Mémoire volontaire? Canonisation as cultural innovation in Antiquity

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1 Introduction: Canonisation as Cultural Innovation

In essence, this Chapter argues, canonisation is about interacting with the past in an attempt to shape the present and thus to determine the future.[1] As a socio-cultural process resulting in the *Umwandlung* of cultural memory, establishing a canon is one of the most important acts in defining a cultural identity.[2] In the famous words of Jan Assmann: "Kanon ist die *mémoire volontaire* einer Gesellschaft".[3] Once a canon has been established, it functions as a normative tool: "Ein Kanon antwortet auf die Frage: Wonach sollen wir uns richten".[4] It thus becomes "an instrument for measurement", which is the full meaning of the word in ancient Greek.[5] Assmann has argued that the creation of a canon is often a response to what we could call an identity crisis for societies.[6] Indeed,

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2 Psychologists call the distinctly human ability to recognize oneself in the past and project that onto the future *autonoesis*, see Tulving 2002.
3 Assmann 1992, 18. A canon is thus understood as the point where a tradition reaches its "höchste inhaltliche Verbindlichkeit und äußerste formale Festlegung", Assmann 1992, 103.
4 Assmann 1992, 123.
5 For ancient and modern definitions and conceptions of canon and canonisation see extensively Silver and Terraciano 2019 and Papadopoulos 2019, as well as the contributions by Papadopoulos, De Jonge and Gonzalez to this volume.
6 Assmann 1992, 125: "In Zeiten verschärfter innerkultureller Polarisierung, Zeiten zerbrochener Traditionen, in denen man sich entscheiden muß, welcher Ordnung man folgen will, kommt es zu Kanonbildungen." For ancient canonisations with a focus on identity formation in "Zeiten des Umbruchs" see recently Friesen and Hesse 2019.

a canon is often developed as an instrument that should provide society with a different cultural coherence – based on a (new or reaffirmed) reading of the past, to create a different present for a novel future. As such, canons often seem to function as *anchors* for the societies in which they function, connecting the new with the familiar while mediating change in relation to continuity. As such canonisation frequently leads to new forms of cultural formation – and is thus an important instrument of innovation.

In his book *Contre François Jullien*, the sinologist Jean-François Billeter even argues that it is the main and most innovative instrument of cultural formation.[7] He maintains that the real secret of the success of the Han Empire (206 BCE–220 CE) did not, or not mainly, rely on military, administrative, institutional or ritual domains, but rather on canonisation as innovation. It is worthwhile to quote his conclusion in full:

> Rappelons que l'empire chinois a été fondé par Ts'in Cheu-Houang, le « Premier empereur de Ts'in », en 221 avant notre ère, à la suite de terribles guerres, et que la violence dont est né ce nouveau pouvoir s'est retournée contre lui puisqu'il a sombré dans le désordre quinze ans plus tard, en 206. (–) Après quelques hésitations, les vainqueurs de cette nouvelle guerre ont repris à leur compte l'idée d'empire et fondé, en 202, la dynastie impériale des Han, qui est devenu la deuxième. Leur principal souci était de ne pas subir le sort de la première, c'est-à-dire de durer. Ils y ont réussi au-delà de tout espoir puisque leur dynastie a subsisté pendant quatre siècles (les Han forment la période romaine de la Chine). Mais les empereurs Han et leurs conseillers ont fait plus que cela puisque l'empire a duré plus de deux millénaires et que, grâce à eux, la folie, la démesure du Premier Empereur, qui aurait pu rester une aberration sans lendemain, sont devenues le moment fondateur de toute cette histoire impériale. Ce fait capital doit être médité. Les historiens voient la raison de cette réussite extraordinaire dans l'ordre militaire, administratif, institutionnel et rituel qu'ils ont su créer et qui a, en effet, perduré dans ses traits essentiels jusqu'à la fin de l'empire, au début du XXᵉ siècle. Le véritable secret de cette réussite, cependant, que les historiens ne voient pas ou ne comprennent pas suffisamment, c'est que ces empereurs, leurs conseillers et leurs agents ont instrumentalisé la culture au point de la

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7 Billeter 2014, 18–19 for the quote below; the dates mentioned are BCE. I thank Damien Agut-Labordère for bringing this book to my attention. Note that using this important observation by Billeter here has no relation whatsoever to the Jullien-Billeter debate and my own opinion on that matter.

refondre entièrement et d'en faire la base d'un ordre nouveau. Pour faire oublier la violence et l'arbitraire dont l'empire était né, et par lesquels il se soutenait, il devait paraître conforme à l'ordre des choses. Tout fut recentré sur l'idée que l'ordre impérial était conforme aux lois de l'univers, depuis l'origine et pour tous les temps. Tous les domaines du savoir, toute la pensée, le langage, les représentations devaient concourir à persuader les esprits que cet ordre était, dans l'ensemble, naturel. C'était le moyen le plus efficace d'assurer la pérennité du régime impérial, de ses hiérarchies, des formes de domination qu'il imposait, de la soumission qu'elles exigeaient. De cette refonte générale est née ce que les Chinois eux-mêmes ont considéré depuis lors, et que l'on considère aujourd'hui encore, en Chine et ailleurs, comme la civilisation chinoise. Le passé préimpérial a été si bien réinterprété qu'il est lui-même devenu une partie intégrante du nouvel ordre des choses. On peut admirer cette synthèse, qui a duré plus de deux millénaires en dépit des crises que l'ordre impérial a traversées, des défis qu'il a dû relever des transformations sociales profondes auxquelles il a dû s'adapter. Mais il faut bien voir qu'elle a été sécrétée par le pouvoir impérial, qu'elle a eu pour fonction principale d'occulter la nature de ce pouvoir et de rendre impensable toute alternative au despotisme. Et il faut être conscient du fait que tout ce qui passe aujourd'hui pour spécifiquement chinois, en particulier dans le domaine de la pensée, fait partie de ce système.

When such an "instrumental reshaping" is successful – that is: becomes canonised – it can subsequently develop into a cultural tradition; a tradition that might continue to exert its influence over millennia. For classicists, the Augustan era, with its reshaping of an Italo-Hellenistic Republic as the Roman Empire by Octavian Augustus, probably springs to mind at once as example *par excellence*.[8] It is important to realise that many of the cultural traditions that we distinguish today, as being present in our modern world or as the most important cultural foundations of that world – think of what we now call Chinese, Buddhist, Indian/Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Greco-Roman, et cetera – are "instrumental re-shapings" and their successful canonisation that go back to Antiquity and often the 1st millennium BCE in particular; a point to which I will return below.

From the moment that a canon is in place, it often immediately does away entirely with the complex historical process behind its formation – the

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8 It has therefore been righty characterized as a cultural revolution, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008. Note how also Billeter compares Han China to the Roman Empire.

period of crises and the choices then made.[9] Instead of a *mémoire volontaire*, the canon is represented and even mythologised as divinely established and "natural". The idea is created that the canon simply imposed itself through its own authority.[10] Although this is what a canon needs, as a technology to arrive at a novel cultural coherence, nothing could be further from the truth. Focussing on canonisation therefore allows us to understand the cultural formation of societies as complex and contested historical processes. It enables us to go beyond the convenient truths that societies tell about their own past and identity, as in reality canons are never as pure or uncontested as one would wish.[11] This is important, in itself, to arrive at a better understanding of how the ancient societies that called themselves "Assyrian", "Persian", "Greek", "Egyptian" or "Roman" (et cetera) came about – what kind of work they had to do to arrive at this self-definition of cultural coherence and what kind of competing definitions they had to obliterate.[12] The observation also prompts us to investigate processes of canonisation themselves from a comparative perspective: How do canons operate as anchors for the societies in which they function? Does canonisation indeed result in cultural formation and how? How were canons able to innovate? Why did particular canonisations do so well as cultural traditions – in the historical context in which they were created as well as beyond? And why are so many canonisations from Antiquity still with us today?

This essay suggests some initial ideas to answer these big questions, with the additional intention of serving as a framework for the case studies that follow in the subsequent part of this book. I will first elaborate on how canonisation works by focussing on (overlapping) questions of *ideology*, *documentation*, *history*, and *transmission*, with the attempt to connect all these concepts with canonisation in a somewhat different light than is usually done, that is: through the lens of cultural innovation. By drawing in the concept of *anchoring*, I will subsequently discuss the impact of canonisation with the aim to understand why some canonisations were so successful. Lastly, we will turn to the historical context of the 1st millennium BCE. A much-debated theory

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9   For how, in Antiquity, crises were dealt with in these terms of remembrance, recovery and innovation see now Klooster and Kuin 2020.

10   This rephrases one of the succinct remarks on canonisation by O'Leary 1999 and is illustrated in the quote from Billeter. Additional examples in the important volume by Silver and Terraciano 2019.

11   As eloquently expressed by Roman 2016, 9 concerning the *Imperium Romanum*: "Un empire, romain certes, mais constitué par qui, avec quoi, comment, évoluant en fonction de quelles idéaux, de quelles contraintes".

12   As stressed in the contribution of Woolf to this volume, the *uncanonical* is an essential part of the cultural landscape created by canonisation processes.

on canonisation in this period has been around for more than half a century already: the notion of *Achsenzeit* (Axial Age), as formulated by Karl Jaspers in his *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* from 1949. The original idea, as formulated by Jaspers, has been strongly criticised for various reasons. As a historical theory, it is indeed lacking in many aspects, as will be discussed below, but it certainly does not lack the insight that canonisation is fundamental to understand cultural formation in this period of Antiquity, in particular. To this I will add the concept of *Globalisation* and suggest that increasing connectivity throughout the 1st millennium BCE necessitated the major canonisations that gave us the cultures of the ancient world we still live with today.

2   Canonisation and Ideology

The first important issue concerning canonisation is the power and authority that are linked to it.[13] Canonisation is about selection and that is never an innocent or random process. With canonisation, it is therefore always important to ask the question of ideology: who selects what, for what reasons and with what kind of intended outcome in mind?[14] From this perspective, canonisation is essentially a political procedure that enforces internal coherence and unity at the expense of diversity – and thus results in the marginalization of competing narratives about past, present and future.[15] Pierre Bourdieu has illustrated how canonisation, as an ideological instrument, revolves around the accumulation of symbolic capital, often from materials from the past.[16]

His observation immediately reveals a central and most interesting paradox concerning canonisation. On the one hand, a canon necessitates seclusion and inscrutability: "Nichts darf hinzugefügt, nichts weggenommen, nichts verändert werden", as Assmann put it.[17] On the other hand, a canon transcends

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13   As underlined and illustrated by the contribution of Papadopoulos to this volume.

14   As Robinson 1997, 11 put it: "After all, when we turn from the construction of pantheons, which have no prescribed number of places, to the construction of course syllabi, then something has to be eliminated each time something else is added, and here ideologies, aesthetic and extra-aesthetic, necessarily come into play", cf. also McCusker 2013, 77. For the concept of ideology see still the illuminating discussion in Moore 1990 and further below.

15   Ofek 2010; Woolf, this volume and see in particular the important collection Brzyski 2007 for what are called partisan canons. On the (productive) interplay between canonicity and marginality, for the discipline of Classics, now Formisano and Shuttleworth Kraus 2018.

16   Bourdieu 1998.

17   Assmann 1992, 103.

time, needs constant maintenance and thus develops, as all cultural products do. *Although it should look stable and immutable, therefore, a canon is in fact constantly in the making*. This renewal, however, cannot be achieved simply through more accumulation, as this violates the main principle of seclusion and inscrutability – and precisely that is the paradox. Societies have found many different ways to evade this dilemma. For instance, they made canons extremely self-referential in order to maintain their authority. Possible additions, moreover, needed to be negotiated extremely carefully and almost in a ritual way – and we will encounter many more (improvised) solutions in the case studies discussed in this book. *A canon, in other words, needs to constantly mediate continuity and change and does so by disguising the latter in order to present it as the former*. Anchoring is an important tool, perhaps even the instrument *par excellence*, to make that work.

How canonisation functions and succeeds as an ideological process has been well investigated for what is one of its most important case studies: the canonisation of saints by Church authorities, a process that started in the 12th century CE. Contrary to common understanding, these studies illustrate that canonisation is never merely a top-down process, but rather a form of negotiation and compromise between different societal groups and their interests.[18] Moreover, these canonisations often stretched out over a long period of time, as a slow and, in fact, never finalized project. Long after the canonisation process of the Reformation, for instance, many (now) Protestant communities were still very much interested in relics and saints – which the new cultural coherence no longer allowed them to be. In turn, Catholic Church authorities needed much time and debate to arrive at proper Counter Reformation canonisation policies. These included decrees against an all too swift canonisation of popular saints, like the "50-year wait" issued in 1627. This was an attempt to keep the authority of the canon intact and to present change in terms of continuity, as described above.[19] To underline the importance of negotiation and comprise with canonisation – thus nuancing a simplistic and singular understanding of power as a top-down process – Didier Lett uses the notion of "saint-making".[20] He shows how the canonisation of saints was a long procedure also in juridical terms, which allowed for the evidence to be structured and framed.[21] His analysis of the elevation of Nicolas de Tolentino

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18 Klaniczay 2004; Lett 2008; Copeland 2012.
19 Copeland 2012. See Klaniczay 2004 for legal aspects.
20 Lett 2008.
21 A similar view in Klaniczay 2004 and Copeland 2012, 261 who qualifies the official recognition of a saint as "(–) the result of both the development of a cult and a juridical process

to the level of saint, in the first half of the 14th century, even shows that the figure of De Tolentino was, in fact, more created than revealed throughout the process. This complex historical development, however, was forgotten as soon as Saint Nicolas de Tolentino was functioning as a canon saint. Change and innovation, which thus sometimes even reached the point of invention, had been successfully disguised as continuity.[22]

Another important insight arising from the study of the canonisation of saints, is the fact that canonisation processes often work both internally and externally simultaneously and often not as originally planned. Canonisation, in other words, has many "unintended consequences".[23] The canonisation of saints after the Reformation in the 16th century provides an illustrative example of this. The Catholic cults of saints had been strongly criticised by the Protestant reformers and were at the heart of their quest for a new religious and cultural coherence. The council of Trent (1545–1563) assertively defended saints and their (spiritual) role within the church, as a result. The subsequent Catholic canonisation of saints, then, served two goals. It was, of course, a militant response of the Catholic church towards Protestantism and therefore externally aimed. At the same time, it shows that it had an important innovative role to play internally, as well; namely, serving almost as "a Catholic Reformation in which Church authorities focused on removing corrupt practices".[24] The latter, internal part of this complex historical process was covered up and meant to be forgotten, as it was not in line with what canonisation is supposed to do: produce coherence internally, against those outside the canon. But it certainly happened, and not only during the Counter-Reformation.

If we study canonisation, we should always pay attention to issues of power and ideology. This has been done extensively in literature from the past decades, probably influenced by the "culture wars" that characterised academia in the final part of the 20th century, if not until today.[25] This (exclusive) focus on canonisation as a vehicle for institutional intent, however, has pushed the

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investigating an existing reputation for holiness amongst a substantial body of devotees spanning various states of life."

22   For "the invention of tradition" as an anchoring device to suggest continuity in order to innovate in the period of Antiquity, see Boschung, Busch and Versluys 2015.

23   After Merton's famous article from 1936 and the studies in its wake, like recently Van der Leeuw 2020.

24   Copeland 2012, 260.

25   For the (shifting) relations between culture and power within cultural-historical studies, see Gibson 2007. For how the concepts of canon and canonisation became a focus of the "culture wars", see Gorak 1991 and Robinson 1997; Hurley 2020 for Art History specifically. For a recent example one can think about current debates on cultural appropriation and its discontents.

analysis of how canonisation works as a process of cultural formation or innovation to the background.[26] To arrive at more complete and nuanced understandings, therefore, we can probably analyse power and ideology best as influenced by all manner of socio-cultural factors and players; functioning both top-down and bottom-up, internally and externally at the very same time; and with a lot of "unintended consequences". Moreover, a canon is distinctly part of the long-term, almost to the point where we could call it "the formalisation of a tradition-in-the-making". The examples mentioned so far, at least, strongly suggest that canonisation is more a process evolving over time than a single conscious decision made through the agency of a person or group of persons at a specific point in time. I will argue that it is essentially a combination of both; but that conclusion indeed poses problems for the definition of canonisation in relation to concepts like formalisation or standardization; a point to which I will return further below. Be that as it may, the concept of canonisation is crucial to any theory of tradition, its constitution and its transmission.[27]

3   Canonisation and Documentation

Documentation is central to the functioning of a canon, as it needs to be made crystal clear what the new normative tool exactly entails; what is allowed and what is forbidden; what is inside the canon and what is outside. Therefore, only documentation allows the canon to serve as an instrument of measurement and to have a profound impact. The idea of making a *list* is probably usually the start of what canonisation is about, as selection in order to change society.

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26   As already argued and illustrated by Gorak 1991 as well as Silver and Terraciano 2019.

27   Boyer 1990. For canonisation and transmission see Rigney 2005; Silver and Terraciano 2019 and further below. The relation between power and canonisation is therefore well encapsulated, I think, in the compelling definition Fernand Braudel (1989 [2019], 60, for the issue see also Moore 1990) gave of ideology: "To call it an ideology is to identify it as a loose system of ideas, beliefs, declarations, prejudices, connected by a sometimes less than perfect logic, but connected all the same. An ideology cannot but be all-enveloping; its nature is to take over the individual and oblige him to submit to constraint, as he is generally only too pleased to do. In short it is a kind of replacement civilisation, designed to repair the holes and fill the gaps in an existing civilisation, now perceived as damaged or deficient. Logically it calls for enthusiasm, conviction, the certainty that one is right, and the lure of success. That it should consist of a bit of everything is logical too: the plaster used to patch up the cracks blends with what was already there." Braudel talks about European "humanism" and the Renaissance here. Note how the final sentence of this quote ("the plaster used to patch up the cracks blends with what was already there") in fact describes the mediation of continuity and change discussed above. Further below I will explore the concept of anchoring from this perspective.

As such, canonisation is *Listenwissenschaft* with the invention of writing representing a crucial step forward in this respect as well.[28] Strongly related to the list, is its formalization as a *catalogue*. Without these forms of documentation, it would probably be impossible for canons to persist over time. One other element that is crucial to the life of a canon, is the *exegete*; a person with special knowledge of the canon. With religious canons, this person is most often called a priest. The exegete distributes the prescriptions of the canon to its members and monitors their obedience. This is why this person, as interpreter of the canon, has authority and is deemed essential for the survival of the group or society in question.[29] Above we have already encountered a central paradox that characterizes canonisation: although a canon should look immutable and unchanging it is, in fact, always in the making. It takes much effort to keep that tension at bay. Exegetes play a crucial role also in that respect. Their explanations and interpretations are usually strongly self-referential, and thus strengthen the authority of the canon.[30] Moreover, the work of the exegete also serves to update the canon, making it relevant for new generations, while hiding this innovation as tradition through careful anchoring. As such, the interpreter almost *is* the canon, as mediator between continuity and change.

The functioning of the list, catalogue and exegete in relation to the notion of canon has been demonstrated by Jonathan Z. Smith, in a brilliant article on persistence, that I will therefore briefly summarise here.[31] The existence of a list implies that a selection has been made; a selection that has been documented. Most lists are open-ended: "they have neither a necessary beginning nor end save that provided by the duration of the attention of the compiler or the use to which the list is to be put. There is no necessary order. Everything may appear to be quite arbitrary".[32] In this way, it is *discontinuity* that characterises the list. For the list to really function in terms of canonisation, therefore, other things are needed as well. When lists show relatively clear principles of order and are aimed at information retrieval, we usually call them catalogues. "The items in a catalogue remain heterogeneous (–) but an account of why

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28 For the concept of *Listenwissenschaft* and a proper understanding of it see Hilgert 2009. For the crucial importance of writing as an instrument of canonisation see Assmann 1992; Raaflaub 2014 and below.

29 That the Roman emperor, as the highest authority in society, also was the *pontifex maximus* is an illustration of this principle.

30 For self-referentiality as the inevitable result of the relationship between original (canon) and translator (exegete) in more general terms, see Sluiter 1998.

31 Smith 1982. I thank PhD candidate Suzan van de Velde for bringing this text to my attention.

32 Smith 1982, 44.

the items have been brought together can be given, transmitted and learned", as Smith formulates it.[33] Codes of classification now matter in a strong way. When the catalogue is seen as a list that is (fundamentally) complete, Smith argues, we talk about a canon. For a canon, there must be an element of closure and one of the most important steps in the process of canonisation is the closing of the canon. At that moment, a distinction is created between the canonical and the apocryphal. With the creation of that distinction, however, the tension between continuity and change becomes immediately acute. Because how are canons kept alive, how can they develop, when they cannot be changed? Here the exegete, or hermeneut as Smith also calls this person, comes into play: "an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists without altering the canon in the process".[34]

The exegete has a crucially important function. Not only does he or she have to mediate the tension between continuity and change, as explained above. *The exegete also has to deal with the tension that exists between the arbitrary and the specific.* From a limitless horizon of possibilities, only a very small and, in fact, arbitrary selection makes it into the list or catalogue. Theoretically, therefore, everything can become canonised – and be used for cultural formation with the intent of becoming a tradition with its cultural identity. This arbitrary selection, however, is consequently treated as being very specific and therefore called "chosen", "holy", "sublime" or "ultimate" once it has developed into a canon. Therefore, the canon constantly has to be explained *as the canon* by these specialised exegetes. Canons can therefore only function through time because they are studied and interpreted; something that is called *Auslegung*. They need constant interpretation and discussion to mediate the relation between a changing tradition and an the unchanging canon. Documentation is crucially important in this respect and canonisation thus results in the formation of *Auslegungskulturen* through instruments like libraries, school curricula, museums, et cetera.[35] Canons may look stable and unchanging – but making them look that way thus requires a lot of work through lists, catalogues and exegetes.[36] We could ask ourselves whether the success of certain

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33 Smith 1982, 45.

34 Smith 1982, 48, adding: "It is with the canon and its hermeneut that we encounter the necessary obsession with exegetical totalization". Cf. Assmann and Assmann 1987.

35 Assmann 2000, 56; Assmann 2018, 292. These instruments, therefore, will play an important role in the analyses of all case studies in the subsequent part of this book.

36 To better understand how the symmetrical relationship between the exegete and the canon works, it is useful to compare it with (the debate on) ancient commentaries, where there is a similar mutual dependence between the commentator and his textual model in

canonisations as enduring cultural traditions is, perhaps, due to their ability to productively mediate this tension; a point to which I will return below.

4   Canonisation and History

We have seen above that questions of authority and political power loom behind many interpretations of canonisation not without reason, also in relation to documentation and the ordering of knowledge.[37] It has likewise become clear, however, that canonisations are to be equally understood as part of much wider, long-term developments in culture and society.[38] Canonisation is therefore about both the immediacy of political history and the long durations of cultural evolutions, simultaneously – and I would argue that we can only properly understand canonisation as cultural formation and innovation when we integrate both perspectives.[39] How then, does canonisation write history, in the short term *and* in the long term? To explore this question, I will briefly elaborate on two fundamental canonisation case studies: the coming into being of Jewish culture and religion in the 1st millennium BCE and the making of Christianity. I will do so with brutal brevity, and only on the basis of the research of two important thinkers about canonisation: Jan Assmann and Guy Stroumsa.[40]

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which both profit from one another: the commentator from the text by the social significance attached to tradition; and the text from the commentator because of its survival; see Sluiter 1998 and 1999.

37   For the relations between ordering knowledge and cultural formation in the Roman Empire from this perspective see König and Whitmarsh 2007.

38   Although it is not dealt with in this essay, the notion of antiquarianism is therefore very much related to canonisation. For antiquarianism see Schnapp et al. 2013 and the two recent important volumes Anderson and Rojas 2017 as well as Baines et al. 2019.

39   Cf. the contribution by Lardinois to this volume, on the measures that Lycurgus took around 330 BCE to promote Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides as the great Athenian tragedians, a status the three still enjoy today. He argues that, in doing so, Lycurgus strengthened the canonical status that they enjoyed already rather than inventing it. A comparable line of reasoning can be found in the contribution by Gonzalez to this volume when he suggests that the 2nd century BCE "canonisation" of the Hebrew Bible was the result of the authority these texts already had; something that the Maccabees and Hasmoneans capitalised upon and strengthened rather than invented.

40   For the first see Assmann 1992 Chapter 5; Assmann 2000, Chapter 3, now with Assmann 2015; for the latter see Stroumsa 1999 and Stroumsa 2005. Note that I am not so much concerned here with their historical interpretation and reconstruction *per se* but with their method in terms of canonisation. For both canonisation case studies the essays in Van der Kooij and Van der Toorn 1998 still have a lot to offer.

Assmann's analysis of the canonisation of Jewish cultural and religious traditions during the 1st millennium BCE provides a good example to illustrate the above-mentioned interplay.[41] He sees this process developing as follows. First there would be a codification of law and kingship, in the homeland, at the end of the 7th century BCE. This was followed by the Babylonian exile from the 6th century BCE. The lived tradition of Jewish culture and religion was no longer a given, in these new circumstances. What "being Jewish" exactly meant, therefore, now needed to be described and defined, thus marking a next important step in the canonisation process. The third step was also triggered by an interaction with the foreign: the power of the new Achaemenid Empire over the Levant. The coming of the Persians, Assmann argues, triggered a top-down codification of what Jewish culture and religion entailed. The Persians organised knowledge because they needed to know what cultures and religions they were dealing with in their Empire. This brought Jewish self-definition, such as it had developed in the Babylonian exile, one important step further. The fourth step would be the creation of textual communities around these codifications, as they had developed throughout the ages. Libraries like those from Qumran and Nag Hammadi as well as exegetes dealing with the interpretation of what now had become an established canon testify to this. Assmann regards the Jewish condemnation of idolatry as the fifth and final step. This was a much older feature of Jewish religion for sure, but it was only in the Hellenistic period that it started to play a defining role in terms of canonisation. If you do not allow people to make images, Assmann argues, all symbolic capital that constitutes the canon must end up in a text, as it did. In terms of textual canonisation, therefore, this is a clever move, as the text now definitively becomes *the* text. How central this text subsequently became for Jewish identity formation is encapsulated by the expression "the people of the book".[42] With this example, as analysed by Assmann, the immediacy of political history plays an important and constant role but probably not in the way we traditionally imagine political power and authority to play out. It was not the intention of the Babylonians to help the Jews to arrive at a form of cultural self-definition, nor was it the goal of the Achaemenids to codify Jewish culture for the Jews. Still, this is what seems to have happened. Jewish culture and identity, in Assmann's view, were created through a long process

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41 I summarise Assmann 2000, Chapter 3, entitled "Fünf Stufen auf dem Wege zum Kanon. Tradition und Schriftkultur im alten Israel und frühen Judentum". This is a contested and much debated issue in which I do not claim any expertise. For more background, recent bibliography and alternative views see the rich essay by Gonzalez in this volume.

42 See Halbertal 1997.

of canonisation. It is important to underline that some of the key moments within that process were determined by agency from outside the own culture and its "unintended consequences"; a confrontation with the Other and the impact of that encounter.

This also is the case, and perhaps to an even more extreme degree, with the formation of Christianity; another major canonisation process from Antiquity. Following the analysis by Stroumsa, the translation of the Hebrew *torah* into Greek as the Septuagint was of crucial importance in this respect.[43] This translation took place in Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE and was probably initiated by Jews and for Jews because knowledge of Hebrew was dwindling. That initiative, of course, strengthened the status of the *torah* as canonical book for Jewish culture and religion at the time.[44] The Septuagint, however, is *also* the text that Christianity would later take as point of departure for building its own canon. This strategy was not only quite unprecedented but also extremely high-risk as the start of a canonisation project. Why? In the first place, because by selecting the Septuagint as its canonic book, it made Christianity base itself on another, foreign, already existing, Jewish canon. In the second place because it made Christianity part and parcel of Hellenistic civilisation by taking a Greek text compiled in the cosmopolis of Alexandria as its foundation. Thus, the birth of Christian culture simultaneously becomes a process of the canonisation of both Jewish culture as well as the Hellenistic tradition. Stroumsa calls this "the Christian hermeneutical revolution" and underlines that it had a double helix: Jerusalem and Athens.[45] This particular choice for what we could call a double anchoring – a canonisation of the Jewish *torah*, on the one hand, and Hellenistic legacy, on the other – would come to define what we call European culture: the fact that we talk about the Judeo-Christian and Classical fundaments of Western civilization today still relies on a particular and remarkable choice of canonisation from two millennia ago.[46] Through this particular form of anchoring, the tension between continuity and change,

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43 I summarize Stroumsa 1999. Again, this is a much contested and debated issue in which I do not claim any expertise; my interest lies in a better understanding of how (scholars think) canonisation works as a process. For a version of his essay as published in English: The Christian hermeneutical revolution and its double helix. In: L.V. Rutgers et al. (eds.). 1998. *The use of sacred books in the ancient world*. Leiden. 11–28.

44 The picture is, of course, much more complicated, see Gonzalez this volume.

45 With the first he means Jewish culture; with the latter he refers to Graeco-Roman (Hellenistic) civilization in general.

46 It seems that for Jews, Christians and Romans alike the final steps in their defining canonisation processes (regarding, respectively, the Mischna, the New Testament and the Greek world) only seem to be taken towards the end of the 2nd century CE; an important point to which I will return in the conclusion.

and between the arbitrary and the specific, was probably more acute than with other canonisation processes, as the Christian canon openly made other traditions its own, being ostentatiously secondary. A comparable example of such a double anchoring process might be visible in the 3rd century BCE Roman decision to build their own literature, identity and culture on Greek models while that was a very Hellenistic thing to do. Thus, the birth of Roman culture simultaneously becomes a process of the canonisation of both Greek culture as well as the Hellenistic traditions of the eastern Mediterranean in particular: Rome's double helix consisted of Athens and Alexandria.[47]

The notion of standing into a secondary relation to the original is characterized as belatedness or *Epigonalität*. The fact that this secondary relation is often considered to be a major problem is probably best encapsulated in the famous observation by Karl Marx, who adds to the idea of Hegel that all important events or persons in world history happen twice: "Er hat vergessen hinzuzufügen: das eine Mal als groBe Tragödie, das andre Mal als lumpige Farce".[48] Christianity was apparently able to overcome this idea of belatedness and to work against the feeling that the cultural constellation it was creating would only be a "lumpige Farce". Its revolutionary character was located in the fact that it turned the question of belatedness on its head by presenting it as a defining strength instead of a failure. Christian culture understood itself as the perfection of its predecessors; by means of repeating, yes, but by doing so in a superior way and therefore casting aside its predecessors.[49] This is how the Christians were able to present themselves as the *verus Israel* as opposed to the Jews.[50] The Romans positioned themselves towards (contemporary) Greeks in a comparable way by stating that Roman civilisation would be the only real successor to Classical Greece.[51] Cartsen Colpe has proposed to char-

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47   For a pertaining analysis of "the Roman hermeneutical revolution" in these terms see Feeney 2016.

48   Marx, K. 1852. *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, here quoted after the 2007 edition edited by H. Brunkhorst, 9. He adds: "Caussidiere für Danton, Louis Blanc für Robespierre, die Montagne von 1848–51 für die Montagne von 1793–95, und der Londoner Konstabler mit dem ersten besten Dutzend Schulden beladener Lieutenants für den kleinen Korporal meit seiner Tafelrunde von Marschällen! Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Idioten für den achzehte Brümaire des Genies!"

49   In religious terms, Christianity would be the *Endoffenbarung*, as Stroumsa 1999, 15.

50   Stroumsa 1999, 17. Note that Islam used the same strategy to present itself as the perfection of its Jewish and Christian predecessors; again a form of double anchoring (A. Lardinois, personal comment).

51   This process of antagonistic differentiation *with* the past is already in Antiquity known as *aemulatio*, cf. Sluiter 1998, 12. It would therefore be most worthwhile to draw Hellenistic and Romans discussions on the relation between copy and original into the debate.

acterize this particular way of canon development as secondary canonisation or "filiation".[52] Its essence is that the relationship towards predecessors, the earlier canons, is not denied but made explicit, yet as "prefiguration".[53] Such secondary canons thus produce cultural dependency, and with that conscious parallels. Yet they produce counter-formations at the same time. The new depends on and is legitimated by the old, while at the same time the new is presented as innovating and overtaking the old. This interplay enables the canon to become even more self-referential, as the older *exemplum* is framed as already presupposing its successor. This is how the Christians conceptual-ised the Septuagint. Although it was not an original and even not originally a translation for or by Christians, the Septuagint indeed functioned as good and efficacious for them, as the original in Hebrew did for the Jews. Moreover, this remarkable innovation, by others, allowed Christianity to spread the faith in Greek; a language spoken by many in the Mediterranean and therefore an important factor in the rise of the Christian church at the expense of Judaism.[54] Did its secondary character perhaps provide Christianity with more or better affordances to develop in the long run?

5   Canonisation and Transmission

Looking at canonisation as history maker puts the question of transmission centre stage.[55] The two examples briefly discussed above clearly show that transmission of the canon is of key importance for its functioning over time. How to account for successful transmission? Or, to put the question more

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There is a similar attitude there to understand eclecticism though models from the past as something positive or even superior, as summarized by Perry 2005, 149 for works of art: "Far from being symptomatic of creative failure, then, eclecticism provided the artist with a strategy for balancing the familiar with the innovative, with the intended result a work of art uniquely suited to a specific social, cultural or physical context. Eclecticism allowed the artist both to link with tradition and to carry it further". In this formulation eclecticism is a form of anchoring innovation.

52   Colpe 1987.

53   For Christians it was thus *not* necessary to go back to the Jewish original. On the contrary: what they appropriated as "their" translation (the Septuagint) was made into a *conditio sine qua non* for the *Endoffenbarung*. For how this tension played out and was made fruit-ful in the relation between ancient texts and their commentators, a comparable case, see Sluiter 1998 and 1999.

54   Stroumsa 1999, 19–23. Thus far in the ancient world language had been defining for the sacred character of texts as with religious texts the divine was thought to be in the lan-guage itself. Christianity changed that.

55   Cf. the important remarks by Woolf, this volume as well as well as Currie and Rutherford 2019.

concretely, why are some canonisations from Antiquity still with us today as cultural traditions and many others not?[56] There appear to be two (extreme) positions in this debate. On the one hand, one could argue that it is all about the content of the canon. This is, for instance, how the canonisation of Greek culture by the Romans has often been interpreted. The content of the canon – that is: Greek literature, philosophy, art, et cetera – would simply be so superior that it could not but be appropriated and canonised by those coming into contact with it. The canonisation of the New Testament was often described and understood in similar terms of inherent quality – although the exact 27 canonical books were only decided upon around 367 AD. On the basis of what we have learned about canonisation so far, however, we can probably conclude at this point already that this was most likely the image those canons wanted to convey from the moment they were established – not reality. One could also take up the opposite position, and argue that canonisation is not so much about content, but rather about transference through time. As radically formulated by Guillory: "Canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission".[57] This would imply that, in fact, everything could potentially be canonised, and that canonisation is about the medium, not the message.

In order to approach this question, the consideration of texts, and the fact that canonisation often takes place through texts, play an important role. Texts are an ideal instrument for canonisation, perhaps even a necessary precondition in terms of documentation, as we have seen above. Assmann understands this as follows:[58]

> Da sich das kulturelle Gedächtnis nicht biologisch vererbt, muss es kulturell über die Generationenfolge hinweg in Gang gehalten werden. Das ist eine Frage der Objektivierung, Speicherung, Reaktivierung und Zirkulation von Sinn. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass in der Geschichte dieser Funktionen die Erfindung der Schrift als eines aussergewöhnlich leistungsfähigen Mediums symbolischer Objektivierung den tiefsten Einschnitt bedeutet.

Through texts, the possibilities of canonisation processes became much more extended and refined, at the same time.[59] Canonisation, therefore, very much

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56 Cf. Boyer 1990 who speaks about tradition as truth and communication and shows from a cognitive perspective that having a cultural tradition implies complex processes of acquisition, memorization and social interaction that must be described and explained.

57 Guillory 1993, 494.

58 Assmann 1992, 89.

59 See Raaflaub 2014 but note that Assmann 2000, 53–54 specifies the interplay between texts and canonisation as follows: "Nicht schon die Verschriftung, sondern erst die

revolves around *technologies* of canonisation. Texts are not the only important instrument however; objects play a similar role. Illustrative of this, for instance, is the cultural definition of great "masterpieces": from the Parthenon and the Venus de Milo, to the paintings by Raphael and Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Vermeer, et cetera.[60] Those are the objects considered to express where "we" come from and who "we" are. It is through canonisation, that such objects change from being commodities into objects that are maintained, cherished, and institutionalised as heritage.[61] Where institutions like libraries are therefore of crucial importance as canon-makers for texts; museums fulfil the same function for objects.[62] As a result, such institutions are peopled with canonical exegetes. Both texts and objects thus play key roles in the successful transmission of the canon and its persistence over time. As lists and catalogues and together with the exegete, they mediate the arbitrary – all that is available in the world – and the specific – that what is in the canon. In doing so, they closely monitor change and continuity in a balanced relation with each other.

6   Anchoring Innovation

Underlining the immediacy of political history, traditionally canonisation has been studied in terms of *ideology* and *documentation*, as has been described and illustrated above. This essay argues for the importance of the long duration of cultural evolutions as an additional perspective to that and has therefore equally analysed canonisation in terms of *history* and *transmission*. Focussing on canonisation as a long-term process of cultural innovation underlines the importance of the practice of *anchoring*. Already mentioned several times above, we will now turn to this concept more in depth.

In the 27 years he was in office, from 1978 to 2005, Pope John Paul II created more saints than all other popes created together (!) since Urbanus VIII

         Kanonisierung der kulturellen Texte bewirkt eine grundsätzliche Veränderung kultureller Kontinuität".

60   For the discipline of Classcis in these terms, see now Formisano and Shuttleworth Kraus 2018. Within the field of Art History canonisation has been intensively studied, see Camille et al. 1996; Brzyski 2007; Recht et al. 2008; Locher 2012. This important (theoretical) debate on how canonisation works, unfortunately only seldomly taken into account by scholars working on canonisation and texts, has not only underlined the "constructedness" of canonisation but also its fundamental nature, see Halbertsma 2007. This is probably true for every discipline, and certainly Classics, see now Formisano and Shuttleworth Kraus 2018.

61   As put by Recht 2008, 12: "Au cœur de la théorie de la réception se trouve la notion plus ou moins explicite de 'canon' à partir duquel toute œuvre d'art est 'reçue', jugée et étudiée".

62   Analysed in these terms by, for instance, Hein 1993; Goldstein 2011 and Hurley forthcoming.

centralised control over "saint-making" in 1634.[63] Oliver Bennett has analysed this process in terms of what he calls "strategic canonisation".[64] In his view, the Catholic church wanted to tie in with changes in society, particularly concerning popular culture, in order to retain its dominant position. In a historical period of secularization, in which the role of the Catholic church became much less self-evident than it had been before, innovation was urgently needed. But how to present it as continuity? The Catholic church authorities solved this dilemma through a careful anchoring of the new. First of all, it started producing more saints than it had ever done before, in order to legitimize and strengthen its own authority through the self-referentially of the canon. Subsequently it began to include what are called "celebrity saints", like Padre Pio or Mother Theresa, in an attempt to modernise. This would be, in Bennett's words: "(–) a clear illustration of the Catholic Church's unique capacity to reinvent very old forms of cultural policy for changing times".[65] How was canonisation so successfully, in this example, as a form of cultural innovation? The concept of anchoring is part of the answer to that question. We have seen above that canonisation as cultural innovation has to mediate a tension between the arbitrary and the specific. In other words, what is new and wants to move from the list via the catalogue towards the canon, has to be explained *in terms of the canon* to become part of that cultural tradition. Anchoring is one of the mechanisms through which this is achieved. In doing so, it simultaneously mediates the other recurring tension with canonisation, that between continuity and change, by presenting the latter in terms of the former.

Anchoring can be defined as the dynamic process by which individuals or relevant social groups connect what they perceive as new to what they consider to be familiar.[66] Anchoring is dynamic: once something has become part of the canon or cultural tradition, it no longer needs anchoring, but can even be appropriated for anchoring purposes itself. The examples of "saint-making" discussed in this essay are a clear illustration of that process. They first need to be anchored and when this has successfully been achieved, when they are established as part of the canon, they can start serving as anchors themselves. Sometimes, agents can be identified; individuals playing an active role in attempting to anchor a new phenomenon. At other times, no specific agency can be defined in the process and often the two are entangled. Anchoring is

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63 For "saint-making" see Lett 2008 and above.
64 Bennett 2011.
65 Bennett 2011, 452.
66 Definitions after Sluiter 2017. For the concept of anchoring in relation to innovation specifically see Versluys and Sluiter 2022.

relevant for individuals to maintain their sense of orientation, identification and continuity in the world but plays an equally important role at the level of social groups. It is on purpose that I repeat some of the main elements of the definition of anchoring as given by Ineke Sluiter, to highlight the convergences between the concept of canonisation and the concept of anchoring. Both seem to be functioning in similar ways; with anchoring being an important instrument for successful canonisation. We should therefore understand the importance of the exegete that mediates the tension between the arbitrariness of the new and the specificity of the tradition in terms of anchoring, as well. It has been described above how the exegete constantly accounts for the choices that have been made. Exegesis not only explains what the original anchoring was about, but also, in doing so across generations, anchors the canon ever more firmly into its own socio-historical context. Anchoring is thus an important mechanism for understanding how canons are made to work as cultural traditions.[67] Canonisation needs the exegete as *anchorer*.

Let us now move from the concept of anchoring proper towards cultural innovation and the emergence of new cultural traditions more in general. We have seen that coherence and repetition are of prime importance to the functioning of a canon. These characteristics sit uneasily with the fact that improvisation and change are what keeps societies going in the first place. This is probably the reason why canonisation is often used as a survival strategy for cultural and social identity in times of crisis, when a new form of cultural coherence is needed. From that perspective, canonisation is an attempt to deal with change in a productive manner. For societies to survive, finding a balance between tradition and innovation in how to canonise is therefore crucial. Questions of translation and the copying of both texts and objects are, from this perspective, fundamental and almost evolutionary problems.[68] For these dramatic innovations to be successful, anchoring was key.[69]

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67   As Lardinois, this volume has it: "Canons, either already existing or newly created, are perfect 'anchors' to which to tie new developments and from which to derive authority". Many of the essays in Klooster and Kuin 2020 draw similar conclusions.

68   That what does not become canonical often disappears, see Woolf, this volume. Already Bourdieu 1966, 865 understands the tensions inherent in canonisation processes in evolutionary terms and quotes from Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* to make his point: "Les théories et les écoles, comme les microbes et les globules, s'entre-dévorent et assurent par leur lute la continuité de la vie." I use the term *evolutionary* on purpose in order to underline that canonisation is a distinct part of the story of information processing that some scholars see as fundamental to properly understand human evolution, see, for instance, Van der Leeuw 2020.

69   As aptly concluded by Saint-Gille 2007, 586 in a more general sense: "(–) c'est la capacité de persistance, c'est-à-dire l'aptitude à se recontextualiser ou à être instrumentalisés à

7   *Achsenzeit*: The Age of Canonisation?

It has been argued above that, in essence, a canon is an authoritative set of ideas that is grounded in the past in order to function as a guiding social imaginary in the present and hence to determine the future.[70] Canonisation, therefore, is a process at the heart of any form of cultural innovation – with anchoring being key to its impact and success.

For the 1st millennium BCE, a strong and compelling, though heavily debated and often criticised, concept regarding canonisation-as-cultural-innovation has already been developed: that of the *Achsenzeit* or Axial Age. It was originally formulated by Karl Jaspers as a philosophical idea in his book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* from 1949.[71] Jaspers starts from the surprising conjunction that many of the world's most influential thinkers like Confucius, Buddha, the Jewish prophets and Socrates all emerged around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE.[72] That "Axial Age", in his view, produced the first "classics" in human history; the early works of philosophy, literature and theology that would be the guiding principles for Eurasian societies in the ages afterwards – and to which we still return. As a historical theory, the *Achsenzeit* has been criticised and nuanced for good reasons: not only is the chronology untenable as far as the main protagonists are concerned, there were also "Axial Societies" long before – think of Egyptian civilisation – and after the period of around 500 BCE.[73] This just criticism on the *Achsenzeit* as a historical theory, however, has not prevented the concept from being discussed and brought forward in a most fecund way.[74] At present the Axial Age is intensively debated again, as a tool to talk about "transcendence" or "reflexivity" within

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nouveaux frais, au-delà de la conjoncture originelle, qui ouvre une piste d'étude sur les oeuvres canoniques".

70   For the notion of social imaginary see Castoriades 1975 and Taylor 2004; Stavrianopoulou 2013 for the ancient world.

71   Jaspers 1949, see further below.

72   This was first noted by Anquetil-Duperron in 1771, see further below.

73   As reviewers have noted the *Achsenzeit* critique by Provan 2013 is fundamentally misconceived (see, for instance, *Religious Studies Review* 40(3) 2014, 135). For balanced criticism on the *Achsenzeit* as a historical theory see many of the contributions to Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005 and in particular Bellah and Joas 2012. Overviews of the *Achsenzeit* debate as whole, explaining and illustrating the problems with Jaspers' ideas from a historical perspective include Assmann 2012, Bowersock 2013, Joas 2014 and now Assmann 2018.

74   This is mainly the merit of the important work by Shmuel Eisenstadt who started organising Axial Age conferences in the 1980s in order to critically evaluate and develop the concept; see Eisenstadt et al. 1986 and the analysis of this work by Preyer 2011 and Assmann 2018, 255–266, both with full bibliography.

human evolution, as well as the emergence of new "cultural crystallizations".[75] It is remarkable that this discussion mainly takes place amongst philosophers, scholars of religion and sociologists, whereas most historians, archaeologists and classicists remain aloof.[76] I think this is a missed opportunity; the Axial Age debate has a lot to bring to them as well. For that we should probably not so much try and "re-historicize" the idea of an *Achsenzeit* but rather frame the issue in more general terms, as cultural innovation through canonisation.[77] The sociologist Hans Joas has argued that the Axial Age debate is "one of the most important developments in the area of comparative-historical social sciences" and an instrument to write what he calls a "contingent history of emergence".[78] I argue that the ever-increasing connectivity that characterises the 1st millennium BCE is one of the most important factors in the "history of emergence" that we can write, from this perspective. Instead of an Axial *Age*, however, it is much better to talk about "axial breakthroughs" then; periods characterised by a high degree of reflexivity, historicity and what is called agentiality.[79] What do those terms imply? *Reflexivity* is the human ability to step outside the immediate present and imagine different worlds; *historicity* refers to the translation of that imagination in time, by which the present can be separated from the past and Self from Other. *Agentiality*, lastly, is meant to indicate that human action based on that reflexivity and historicity is intended to change the present and determine the future. All these characteristics come together equally in the concept of canonisation as it has been defined and as discussed in this Chapter.[80] Let us now first briefly review the *Achsenzeit* debate, not in its own right but with the goal to see what important insights it has already generated to understand canonisation as cultural innovation in

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75   See, for instance, Eisenstadt 2000; Arnason and Wittrock 2004; Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005; Bellah 2005; Bellah and Joas 2012; Joas 2014; Baumard, Hyafil and Boyer 2015; Hoyer and Reddish 2019.

76   Hoyer and Reddish 2019 (with an illuminating Foreword by Ian Morris) is an important recent exception.

77   Arnason 2012 for a plea to "re-historicize" the Axial Age. Fine examples of what I propose, that is: attempts at world history through the idea of axial civilisations, are already provided by Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005; Morris 2010, 254 ff.; Mullins et al. 2018 and Hoyer and Reddish 2019.

78   Joas 2012, 9. In his understanding the notion of *Achsenzeit* has already developed towards canonisation-as-cultural-innovation in a more general sense – and comparable, I think, to what has been argued above.

79   The shift from an Axial Age to "axial breakthroughs" was already at the core of the work by Eisenstadt, see Preyer 2011. For the notions of reflexivity, historicity and agentiality see Wagner 2005, whom I follow here.

80   Cf. Wagner 2005, 93 and further below.

the 1st millennium BCE, in particular in relation to increasing connectivity or Globalisation.

The idea that there would be something of an Axial Age in world history goes back to the 18th century Iranist Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron and his study of the Avesta.[81] He noted that Zarathustra, Confucius and Pherecydes of Syros (the teacher of Pythagoras) were 6th century BCE contemporaries who would all, in their own way, inaugurate a defining period for the cultures they were living in. Anquetil-Duperron realized that in the three main cultural spheres of the ancient world, around the period of 550 BCE – China (eastern Eurasia); India and Persia (central Eurasia); and the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean (western Eurasia) – men emerged that through their novel ideas would change history. However, it was clear that these Chinese, Indian, Iranian and Near Eastern/Mediterranean cultures were not directly influencing each other, in this respect. What was at stake then? Was the world as a whole going through some kind of "Axial Age", a term only coined by Jaspers much later, similar to how it had gone through a Stone, Bronze, and Iron Age before? Many scholars took up the question; a trajectory recently analysed by Assmann in his book *Achsenzeit. Eine Archäologie der Moderne*.[82] He defines three different periods in the reception and *Aufarbeitung* of the idea.[83] From the publication by Anquetil-Duperron in 1771 until 1945, many scholars indeed reflected on his *Entdeckung der Gleichzeitigkeit*, but they did so rather individually and not as part of a comprehensive and coherent intellectual discussion. In this period, the debate was either empirical or historical-philosophical. The empirical research elaborated on the *Gleichzeitigkeit*-observation by adding names and cultures to what became a treat list of axial thinkers, like Buddha, Laotse, Jeremia, Parmenides, et cetera. Independently of this, the historical-philosophical discussion tried to account for the *Gleichzeitigkeit*, for instance in terms of (changes to) culture, religion or ethics. For Hegel, for instance, the Axial Age was related to the paring of state-power and writing which, for him, would be the true beginning of history. Without writing, Hegel presumed, there could be no memory and therefore no history.[84] Ernst von Lasaulx, a 19th century German philosopher of history, explicitly drew on

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81   See Metzler 1991.

82   Assmann 2018, on which this section draws heavily.

83   In his useful review of the historiography as presented by Assmann, Klostergard-Petersen 2017 argues that there is, in fact, a fourth and most recent period, inaugurated by Bellah 2005, in which the idea of an Axial Age is used to write world history in evolutionary terms. See Mullins et al. 2018 with bibliography.

84   "Mit den persischen Reich treten wir erst in den Zusammenhang der Geschichte. Die Perser sind das erste geschichtliche Volk, Persien ist das erste Reich, das vergangen ist"

Anquetil-Duperron in the development of his anthropological theory of human evolution.[85] The cultural-sociologist Alfred Weber, in his *Synchronistische Weltzeitalter* from 1935, used the *Entdeckung der Gleichzeitigkeit* to develop something a global cultural history.[86]

With Jaspers, these only very loosely connected ideas were brought together but into a historical-philosophical theory that was meant to explain the present – and in particular the catastrophe of Nazism and World War II. Assmann hence characterizes *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* as essentially hermeneutical.[87] Jasper's primary goal was a better understanding of the present, not the 1st millennium BCE, although he considered the two as being strongly related. Jaspers uses the *Entdeckung der Gleichzeitigkeit* to develop a coherent, evolutionary world history that is based on what he calls the *Einheit der Geschichte*.[88] The Axial Age would be defining in this evolution, be a *Durchbruch* in his terms, because it would have provided *Offenbarung*, that is: the intellectual sophistication through which a new, self-reflexive attitude towards human existence came into being. Characteristics of this *Offenbarung* are the birth of philosophy; the deconstruction of mythical thinking; profound reflexion on the concept of history; and an overall drive for explanation, beyond the ruling paradigms of the time.[89] The main point of Jasper's theory is that this *Offenbarung* is the beginning of mankind as we understand it. The Axial Age, therefore, is *die Ursprung der Moderne*; "wo geboren wurde, was seitdem der Mensch sein kann".[90] This spiritual and intellectual development had a profound impact on society: axial thinking resulted in a new understanding of reality that came forth from a tension between political power and

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  (Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Geschichte from 1827, section 255); cf. Assmann 2018, 60. For Hegel and the *Achsenzeit* idea in general, see Assmann 2018, 55–76.

85 See Assmann 2018, 96–118.

86 For Antiquity, Weber reasons in terms of "den Kontaktgürtel von China bis Griechenland" (58), see Assmann 2018, 152–164, 155.

87 See Assmann 2018, 165–227 (Chapter 9: Karl Jaspers: Die Achsenzeit als Gründungsmythos der Moderne) with a lot of attention for Jasper's biography and the (post) World War II context is which his ideas were developed.

88 A qualification he uses in a letter to Hannah Arendt in 1948; in an earlier letter to her he qualifies his project as a "*Weltgeschichte* der Philosophie", see Assmann 2018, 177–178.

89 For these characteristics see the summary in Assmann 2018, 189–197 and Mullins et al. 2018, 600–602.

90 Jaspers 1949, 19. See also Jaspers 1949, 111: "In diesem Zeitalter wurden die Grundkategorien hervorgebracht, in denen wir bis heute denken, und es wurden die Ansätze der Weltreligionen geschaffen, aus denen die Menschen bis heute leben. In diesem Sinne wurde der Schritt ins Universale getan."

intellectual trends. The Axial Age, which Jaspers defines in rather broad terms as the period between 800 and 200 BCE, is the age of criticism.[91]

After a quarter of a century of relative silence, despite the enormous popular success of the book, within academia the idea is only taken up again from the 1970s onwards, first by sinologist Benjamin I. Schwartz – for whom the Axial Age is about "standing back and looking beyond"[92] – and then by the sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt. The focus now shifts towards cultural-historical analysis. With this, according to Assmann, "beginnt das Konzept sich im Grunde aufzulösen" – and indeed it is now more and more realised that the *Achsenzeit* makes little sense as an *Epochenbegriff*.[93] Through a series of conferences, however, Eisenstadt was able to develop it as hermeneutical tool.[94] He did so by moving away from the idea of a specific Axial *Age* towards axiality and "axial breakthroughs", in a broader sense. The process of axiality and its resulting in new cultural constellations thus became tools for analysis of potentially *all* periods in world history.[95] Central to "axial breakthroughs" is the idea that a civilization (*Hochkultur*) starts reflecting on itself by looking back to the past and looking around, in a confrontation with the Other, in the present. This necessitates the formation of a new, or at least different, identity; something that necessarily goes hand in hand with the *Umwandlung* of cultural memory – and results in profound change. The transition made is therefore often described as one from Archaic to Classical.

Based on this understanding as it has developed from the 1970s onwards, I would argue that the *Achsenzeit* debate is a great research tool to understand cultural formation and for approaching global history, in particular for the period of Antiquity.[96] I think, however, that one could have the same historical

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91 An aspect rightly underlined by Morris 2010, 254–256 who concludes that the result of all that self-refashioning was a kind of social revolution in terms of critique on existing power structures.

92 See the important journal issue 104.2 from *Daedalus* (1975) entitled *Wisdom, revelation and doubt. Perspectives on the first millennium BC*, cf. Assmann 2018, 258.

93 Assmann 2018, 258; Assmann 2012 therefore talks about the Axial Age as myth. This conclusion is backed up by the latest archaeological and historical research as presented in Mullins et al. 2018 and Hoyer and Reddish 2019.

94 Published in several volumes edited by Eisenstadt and entitled *Kulturen der Achsenzeit*. See for Eisenstadt, his research program in this respect and a full bibliography: Preyer 2011.

95 Arnason and Wittrock 2004 deals with Eurasian transformations between the 10th and 13th centuries; Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005, for instance, presents a section on late Antiquity.

96 As underlined by the potential of a spade of recent publications: Baumard, Hyafil, Morris and Boyer 2015; Baumard, Hyafil and Boyer 2015; Mullins et al. 2018; Hoyer and Reddish 2019. Cf. Klostergard-Petersen 2017.

debate in terms of canonisation as cultural formation, and the various concepts related to it as they have been introduced above. "Axial breakthroughs" and the new cultural crystallizations they provide have three main characteristics: they step outside the immediate present and imagine different worlds (*reflexivity*); they translate this new imagination in cultural memory and separate the present from the past as well as Self from Other (*historicity*) while making this new imaginary work in society in order to define the present as well as the future (*agentiality* or cultural innovation).[97] All these characteristics indeed come together in the concept of canonisation, as discussed and defined in this essay. Wagner has argued that the *Achsenzeit* debate allows us "to assess the possibility of human beings to collectively employ their capacity for reflexivity such that they can critically relate to their history and give themselves new orientations in the present".[98] This is exactly how the function of canonisation as cultural innovation has been described above.

The confrontation with the Other is crucial to "axial breakthroughs" and canonisations.[99] The formation of Jewish culture and Christianity, briefly described above, has illustrated the point. This relation has already frequently been noted in general terms and, in fact, plays an important role, although often implicitly, for many theorists *and* critics of the *Achsenzeit* idea (see below).[100] In the remainder of this essay I will try to make the link more explicit and use the concept of Globalisation to do so.[101] I will argue that increasing connectivity makes the presence of the Other for the Self inescapable and turns reflexivity into a most urgent issue to be dealt with. Moreover, the new historicity thus created – with the help of lists, catalogues, and canons that were

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97   See Wagner 2005 and above.

98   Wagner 2005, 93.

99   This can be a chronological Other or a geographical Other. Through its focus on Globalisation this essay mainly deals with the geographical Other, although I am aware that the two are very much related. Confrontation with the chronological Other is studied through the concept of antiquarianism, for which see Schnapp et al. 2013; Anderson and Rojas 2017 as well as Baines et al. 2019.

100   Cf. Wittrock 2004.

101   I use Globalisation here and throughout the Chapter as a shorthand to refer to the many terms and debates about increasing connectivity and its impact currently around in the social sciences and humanities. German scholars often talk about *Kosmopolitismus*; in France the concept of *mondialisation* is popular; et cetera. There are important conceptual differences of course but fundamentally, I think, all these discussions talk about the same thing: the impact of increasing connectivity over time. Globalisation, therefore, is not at all a process exclusively tied up with 20th and 21st century modernity, as the debate from the last decade has made clear. Cf. Pitts and Versluys 2015 and Hodos et al. 2017, both with a large bibliography, or, to take but one example from outside the field, a recent book entitled *The ages of Globalisation. Geography, technology and institutions* (Sachs 2020).

put into action by exegetes and the ideology that they were all part of – now had a global repertoire to choose from. All the resulting agentiality is a crucially important constituent of cultural formation in the 1st millennium BCE. This section therefore concludes that a fruitful continuation of the *Achsenzeit* debate should focus on canonisation as cultural innovation. The next section will argue that the impact of increasing connectivity is central to understanding how that process worked throughout the longue-durée of human history – and that the 1st millennium BCE is a crucial period on that trajectory.

8 Canonisation and Connectivity: Cultural Innovation in the 1st Millennium BCE

An important conclusion of the *Achsenzeit* debate as it has developed over the past 250 years is that canonisation and connectivity are intimately related.[102] From the outset, the Axial Age *Gleichzeitigkeit* implied a transcontinental, universal, global perspective on the development of humankind. Already for Anquetil-Duperron, who wanted to break free from Eurocentrism in his work, all cultures of the ancient (and modern) world were equal; while Hegel talked about "Weltgeist" when dealing with the Axial Age.[103] In his analysis, Jaspers is drawing on what we would now call 'the Globalisation debate' even more explicitly. He does so in two different ways. In the first place by strongly underlining the universal character of the *Durchbruch* around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. He not only sees this as starting in different regions of Eurasia simultaneously, but he also considers how this intellectual revolution would come to define the *oikumeme* as a whole. The interplay between the local and the global, central to Globalisation theory, is also central to Jasper's *Achsenzeit* and the periods afterwards: "Es gab bisher noch keine Weltgeschichte, nur Lokalgeschichten", as he phrases it.[104] This idea of the beginning of an *Einheit der Geschichte* represents, moreover, a truly non-Eurocentric theory of global history. As succinctly summarized by Assmann:[105]

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102   Silver and Terraciano 2019 show this by focusing on how canonisation is about carving something out, as a specific *place*, from a much larger *space*.
103   See Stuurman 2007.
104   Jaspers 1949, 45, cf. Assmann 2018, 208.
105   Assmann 2018, 184.

> Wie der Einzele erst durch Kommunikation zu sich findet, so auch die Kulturen der Welt. Die Achsenzeit erschliesst erstmals die Möglichkeit weltumspannender Kommunikation und führt eine Epoche geistlicher Globalisierung herauf. Zwar kommunizierten Konfuzius, Buddha, Zarathustra, Jesaja und Xenophanes nicht miteinander. Sie hätten sich aber verstanden.

Jaspers does so, secondly, by explicitly linking this universal past to his global present in terms of defining characteristics; a relation encapsulated in his idea of the *Achzenzeit* as *die Ursprung der Moderne*.[106] In terms of Axial characteristics, there are no real differences, for Jaspers, between the global past and the global present – this is exactly why he considers the two to have such a strong relation with each other.[107] More than half a century's worth of scholarly research, following the publication of *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, has not only radically changed our ideas about the degree of connectivity in Antiquity, but also our judgement of the functioning of the various cultures in relation to each other. One could say that Jaspers' reconstruction of the existence of a global *oikumene* in Antiquity, between 800 and 200 BCE, has been strongly supported, along with his idea that all these cultures were in communication with each other, directly or indirectly.[108] This is quite remarkable. Nowadays, scholars increasingly use the concept of Globalisation to understand this complex connectivity of Antiquity. This proves to be most fecund for many, but it is important to realize that it is only another tool to investigate the functioning of what Alfred Weber already called "den Kontaktgürtel von China

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106 See Assmann 2018, 197–209. Eisenstadt 2000 developed this observation into his theory of multiple modernities. What is at stake here in philosophical terms, Assmann (202) argues, "sind die Grundzüge einer Hermeneutik des Fremden".

107 They are not similar however for Jaspers. The period around 1500 AD would see a radical change in terms of the emerge of science and technology; the 19th and 20th century in terms of an unprecedented increase of intensification of the world wide web. In this respect Jaspers adheres to the classical division of the history of the world into "modern" (19th–21st century), "pre-modern" (15th to 18th centuries) and everything before; the latter (Antiquity, Middle Ages) generally considered to be less interesting as impossible to define in relation to modernity – an idea resolutely countered by Jaspers however. It is following on from this observation of structural similarity between past and present that Eisenstadt and others have developed the idea of multiple modernities. Although an important debate that seeks to historicize the notion of modernity, see Eisenstadt 2000, I will not deal with it here.

108 The bibliography is enormous. See Broodbank 2013; Stavrianopoulou 2013; Sommer 2015 and now Hodos 2020 for general and well annotated overviews on this period and its intense, progressive connectivity.

bis Griechenland".[109] So how do relations between Globalisation, canonisation processes, and cultural innovation play out in Antiquity? When grossly over-simplifying, we can paint the following picture:[110]

The period around 1500 BCE witnessed a proliferation of networks all over Eurasia.[111] The direct linkage within and between regions now became so frequent that many scholars consider the middle of the second millennium BCE to be a turning point in terms of increasing connectivity.[112] The impact of that increased connectivity makes itself felt with such intensity that it is indeed useful to analyse it in terms of Globalisation.[113] In Egypt, the main political power in this period, the Delta now breaks away from the Nile valley and becomes part of the interplay between the Near East, the Mediterranean and North Africa stronger than ever before. This resulted in more marine contacts and an increased interaction in the eastern part of the Mediterranean and the Near East in particular. Silver and copper were the main commodities in this period and we witness a growing social complexity in exactly those sites and regions that had nodal positions in this network, like Crete and Cyprus. The trade of metals and other raw materials was supplemented by manufactured objects, like metalwork, textiles but also perfumed oil and its containers. The local styles in which these objects were made already soon started influencing each other. As a result, we now not only see, for instance,

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109 See Pitts and Versluys 2015. For a recent overview of the use of Globalisation theory within ancient studies see Versluys 2021 and forthcoming.

110 What follows builds on some ideas initially formulated in Versluys 2015; for the perspective itself see already Assmann 2010b. For a *longue durée* sketch of the history of Egypt from the perspective of increasing connectivity and with a focus on interaction with the Mediterranean specifically see Agut-Labordère and Versluys forthcoming. For the period before 1500 BCE in the Mediterranean, see Broodbank 2013; cf. the first Chapters of Cunliffe 2015 for Eurasia in general.

111 Sherratt 2017, 608. This development was dependent, as always, on pre-existing circuits of interaction and exchange.

112 In his history of the Mediterranean up to the emergence of the Classical world around 500 BCE, also Broodbank 2013 considers the period around 1500 BCE to be a tipping point in terms of increasing connectivity; qualifying the eastern Mediterranean in this period as a "theatre of interaction" (373).

113 Illuminatingly formulated by Sherratt 2017, 603: "The effects of 'globalisation' in the Bronze and Iron Age Mediterranean, certainly, did not take the extreme form in which we experience them today. Nevertheless, many of the basic underlying motives and processes, if not the scale and the particular technologies available, were similar. As in our modern globalisation, the driving motor was desire for material possessions well beyond the necessities for simple subsistence, including ones which would bring novelty or would distinguish their owners from others around them, or which would simply make life more comfortable or pleasant; and a corollary to this was the invention and propagation of new products and technologies which nobody previously knew they needed".

painted imitations of multi-coloured woollen textile from the Mediterranean in Egyptian tombs but also the development of an "international style" in luxury goods that playfully brings together a wide variety of stylistic elements, perhaps even in order to boast its cosmopolitanism.[114] It seems that the site of Tell el-Dab'a, in the eastern Delta, was amongst the many important centres of this cosmopolitan network. One of its main sanctuaries was the temple for Seth, an Egyptian god who was depicted, however, as the Syrian storm god Baal-Sephon. This *interpretatio* implies a confrontation with the Other which resulted in a reflection and, in this case, recalibration of the own culture. We therefore see reflexivity and agentiality but remain ignorant about processes of historicity. Those might be grasped, however, from Egyptian literature in the period that testifies to the same effect, as it shows that conceptions of the *kosmos* only now begin to move beyond the horizon of the Nile valley.[115] Mental maps, in other words, were changing as a result of increasing connectivity. The world of the Late Bronze Age was not only connected by trade but also by the (sometimes overlapping) empires of Egypt, Babylonia, the Hittites and the Mitanni. Interaction between these was so intense that a "global" lingua franca (Akkadian) developed for their communication.[116] The collapse of this world towards the end of the 2nd millennium BCE shows that interconnection had reached the level that trouble could spread with alarming speed.[117] Centralised palace economies made way for more volatile, seaborne trading practices; a process accompanied by a surge of innovation in maritime technology. The frequency, strength, content and directionality of the network changed and there certainly was political fragmentation and economic recession in some regions.[118] High mobility continued to be defining as well however: the famous Huelva hoard, found in Andalucia and dating to the 10th century BCE, shows a mixture of (northern) Atlantic swords and spearheads with Iberian weaponry and objects from the eastern Mediterranean.

This circulation of goods characteristic for the Bronze Age is followed by a more intense circulation of people in the Iron Age. Those people now frequently established permanent and culturally distinct settlements in distant regions.

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114   For the imitation of a Mediterranean textile in an Egyptian tomb see Broodbank 2013, 377; for the cosmopolitan style of the Bronze Age see Feldman 2006.

115   Assmann 2010a, Chapter 1 for changes in Egyptian conceptions of the world from this perspective.

116   Liverani 2000 for the relations between these Empires and their subject rulers in this period – he coined the term "Great Powers Club" to describe them.

117   Phrasing and analysis after Broodbank 2013, Chapter 9.

118   For these parameters see the important essay on Globalisation and networks in Antiquity by Knappett 2017.

Particularly what scholars call the Phoenician and Greek "colonisations" stand out in this respect.[119] First Phoenician and then Greek maritime entrepreneurs and fortune seekers now directly linked up the entire Mediterranean; tapping into comparable Atlantic and Central Asian circuits of exchange with that. They developed new homes away from home to maintain and articulate nodes in the network or safeguard commodities. Not only did this bring the global to a local level – think about the foundation of Carthage on the coast of North Africa by already cosmopolitan Phoenicians from the Levant around 800 BCE – but simultaneously ever more localities were making up the global network as a result.[120] One of the impacts of this more intense confrontation with other cultures was the coming into being of something like a pan-Mediterranean cosmogony.[121] This implies, as we have already seen with the example of Seth/Baal-Sephon from the Egyptian Delta, a reflexion on the own culture. If you encounter, because of the wider network you are now part of, a figure venerated by others as Heracles that turns out to resemble your own Melqart, this forces you to reflect on precisely those categories of Self and Other – and their relative nature.[122] Do we see more signs of reflexivity and perhaps even of historicity in this period as result of this increasing connectivity? Do cultures relate to their history in different ways to give themselves new orientations in the present and do they try to canonise those attempts? It seems so. Around 800 BCE, the Bronze Age past of many cultures are made into exempla for their present, with clear signs of antiquarianism and archaism.[123] If we focus on canonical texts alone there are the stories about Bronze Age Greece by 'Homer' and about the Exodus in Israel; both canonizing events from centuries earlier. There is the continuing popularity of the Gilgamesh epic in the Near East while in Egypt "the book of the Death" is canonised.[124] Reflexivity of the own *status quo* as a result of looking back is certainly part of these canonisations; think for instance of how, in the Iliad, the Trojan enemy

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119   For the many important differences between the ancient phenomenon and our modern understanding of the concept, see Hurst and Owen 2005. Note that also other Mediterranean communities, like the Etruscans, were highly mobile.

120   It is indeed important to underline the interplay, as does Van Dommelen 2017. It is precisely the importance of this process of interplay that should draw our attention to resulting processes of reflexivity and its results like historicity and agentiality.

121   See Bonnet and Bricault 2016, an important analysis of 1st millennium BCE religions from the Mediterranean, the Near East and Egypt from the perspective of interaction and connectivity.

122   For an analysis of Melqart/Heracles in these terms see Bonnet and Bricault 2016, Chapter 1 (Les voyages de Melqart. De rocher sacré de Tyr aux Colonnes d'Hercule).

123   For Antiquarism see Schnapp et al. 2013 and Anderson and Rojas 2017.

124   I follow Assmann 2010b, 126.

is presented as equal to the Greeks in many respects. It seems that in the centuries to follow, this form of reflexivity develops much further and in more profound ways, enhanced by increasing connectivity. The coming into being of universal Empires – perhaps the neo-Assyrian Empire can already be characterised as such, but certainly the Achaemenid commonwealth – plays an important role in this, in three respects.[125] In a general way, Empires facilitate exchange and increase connectivity. Moreover, imperialism did not only bring the Other definitively to each other's doorstep, but it also forced the imperial authorities themselves to make lists and catalogues to administer their Empire, at the same time. Thus canonisation, internally and externally, became key to contemporary understandings of the world.[126] Cultures and cultural concepts, the real Other and the constructed Other, hence became fundamentally intertwined.[127] In terms of canonisation and Globalisation this is a defining breakthrough. Why?

As Arjun Appadurai, one of the most important scholars of Globalisation, has shown, Globalisation is as much about concrete changes in daily life as it is about imagination – and especially about their relation in the form of new social imaginaries.[128] Increasing connectivity over a millennium had, of course, changed nothing to the physical environment itself but it had

125 This has already has been illustrated by the example of Jewish cultural formation briefly discussed above. For universal Empire as idea and reality in Eurasian Antiquity and beyond see Bang and Kolodziejczyk 2012. See also the discussion by Young, this volume, of a tablet from the Assyrian capital of Assur, dated to the period of 1307–1282 BCE, that already seems to suggest a relation between the bringing together of (older) elements from all over the world and the domination of that world.

126 The relation between connectivity and Globalisation is formulated by Broodbank 2013, 506 for the Mediterranean after the period of 600 BCE in these terms as well: "This phase saw the Mediterranean's cultural, social and economic activities intensify and its networks fill out to incorporate most of the basin, and reach well beyond. Simultaneously, rules of engagement between people and places became more codified and rationalized, in ways that would shape some of the most brilliant, as well as the most disturbing, features of the Classical and later Mediterranean."

127 Arnason et al. 2005, 2 beautifully phrase this as a "surplus of meaning" that now has to be dealt with. As formulated in Bricault and Versluys 2014, 29: "Increasing connectivity resulted in a shared field of reference wherein the various 'mind-maps' of the (symbolic) cultures were recognized (and reworked) by all. (–) We witness the build-up of this shared field of reference around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE in particular. From that period onwards, cultural relativism begins to be intensively discussed and initiates a debate about the translatability of cultural traits."

128 Appadurai 1996, 2006 and 2013; always underlining how Globalisation is marked by a new role for imagination in social life. For social imaginary see Castoriades 1975 and Taylor 2004; Stavrianopoulou 2013 for Antiquity. Adams 2008 for a 20th century case study. On imagination and its fundamental role for human history and its evolution, now Abrahams 2020.

profoundly altered the perception and imagination of that world. This conquest as space, as one could call it, is characterised as time-space compression within Globalisation studies, meaning that the nature and experience of space (and time) is radically restructured as a result of increasing connectivity. I argue that the various canonisation processes of the 1st millennium BCE must be understood as part of this radial restructuring. We saw that with the foundation of Carthage around 800 BCE, a pan Mediterranean trade network came into being that linked up with other networks and included the Black Sea. Knowledge about the Other was still relatively limited at that time and the geography of the Mediterranean and Black Sea therefore became loaded with significance through myth. Homer's *Odyssey* is exemplary of both: the importance of travel and movement outside the own locality or region as well as the colouring of those strange worlds through myth. The adventures of Iason, Herakles or Diomedes tell similar stories. The next step in the conquest of space, from largely mythical to largely factual, is only achieved in the Persian Empire. Through their infrastructure and collecting of geographical data, the Persian court probably had a better overview of what the world looked like than there had ever been before and it seems that a decisive breakthrough in geographical knowledge materialised there. This allowed the Achaemenids to imagine themselves as a truly *universal* Empire; something that (again) changed the nature and experience of space. The impact of what one could call "the invention of humanity" around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE is of crucial importance in terms of canonisation, as it implies a radical rethinking of past, present, and future.[129] Already through the *idea* of a universal Empire, through that particular imagination of reality, there simply was so much Other now that ideas about the Self and the own culture in relation to the world had no choice but to change. When Remi Brague argues that the Axial Age coincides with the discovery of the world as the world he means, I think, exactly the same thing.[130] The repertoire for the construction of *mémoire volontaire* is now wider than ever before; the necessity of compiling lists, catalogues, and canons is more urgent than ever before. Only against this background, the emergence of comparative history projects, like those by Herodotos, are clearly understandable.[131] Herodotos' world encompassed Mesopotamia as well as North Africa; Spain as well as the steppes of southern Russia; Egypt and Aethiopia as well as the Danube region and the Celts. As a result, his book is one big exercise in reflexivity and historicity. It is immediately during and after this period, in the 4th

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129   I refer to the title of Stuurman 2017.

130   Brague 1999, cf. Arnason 2005, 32.

131   For Herodotos as world historian representing the anthropological turn, see Stuurman 2008 and Moyer 2011, Chapter 1.

and 3rd centuries BCE in particular, that we see responses towards all this canon work in the form of encyclopaedism, epitomes and libraries.[132] The conquests of Alexander the Great, heir of the Achaemenids, brought nothing new structurally, yet they enhanced and intensified Globalisation processes and their impact even more. The imagination of the world as single world was further refined: Persian documentation provided Alexander with vital information that he added to by means of the *bematisteis* (land surveyors) in his consort. Myth thus slowly gave way to ethnography as well as world history and would, in the Hellenistic period, also develop into something a comparative scientific project, as exemplified by the library of Alexandria and many other centres of knowledge.[133] As a result, mapping culture and defining cultural identity through the transformation of cultural memory now becomes an almost worldwide obsession.[134] It is at the heart of the cultural formation of, for instance, the Seleucid Empire, in which the unique and unprecedented decision is taken to introduce a linear and transcendent concept of (global) time.[135] Such a strategy can only be understood as the impact of time-space compression brought about by Globalisation processes. The same seems to be true for all the major 3rd century BCE cultural canonisations that were written to define what exactly now is local in this global world. These "national histories" were compiled for Egypt by a priest from Heliopolis called Manetho; for central Asia by the Chaldean astronomer-priest Berossos, and probably also for Phoenicia by the Hellenistic source of Philo of Byblos – while one should add the Hebrew canonisation of the Torah as the canonisation of the history of the land Israel.[136] Their simultaneousness is most remarkable.[137] That all

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132 Cf. Woolf, this volume. On encyclopaedism see König and Woolf 2013; on ancient libraries see König, Oikonomopolou and Woolf 2013.

133 This was, of course, never a process of replacing but rather of subjoining. Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, written around 270 BCE, is an illustrative example as it brings together myth, ethnography as well as the knowledge of the Alexandrian library and *mouseion*. Its goal, as Thalmann 2011 has convincingly argued, is to create a set of traditions in order to explore the *oikumene* and understand it in terms of Hellenism. Note the cautionary tales on (our modern, scholarly imagination of) ancient libraries in König, Oikonomopolou and Woolf 2013.

134 For relations between globalization and memory in general terms and with modern case studies, see Assmann and Conrad 2010.

135 As demonstrated in Kosmin 2018.

136 For the latter see Gonzalez, this volume. For Manetho, see Moyer 2011 Chapter 2; for Berossos, see Haubold et al. 2013; for the 2nd century BCE author Philo of Byblos and his Hellenistic sources, see now Delalonde 2021.

137 Assmann 2010b, 129. Cf. Quinn 2018, 145 who understands their writings as attempts to impress the new Hellenistic overlords; I see this somewhat broader as attempts to anchor the local into the global.

these anchorers were probably priests is not surprising in view of what has been concluded above, concerning the importance of priests as exegetes to deal with canonisation. Their histories were a form of canonisation as cultural innovation; namely, an attempt to redefine and bring forward the local in what had become a truly global world. Manetho, Berossos, the Phoenician source and the Jewish priests but also contemporary authors like Megasthenes, who wrote a history of India for the Seleucids, and other examples of the ethnographic literature from this period, all were dealing with the same intellectual project: providing what had now become the global present with a global past and map the own local place within that global space.[138]

This profound, global transformation of cultural memory results, towards the period around 200 BCE, into what could be called a global cultural horizon.[139] It has often been noted that around the period of 200 BCE a distinctly new phase in the history of the ancient worlds begins.[140] This transition has indeed many aspects and profound results.[141] However, at the core of it, I would argue, is the impact of Globalisation processes and their handling through canonisation as an engine for cultural innovation. As Ian Morris illuminatingly summarized:

> By 200 BCE the East and West had more in common than at any time since the Ice Age. Each was dominated by a single great empire with tens

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138   For Megastenes see now Wiesehöfer, Brinkhaus and Bichler 2016. Also the Maurya philosopher Kautilya and his writings fit this picture well (Marike van Aerde, personal comment). For relations between Globalisation and cultural memory see Assmann and Conrad 2010.

139   As phrased by Assmann 2018, 291: "(–) seit dem 3. Jahrhundert v. Chr. entstand in der hellenistischen Antike ein Referenzraum und Verstehungshorizont, innerhalb dessen die groBen Texte zugänglich, verständlich und verbindlich blieben. Das setzt eine spezifische Organisation des kulturellen Gedächtnissen voraus, die neben Schrift die Verbindung von Kanonisierung und Exegese erfordert". See also Assmann 2010b. For the circulation of such cultural memory see Rigney 2005.

140   This already starts in Antiquity itself. Writing around 150 BCE, the historian Polybius remarks about this period: "from this point onwards history becomes one organic whole: the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end" (*Histories* 1.3). Cf. Pitts and Versluys 2015, 18.

141   Note Purcell's remarks on and qualification of this period in somewhat wider terms (2014, 72): "Meanwhile, with the continuum of the ancient world, the play of intensification of production, mobility and exchange can increasingly, during the Hellenistic period, be seen in a crescendo which produced in the early Roman Empire a paroxysm of integration, whose nature is still a subject of debate, but whose quite exceptional scale, by pre-modern standards, becomes steadily clearer". Cf. Agut-Labordière and Versluys forthcoming.

of millions of subjects. Each had a literate, sophisticated elite schooled in Axial thought, living in great cities fed by highly productive farmers and supplied by elaborate trade networks. And in each core social development was 50 percent higher than it had been in 1000 BCE.[142]

It is against this global cultural horizon that the Roman Republic and the Han Empire had to build their identity. "Schooled in Axial thought", they had no choice but map and innovate their culture through canonisation and ask the respective questions: "who are we against the past and present of the Mediterranean, the Near East and the rest of the world?" and "who are we against the past and present of East Asia and the rest of the world?" This conclusion brings us back to the observation by Jean-François Billeter – that the real secret of success of the Han Empire has to be ascribed to canonisation as cultural innovation – quoted at the start of this Chapter. Drawing in Globalisation makes clear why the Han and the Romans had no choice but to turn to the past to construct their present and future. In that respect, indeed, specific choices were made to construct a *mémoire volontaire*. But we have seen that those choices were the result of ever-increasing Globalisation processes and the consecutive reactions to their impact that took place in the previous millennium. The past was haunting the Han Empire as much as the Han Empire was instrumentalising world history.[143] And this was certainly true for the Romans, as well.[144] It seems important, therefore, to distinguish between the establishment of a *canon* in terms of the immediacy of (political) history on the one hand and *canonisation* in terms of the long durations of socio-cultural evolutions on the other. From the latter perspective, canonisation is a form of slowly developing standardization with varying degrees of rigidity and flexibility;[145] the evolutionary development of a new *habitus* with the canon only representing a point in time testifying to its formal anchoring as consensus – and thus not so much the construction of a *mémoire volontaire* after a crisis. Canonisation, so it seems, is an instrument that all human societies developed and constantly use to deal with the continuous change they are going through.

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142   Morris 2010, 270. Note in particular his phrasing "schooled in Axial thought".

143   Important remarks in Stuurman 2008, von Falkenhausen 2013, a long-term overview of antiquarianism in East Asia, as well as Dudbridge 2019.

144   Boschung, Busch and Versluys 2015; Galinsky and Lapatin 2015; Roman 2016 and Versluys 2017b all provide many examples of how Rome was haunted by (some of) the various pasts it encountered in building its Empire.

145   On canonization as standardization and the important difference between hard and soft processes of selection see Woolf, this volume.

9 Conclusion and Outlook

Canonisation in the 1st millennium BCE revolves about the engagement with increasing Globalisation and the impact of the discovery of global unity and diversity. This progressive discovery forces societies to construct a new past, to create a different present for a novel future. Increasing Globalisation presented severe challenges for the re-organisation of cultural memory.[146] The new canonical traditions thus created are a response to Globalisation and an attempt to embed local diversity in the emerging global context.[147] This is what all the extraordinary ethnographic literature of the early Hellenistic period is doing in one way or another.[148] If the tensions necessarily inherent in these canons – between change that has to be presented as continuity and between the arbitrary that has to be presented as the specific – are well-managed, these traditions can develop into successful and long-lasting new cultural constellations. Anchoring is fundamental as a process in this, as it is needed to calibrate past, present, and future in relation to each other in order to arrive at cultural innovation.

As an outlook on that conclusion, it is interesting to return to the question of secondarity and the 200 BCE "threshold". We have seen above that secondary canons were forced to face their own historicity in a quite unprecedented manner. This made them, one could say, into canonisation specialists *par excellence* and as a result these societies, like Han China and the Roman Empire, developed into cultures with an enormous "mnemische Energie"[149] Did this provide them with the memory-identity they needed to survive in a global *oikumene*? Or should perhaps even the remarkable success and longevity of the Empires that all took off in the period around 200 BCE – the Han Empire, the Maurya

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146　A crucial point as already realized Assmann 2010a, 123 and that volume (Assmann and Conrad 2010) as a whole.

147　Assmann 2010b, 130 even talks about the making of a new, "trans-ethical homeland" in this respect. For the notion of embedding and its relation to Globalisation (in Antiquity) see Versluys forthcoming.

148　Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, complied around 270 BCE, is just one illustrative example hereof. Thalmann 2011 has shown how the story of the Argonauts produces a new, global space by putting all kind of places together into a new relation. In this way, the story constructs a new cultural memory that was needed for the global world the 3rd century BCE had become.

149　I borrow the term from Hölkeskamp 2012. Attempts at truly writing world history, two steps further than Herodotos and one step further than Hellenistic ethnographic literature, therefore seem to be a distinctly post 200 BCE development. China received its first universal history, entitled the *Record of the Scribe* and composed by Sima Qian, around 100 BCE. Polybios wrote his one around 150 BCE.

Empire, the Parthian Empire and the Roman Empire[150] – be explained by the fact that the major canonisation processes triggered by increasing connectivity had been finished in their first instalment in the centuries before? The Roman Empire is a case in point.[151] In all aspects, the Romans made themselves secondary to the Greek and Hellenistic past of the Mediterranean. But in the end, they were able to turn the question of belatedness around by presenting it as a defining strength: the Greek and Hellenistic past was only a prefiguration of the Roman present. It is Rome that that had become the *real Hellas*.[152] To present the canon as something quintessentially novel and unique in relation to the predecessors on which it depended, substantial work was needed.[153] This is, for instance, what Vergil's *Aeneid* did. It is a brilliant strategy of cultural formation as the old and the new can only be considered as strengthening each other; the one has to be read in the light of the other. In this way, the Aeneid is presented not a successor to its Greek originals but rather as their *Endoffenbarung*.

From such a perspective, the 200 BCE threshold should also be explained in terms of a changed relationship between Self and Other: as the result of the impact of Globalisation, 'a new man had now been born'. For their own century, the Enlightenment thinkers of the late 18th century called this person a "homo duplex".[154] They used this term to indicate that, due to the opening of the world in their own era, man had become Self and Other simultaneously. Philosophers like Lessing regarded this "*so wohl als auch*" not as a dichotomy, but as a natural outcome of increasing connectivity. Although historical circumstances were very different, the period after 200 BCE might have seen a similar breakthrough in identity thinking. Roman canonisation, at least, shows the reliance, in terms of identity formation, on sources that stem from outside

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150   For a brief historical presentation of these Empires in relation to each other, see now Benjamin 2018.

151   For this and many other canonisation projects of the late Hellenistic period see Versluys 2017a.

152   Contra Stroumsa 1999, 6 who talks about cultural diglossia: "Die Römer konnten nie vergessen, daB sie zeitlich nach den Griechen kamen. Kulturell fühlten sie sich sehr ungleich, verdammt durch ihre Epigonalität, die überlegene Kultur ihrer früheren Feinde zu interpretieren". I believe that such a term underestimates the power of canonisation to form new cultural constellations, as the Romans did. Cf. Versluys 2014 and 2017b.

153   A brilliant analysis of how Roman literature managed to go beyond Greek from this perspective is Feeney 2016.

154   Assmann 2010a, 196–202. They understood this duality in terms of a coming together of a "homo naturalis" characterized by "thick relations" like kinship and an exclusive (we-) identity with a "homo civilis" characterized by "thin relations" like cosmopolitanism and an inclusive identity. For cosmopolitan egalitarianism in the Enlightenment see also Stuurman 2007.

the Self. This is something that Remi Brague, when he talks about the cultural formation of post-Roman Europe, called Europe's secondarity.[155] Apparently, Rome and Europe managed the tensions generated by their belatedness well, by specialising in canonisation and anchoring. We might speculate that such a strategy of including alterity is an important source of cultural innovation throughout world history in more general terms, as well.[156]

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155   Brague 1992. For this scholar and his views on culture contact in world history see also the essay by Agut-Labordère, this volume.

156   For the elaboration of such a view from a philosophical perspective see Kristeva 1988, drawing on Levinas; from a religious perspective see Assmann 2010a, 203–212. Cf. Versluys 2017b, 274: "It is only in confrontation with the Other that we begin to understand and investigate ourselves and our own culture."

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