reflect the rhythms of history. However, the theory of the Semitic waves involved a shift of focus from single immigrations or invasions to recurring and continuing migrations (and their supposed patterns). Far from being unique acts of land-seizure in a distant

56. See, in general, Daniel Martin Varisco, "Orientalism and Bibliolatry: Framing the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century Protestant Bible Texts," in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian R. Netton (London: Routledge, 2013), 187-204; in addition, see William G. Dever, "Israelite Origins and the 'Nomadic Ideal': Can Archaeology Separate Fact from Fiction?," in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE*, ed. Trude Dothan, Gitin Seymour, Amihay Mazar, and Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998), 220-237.

57. Wilhelm M. L. de Wette, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmatik in ihrer historischen Entwickelung dargestellt: Erster Theil: Biblische Dogmatik Alten und Neuen Testaments, oder kritische Darstellung der Religionslehre des Hebraismus, des Judenthums und Urchristenthums Zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1813); see, on de Wette, James Pasto, "W. M. L. de Wette and the Invention of Post-Exilic Judaism: Political Historiography and Christian Allegory in Nineteenth-Century German Biblical Scholarship," in *Jews, Antiquity, and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, ed. Hayim Lapin and Dale B. Martin (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2003), 33-52; in addition, see Rolf Rendtorff, "The Image of Postexilic Israel in German Scholarship from Wellhausen to Rad," in *Shaʿarei Talmon. Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emmanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 165-173.

58. See Felix Wiedemann, "The North, the Desert, and the Near East: Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß and the Racial Cartography of the Near East," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 12, no. 2 (2012), 326-343.

59. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* (Heidelberg: Winter 1920), I, 16.

60. Winckler, *Die Völker Vorderasiens*; cf. note 44. For more details, see Felix Wiedemann, "Zirkuläre Verknüpfungen. Völkerwanderungen und das Motiv der Wiederkehr in den Wissenschaften vom Alten Orient um 1900," in Wiedemann, Gehrke, and Hofmann, eds., *Vom Wandern der Völker*, 137-160, https://edition-topoi.org/articles/details/zirkulaere-verknuepfungen.-voelkerwanderungen-und-das-motiv-der-wiederkehr-.

past, migrations advanced to become important factors of human history capable of shaping the present in the same way that they shaped the past. This raises new questions about the character of past as well as of modern societies.

NARRATIVES OF MIXTURE

As already mentioned, historiographical migration narratives are not only about movements of certain peoples through time and space. They actually seek to explain the origins and the genesis of civilizations. As delineated above, the answer that foundation narratives provide in this respect is quite simple: Ancient civilizations were founded by outside invaders who brought important skills along with them. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this narrative lost its credibility and persuasiveness. Historians and archaeologists had identified so many different peoples and races in the ancient Near East (and not only there) who were believed to have consecutively and continuously migrated into the region, that the identification of just one key people as the original bringers of civilization appeared increasingly implausible. If centers of ancient civilization like Mesopotamia had always been targets of mass migrations, these regions must have been inhabited by populations that were very mixed in character. Thus it was only logical to regard exactly these mixtures—and not the immigration of just one single people—as a precondition for the rise of civilization. Consequently, the late nineteenth century saw the rise of narratives of cultural and racial mixture. According to these narratives, civilizations are based not on purity but on the amalgamation and integration of heterogeneous elements. Even nationalist historians like Eduard Meyer were very clear in this respect and rejected the premise of pure peoples or races. Furthermore, Meyer was convinced that the further development of civilization is always contingent on mixture: "the higher the culture, the greater the degree of mixture tends to be. Purity of blood, autochthony, keeping foreign influences at bay is of so little advantage that, on the contrary, the more a people has adopted and amalgamated foreign influences into an inner unity, the more capable that people generally is."[61]

There was astonishingly general agreement on this issue among European archaeologists and historians in the early twentieth century. Consequently, the rise of certain historical entities—civilizations, empires, or nation-states—was told as an ongoing mixture: Various groups or peoples with a different set of capabilities, achievements, and experiences enter a certain territory over a certain period of time; initially they fight each other, but eventually a process of mutual imitation, adaptation, and assimilation starts, one that ultimately results in mixture and conflation. Since it had become increasingly obvious that all *modern* nations were of mixed character, with a high level of migration, this view obviously reflects contemporary experiences and thoughts. In this respect, the metaphor of the "melting pot," presumably coined by the British author Israel Zangwill for modern immigration societies, lent itself equally well to ancient civilizations.[62]

61. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 80.

62. See Joseph H. Udelson, *Dreamer of the Ghetto: The Life and Works of Israel Zangwill* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 190-209; in general, see Sarah Wilson, *Melting-Pot Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

The Babylonians were the epitome of a mixed nation in antiquity that had given rise to a powerful civilization and empire. Again, this view has its roots in the Bible: already the city of the confusion of tongues in Genesis, the capital of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, as depicted in other parts of the Old Testament (most important the book of Daniel), seemed to be populated by a heterogeneous population. For this reason, nearly all historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized the mixed character of the ancient Babylonians. Historians who adhered to this narrative presented the origins of civilization in a way that differed from the one mentioned above. They saw the Babylonian civilization not as a Sumerian import, nor as being in a racial war with the Semites, but as a highly productive mixture of these two races. As the British Assyriologist Archibald Sayce put it: "The Babylonian civilisation, with which we are at best acquainted, was the result of this amalgamation of Sumerian and Semitic elements."[63] Referring to the narrative of the recurring waves of migration, the German philosopher and historian Hermann Schneider established a general law of Mesopotamian history based on the ongoing mixture of peoples and races: "Thus, the creators and bearers of civilization are not Sumerians, Hittites or Persians, not Ancient Babylonian, Canaanite or Aramaic-Chaldean Semites, but consistently mixed peoples.[64]

Far from being restricted to Near Eastern or ancient history, the idea that nations are born out of racial mixture was also pivotal in some European nationalisms.[65] Most important in this respect was the English case. In contrast to (and in rivalry with) the traditional focus on the Germanic Anglo-Saxons, a "new racial history"[66] became established in the late nineteenth century, one that presented British history as an amalgamation of different invading races, including supposedly prehistoric ancestors as well as Celts, Romans, Angles, Saxons, Danes, Vikings, and Normans (French). Accordingly, the mixture of all these races appeared as the foundation of British strength and—last but not least—the power of the British Empire.[67] Not astonishingly, British writers identified similarities between the supposed mixed origins of their own nation and those of other empires in history. Of course, the Romans were the chief object of such comparisons,[68] but the Babylonians were also notably prominent in this discourse. George Rawlinson, one of the first historians to write a general account of the ancient Near East using the new results from archaeology and Assyriology,

63. Archibald H. Sayce, *Early Israel and the Surrounding Nations* (London: Service & Paton, 1899), 200; in addition, see, for instance, George S. Goodspeed, *A History of the Babylonians and Assyrians* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1903), 50; Morris Jastrow, *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria: Its Remains, Language, History, Religion, Commerce, Law, Art, and Literature* (Philadelphia and London: Lippincott, 1915), 120.

64. Hermann Schneider, *Kultur und Denken der Babylonier und Juden* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907), 26.

65. See on this the excellent study by Manias, *Race, Science, and the Nation*.

66. Simon John Cook, "The Making of the English: English History, British Identity, Aryan Villages. 1870–1914," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no. 4 (2014), 630.

67. See, in general, Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Etnnicity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); see also the instructive sketch by Geoffrey R. Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War 1886 –1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 7-18.

68. See Richard Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen: The Imperial Origins of Roman Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2000).

was already drawing parallels between the mixed character of the English, the Romans, and the Babylonians: "Like the Romans in ancient, and the English in modern Europe, they [the Babylonians] were a 'colluvio gentium omnium,' a union of various races between which there was marked and violent contrast. It is now generally admitted that such races are among those which play the most distinguished part in the world's history, and most vitally affect its progress."[69]

A lot of British scholars followed Rawlinson in this comparison and claimed general superiority for mixed races: "Mixed races are invariably the best; it is the more pure-blooded peoples who fall behind in the struggle of existence."[70] German and French historians were usually more cautious in this respect, but most European scholars of the early twentieth century agreed on this issue.

However, one should not confound the contemporary discourse on mixture generally with the romanticization of hybridity and difference in postmodern and postcolonial literature of the later twentieth century. Despite the approval of migration and mixture as source of civilization, this phenomenon remained highly problematic, and the whole discourse was ambivalent. Most scholars mentioned positive and negative effects of mixtures at the same time, thus offering the possibility for counter-narratives. The central question in this respect was simply *who* the immigrants were. Meyer was quite clear in this regard, claiming that the "inner unity" and fruitful "amalgamation" of peoples or nations was dependent on the harmony of the components, but "where that does not succeed, the mixture is ruinous."[71] As the contemporary discourse had it, there could be different reasons for the failure of a mixture to find harmony, too many elements in the mix, for instance, or a general incompatibility between them (meaning: peoples having supposedly antagonistic physical or mental features). For this reason, historiographical narratives of mixture always revolved around the identification and classification of the individual elements (meaning peoples) of which a civilization or nation was believed to be composed. It was precisely these issues that linked the culture- or ethno-historical narratives of the historians and archaeologists to the "bio-historical narratives"[72] of racial scientists. Furthermore, issues relating to the differentiation between supposed positive and negative elements were of key importance in emerging disciplines like eugenics or, as it was called in Germany, racial hygiene *(Rassenhygiene)*.[73] Thus, in addition to stories about successful mixtures and the rise of civilization as a consequence of migrations

69. George Rawlinson, *The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World or The History, Geography, and Antiquties of Chaldaea, Assyria, Babylon, Media and Persia: Vol. 1* (London: Murray, 1862), 70.

70. Sayce, *Early Israel*, 200.

71. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 80: "wo, das nicht gelingt, ist die Mischung verderblich."

72. Veronika Lipphardt, *Biologie der Juden: Jüdische Wissenschaftler über "Rasse" und Vererbung 1900–1935* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 35-38.

73. There is a large body of literature on the history of eugenics. See, in general, Stefan Kühl, *Die Internationale der Rassisten: Aufstieg und Niedergang der internationalen eugenischen Bewegung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2014); Philippa Levine, *Eugenics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); for the German tradition of racial hygiene, see Peter Weingart, Jürgen Kroll, and Kurt Bayertz, *Rasse, Blut und Gene: Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

into a certain territory, history seemed also to offer examples of negative mixtures—not least in the ancient Near East. Although scholars like Schneider, who later joined the Nazi party, praised the mixture of Sumerians and Semites as a kind of Babylonian "big bang," but conferred far less approval on later Semitic immigrations.[74] The epitome of an empire in which the mixture of peoples seemed to be too exaggerated and extreme was the neo-Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar—though this image also has its roots in the Bible.[75]

CONCLUSION

There are, of course, ways of telling the history of early migrations other than those delineated in this article, and it would be wrong to try to reduce the historiography of migration to these three patterns alone. A detailed study would certainly reveal additional migration narratives for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and different ones for newer historiography. However, it would not be difficult to find examples of the three narratives discussed here in today's discourse on migration. Even though foundation narratives, as delineated above, are dismissed as naïve in recent academic writings on the rise of civilizations, variants and elements of these older stories are still common. Generally, supposed founders of civilizations have a greater presence in popular archaeological accounts than in academic discourse. A striking example of this is the field of so-called pseudo-archaeology,[76] especially when it comes to the supposed extraterrestrial roots of human civilization. Taken as a narrative, Erich von Däniken's books, for instance, are astonishingly similar to historiographical accounts of the nineteenth century—with the aliens assuming the same role as mythical founders like the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia.[77] It is even easier to find examples of the continuity of the destruction narrative. Apart from the new currency of the *Völkerwanderung* in historical explanations of the decline of the Roman Empire,[78] connections among mass movements, destruction, and decline were omnipresent in anti-migration campaigns during the recent European refugee crisis. Finally, narratives of mixture dominate not only modern and postmodern literature on globalization, migration, and multiculturalism, but recent historiography as well. Most present-day historians and archaeologists who are discovering the ethnic

74. Schneider, *Kultur und Denken*, 15.

75. Rawlinson, *Five Monarchies*, 321-322.

76. See, among others, *Archaeological Fantasies: How Pseudoarchaeology Misrepresents the Past and Misleads the Public*, ed. Garrett G. Fagan (London: Routledge, 2007). However, it should be emphasized that the term "pseudo-archaeology" (or pseudo-science in general) is highly problematic, since what is believed to be real or good science and pseudo-science always depends on historical, social, and epistemological contexts. See, in general, *Pseudowissenschaft: Konzeptionen von Nichtwissenschaftlichkeit in der Wissenschaftsgeschicht*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, Veronika Lipphardt, Jens Thiel, and Christina Wessely (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

77. See Jonas Richter, *Götter-Astronauten: Erich von Däniken und die Paläo-Seti-Mythologie* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2017).

78. See, among others, Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

diversity of ancient societies are probably not aware of the longer historiographical tradition of the narrative they employ. However, since all narratives are fundamentally ambivalent and offer possibilities for constructing counter-narratives, a thorough examination of our present-day (not only historiographical) writings on migration might reveal their ambivalences and rewritings, too. In this sense, analyzing older migration narratives helps us to sharpen the critical view on the genealogy of our own views on the history—and present—of human migrations.

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