PZB Protokolle zur Bibel

Contexts of Ancient Rural Landscapes Creating Human Culture and Language

Applying Semiotics for Finding Universal Language in Unrelated Sources

Kontexte antiker Landschaften und die Entstehung von Sprache und Kultur.
Wie man mithilfe der Semiotik eine kulturübergreifende Sprache in unverbundenen antiken Quellen finden kann

Nelson Henrique da Silva Ferreira
Centre for Classical and Humanistic Studies – University of Coimbra
nelsonhenriquecechuc@gmail.com
ORCID-ID 0000-0003-2637-3211

Abstract: This paper has two main goals: frist, to describe the role of natural space in the creation of anthropological prototypes and in establishing universal biases by using semiotics' theoretical framework; second, to argue that the cognitive behavior of humanity depends on a universal way of interacting with nature, instead of being limited to social stereotypes.

Landscapes are frames for cultural constructions and anthropological behavior, collective and individual. In this sense, landscapes favor the construction of cultural archetypes and, by analogy, can be translated into a symbolic language. That language facilitates complex expression, explains nature and, at the same time, reveals everyday phenomena in a crystalized and invariable manner. Each visible component of a landscape is potentially a driver for the construction of meaning, i.e., the empirical experience with weather, terrain, fauna, and flora generates signs of meaning that is later reflected in the cultural matrix of a culture. In that sense, agricultural context is the main source for abstract language in sedentary cultures from Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions.

The methodology applied in this paper is directed to listen to the silent voices of the past through the analysis of unrelated textual sources, Sumerian and Roman, as the Sumerian text Inana B or Vergil's *Georgics*. It is used to 'break down' the symbolic language of those texts into 'signs of meaning', and from this process, describe the original landscape that inspired it. We argue through anthropological/linguistic evidences that two unrelated cultural contexts in space and time can share cultural features. Such parallel characteristics result from similar anthropological experiences in the natural rural world and from the impact of economic activities in the daily life of ancient people.

Abstract: Dieser Beitrag verfolgt zwei Hauptziele: Erstens soll die Rolle des natürlichen Raums bei der Entstehung anthropologischer Prototypen und bei der Festlegung universeller Einstellungen unter Verwendung des theoretischen Rahmens der Semiotik beschrieben werden; zweitens soll argumentiert werden, dass das kognitive Verhalten der Menschheit von einer gemeinsamen Weise der Interaktion mit der Natur abhängt, anstatt auf soziale Stereotypen beschränkt zu sein.

Landschaften sind ein Rahmen für kulturelle Konstruktionen und anthropologisches Verhalten, kollektiv und individuell. In diesem Sinne begünstigen Landschaften die Konstruktion kultureller Archetypen und können durch Analogie in eine symbolische Sprache übersetzt werden. Diese Sprache erleichtert komplexe Ausdrucksformen, erklärt die Natur und zeigt gleichzeitig alltägliche Phänomene in verdichteter und unveränderlicher Form. Jede sichtbare Komponente einer Landschaft ist potenziell ein Motor für die Konstruktion von Bedeutung, d. h. die empirische Erfahrung mit Wetter, Gelände, Fauna und Flora erzeugt Bedeutungszeichen, die sich später in der kulturellen Matrix einer Kultur niederschlagen. In diesem Sinne ist der landwirtschaftliche Kontext die Hauptquelle für abstrakte Sprache in sesshaften Kulturen des Mittelmeerraums und Mesopotamiens.

Die in dieser Arbeit angewandte Methodik zielt darauf ab, die leisen Stimmen der Vergangenheit durch die Analyse von nicht verwandten sumerischen und römischen Textquellen wie dem sumerischen Text Inana B oder den *Georgica* von Vergil zu hören. Sie wird verwendet, um die symbolische Sprache dieser Texte in „Bedeutungszeichen" aufzuschlüsseln und aus diesem Prozess heraus die ursprüngliche Landschaft zu beschreiben, die sie inspiriert hat. Anhand anthropologischer/linguistischer Belege zeigt sich, dass zwei räumlich und zeitlich nicht miteinander verbundene kulturelle Kontexte gemeinsame kulturelle Merkmale aufweisen können. Solche parallelen Merkmale ergeben sich aus ähnlichen anthropologischen Erfahrungen in der natürlichen ländlichen Welt und aus dem Einfluss wirtschaftlicher Aktivitäten auf das tägliche Leben der antiken Menschen.

Keywords: Ancient Landscapes; Sumerian Culture; Roman Culture; Agriculture; Inana B.

Preliminary Notes about the Method[1]

Although speculation and subjectivity play an important role in the epistemological and methodological discussion about cultural history,[2] the intention of this paper is not to compare Sumerian and Roman cultures, since geography and

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[1] Abbreviations follow the standardized system used in Assyriological studies (e.g. CAD, CDLI & PSD), with the exception of certain abbreviations that do not have a standardized definition in these publications, as CLAM: Mark E. Cohen, The canonical lamentations of ancient Mesopotamia, Vol. I & II, Maryland, 1988. For Latin texts, the abbreviations stated in OLD, OCD, Liddell & Scott 1996 and L'Année philologique have been followed.

[2] On this issue, see Fernando González Rey, Subjectivity as a New Theoretical, Epistemological, and Methodological Pathway Within Cultural-Historical Psychology, in: id./Albertina Mitjáns Martínez/Daniel Magalhães Goulart (eds.), Subjectivity within Cultural-Historical Approach. Theory, Methodology and Research (Perspectives in Cultural-Historical Research 5), Singapore 2019, 21–36.

chronology make such theoretical exercise unrealistic.[3] Instead, we intend to describe an anthropological phenomenon through a parallel approach to two cultures that have no identifiable relationship or interaction. Our main argument, developed at length in the research project SFRH/BD/93806/2013,[4] argues for a universal human relation with the natural world that generates universal topics in abstract language. The symbiotic approach to signs of meaning plays a crucial role in the argument of our thesis and constitutes the main methodological guideline to identify similar signs in different contexts. In this sense, this paper follows the general principles of the semiotics of signs applied to material culture and images crystalized by common sense and tradition.[5] In our approach, a sign of meaning is being considered as a visual marker that identifies individual features of a compounded image that can convey a fixed and invariable meaning. For example, a landscape described as having growing crops contains the sign of 'quantity' and the sign of 'output', expressed by the quantity of a crop in a landscape. In what concerns the examples presented in this paper, only one exact semantic value was identified for each sign of meaning.[6] The source of the symbolic material is the rural space, more precisely, the productive riverine landscapes. The reason for this research scope is that these landscapes tend to be suitable for agricultural subsistence in a transcultural manner, regardless of technics or crop typology.[7] The texts were selected using ancient agricultural frames as a symbolic source, however, as the final list of this paper shows, the symbols presented here are only a sample of a larger and expanding corpus.

An (Im)possible Dialogue between Sumerian Metaphor and the Language of Roman Instructional Texts

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[3] This paper is an updated, revised, and expanded version of a chapter from the PhD dissertation by Nelson H. S. Ferreira, The silent voices of the past and the abstract thought on the agricultural landscape. A dialogic reading of Sumerian and Latin literatures, PhD thesis, Universitat de Barcelona 2019.

[4] Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3).

[5] On signs of meaning relating to material culture, see Robert W. Preucel, Archaeological semiotics (Social archaeology), Malden 2006, 21–92. On semiotics, we are in general following Paul Cobley (ed.), The Routledge Companion to Semiotics, London 2010.

[6] See also Umberto Eco's definition of signs (Umberto Eco, Trattato di semiotica generale [Studi Bompiani Il campo semiotica], Milano [18]2002, 29–43) and Victor Aguiar e Silva, Teoria da literatura, Coimbra 1997, 76–79. On Umberto Eco's theory, see also Anna M. Lorusso, Cultural Semiotics (Semiotics and popular culture), New York 2015, 117–158.

[7] See examples of its materiality described through big data in Leah Reynolds, Roman Rural Settlement in Wales and the Marches (Archaeology of Roman Britain 6), Oxford 2022, 147.

Although the criteria for classifying or tagging a text as literary are quite debatable, there is one requirement that is constant in literature: symbolic language. And we find abstract expression through symbol in one of the oldest known texts, supposedly created by the first identified author in human history, the priestess Enheduana (c. XXIII century BCE), daughter of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2270–2215 BCE). In the Sumerian text *Inana's Exaltation* (Inana B),[8] flooding and destruction are presented through the representation of a landscape with the objective of qualifying and quantifying the attributes of Inana, the Sumerian goddess of war, sex, and metamorphosis, among other attributes. This composition is a prayer to the benevolence of the goddess and a praise of her powers, whose qualification and quantification are complex to express without the aid of the symbolic magnitude contained in natural phenomena.

In order to define the potential consequences of the goddess's power, it is necessary to create an image that alone can translate the value of Inana's abilities and the consequences of her actions on people/landscape. Taking Antiquity as a reference, only nature can convey superhuman dimensions, so only natural elements can portray and make sense of Inana's destructive power. As a consequence, literary language uses semantics built on images from the natural rural world. Those images are compounded by signs of meaning spontaneously identifiable in images of landscapes.

9.   ušumgal-gin$_7$ kur-re uš$_{11}$ ba-e-šum$_2$
10. ^{d}iškur-gin$_7$ ki šeg$_x$(KA×LI) gi$_4$-a-za ^{d}ezina$_2$ la-ba-e-ši-ĝal$_2$
11.   a-ma-ru kur-bi-ta ed$_3$-de$_3$
12.   saĝ-kal an ki-a ^{d}inana-bi-me-en[9]

9.   "You poisoned the foreign land like a dragon.
10.   When you roar at the earth like Iškur, no vegetation can withstand you.[10]
11.   As a flood descending from $^{(?)}$ the mountains $^{(?)}$,[11]
12.   you are their Inana, the powerful one of heaven and earth."

Inana can kill in serpent form (ušumgal-gin$_7$), but instead of inflicting limited, individual damage, the goddess has the power to affect an entire region (l. 11),

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8   Annette Zgoll, Der Rechtsfall der En-ḫedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara (AOAT 246), Münster 1997.
9   Inana B. cf. A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi O) ll. 23–24, ll. 53–54, ETCSL c. 2.4.2.15.
10   This line follows the translation in William W. Hallo/J. J. A. van Dijk, The Exaltation of Inanna (YNER 3), London 1968.
11   Cf. Angim l. 119. me3-ĝu10 a-maḫ e3-a-gin7 kur-re ba-ra-ab-[e3], "My battle, like a raised flood, [overflowed] in the mountains". Cf. Išme-Dagan S l. 13; Gudea E3/1.1.7.Cyl. A col. xv ll. 24–26 (Dietz Otto Edzard, Gudea and his dynasty [RIME 3,1], Toronto 1997, 78); CLAM 413–419, ll.39–44. Cf. ll. 10–11 with LSUr l. 72.

spreading her poison over the land, bringing sterility to the fields (l. 9), and making them infertile (l. 10). In these lines, there is a kind of comparative gradation. Inana multiplies the abilities that would be recognizable in nature, since her power is translated through a hyperbolic interpretation of a crystalized image: the danger of a serpent[12] and the power of descent water. Interlocutors need to be familiar with the natural world that gives meaning to this image to capture all the semantic value. The main requirement for understanding it is to know nature itself and its role in human subsistence and livelihood. As nature is the constant and the nature-based psycholinguistic resources are part of the toolkit of ancient people living in rural areas, these images are clearly understandable, regardless of the language used to convey it. I.e. the linguistic code of each particular language may be different, but the signs of meaning that compound that code are the same, since the source and the resultant abstract image is the same.

Line 11 seems to suggest that the goddess behaves like a flood coming from above (a-ma-ru + ed$_3$-de$_3$); and, like a flood, her power is unstoppable. The semantic construction implies that nothing will stand in her way. Here, the potential of the image used to construct linguistic meaning is easily identifiable and was probably recognized immediately, since it derives from traditional and common sense-based representations, rather than being a highly literary and aesthetic metaphor. Nevertheless, it is still a metaphor.[13] This frame has two metaphorical representations and one symbolic result:
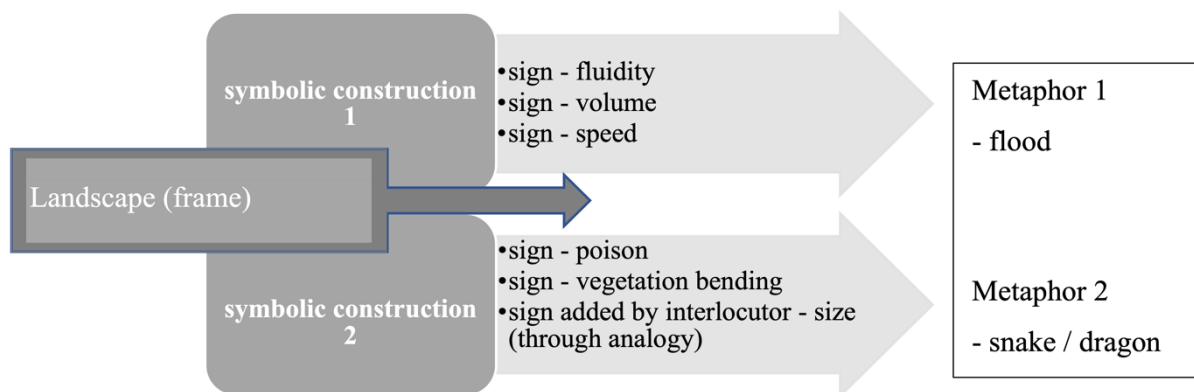

Fig. 1. Symbolic construction of destruction

[12] On the traditional symbol of the serpent see Nelson H. S. Ferreira, A imagética animal e a conceção popular—Um paralelo entre a literatura egípcia e a fábula esópica, MA thesis, Coimbra 2012, 27–36

[13] This analysis was already performed and extended in Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3).

We will return to Inana B later regarding other symbols conveyed by landscape images. We quote those lines to exemplify the semiotic mechanisms of decomposing the semantics of an image into 'signs of meaning.' On one side this approach provides the tools for interlocutors to understand the text; on the other side it gives to the anthropologist a background for identifying a landscape prototype that may have inspired abstract thought. The aim of our research method is to unveil ancient landscapes crystalized in ancient languages, while describing the universal processes of the creation of traditional abstract language, according to the principles of 'semiotics.'

Now, considering Roman literature and the construction of meaning, despite many *topoi* can be found in this hermeneutically complex literature, its basis tends to be a simple original image, i.e., human interaction with nature. Therefore, one should not dissociate literary references from traditional thought, whether the semantic of the text is constructed upon the symbolism of floods, wealth, leadership or labor.[14] The agricultural landscape is a source for creating images that speak not only to the literate Roman patricians, but to all who inscribe themselves in the natural environment. This spontaneous connection between meaning and empirical reality tends to be ignored in philological studies, and 'Instructions on farming' are particularly good sources for these matters. Vergil's *Georgica* offers a particular diverse composition of images. For example, when Vergil comments on the good fortune of the farmer who lives far from the battlefield (Verg. *G.* 2.458–460), he is presenting much more than a telluric perspective on 'human affairs.' Vergil is reflecting a rural reality and natural frame where it is developed (matrix).

> *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,*
> *agricolas! quibus ipsa procul discordibus armis*
> *fundit humo facilem uictum iustissima tellus.*

> "O farmers! If they knew how much luck they have,
> being far removed from the quarrels of war,
> where sustenance flows from the earth."[15]

> [Signs: 'work' + 'output']

The context of these lines is probably the memory of the civil war that opposed Marc Anthony to Octavian Augustus and that ended with the battle of Actium

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[14]   See Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3) 124–199.

[15]   Cf. the images that come from the 'Thessalia infelix' in Lucans' Bellum civile of crops and fields covered in blood (Luc. 7.847–872; see Annemarie Ambühl, Thessaly as an Intertextual Landscape of Civil War in Latin Poetry, in: Jeremy McInerney/Ineke Sluiter (eds.), Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity (Mnemosyne Suppl. 393), Boston 2016, 297–322.

(31 BCE). Vergil expresses the connection with nature, opposing the farmer who works the land to those who lead a complex and futile life. The source for this approach is the reality of the farming activity and its practices. The signs of meaning of the natural framework easily make up the semantic value of the sustenance that comes from the land. The statement in these verses is set against the backdrop of a productive farmland that provides substance. Just by evoking the idea of an agricultural landscape, one can see there is a sense of social balance. The scenario is a productive land offering the farmer freedom from disruptions that may have arisen after a past of war reflected in the landscape (Verg. *G.* 1.489–492):

> *ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis*
> *Romanas acies iterum uidere Philippi;*
> *nec fuit indignum superis bis* <u>*sanguine nostro*</u>
> *Emathiam et latos Haemi pinguescere campos.* (Verg. *G.* 1.489–492)

> "Therefore, Philippi saw the clash between the equal weapons
> of the Roman lines, for the second time,
> nor was it found shameful by the gods that once again <u>our blood</u>
> would enrich the wide-spread Emathia and the fields of Haemus."

> [Signs: 'field' + 'fertilizer' (= blood)]

The landscape of production generates the perception of death. In these lines, blood brings life to the fields of Macedonia after having witnessed death. Thus, an image of destruction heralds future prosperity. Despite the historical context implied here, the scenario is a riverine agricultural landscape, a fairly common image in the Mediterranean region and therefore with the potential to generate similar images in different social contexts.

Returning to Inana B, although the object of the metaphor is different from that of Vergil, one can identify a similar potential frame in the river of blood or death, such as the watercourse (id_2) brought by the goddess in Inana B ll. 43–46:

> 43. kur saĝ ki-za ba-e-de$_3$-gid$_2$-de$_3$-en ^{d}<u>ezina$_2$</u> <u>niĝ$_2$-gig-bi</u>
> 44. abul-la-ba izi mu-ni-in-ri-ri
> 45. <u>id$_2$-ba uš$_2$</u> ma-ra-an-de$_2$ uĝ$_3$-bi ma-ra-na$_8$-na$_8$[16]

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[16] Different versions exist for line 45, which may indicate different lexical results (ma-ra-na8-na8 or ba-ra-na8-na8, as suggested by the ETCLS comp.t), although in terms of the image created, the semantic value remains the same. Inana's actions caused the death of these people. In assuming this interpretation, the textual ambiguity/variant in l. 45 is not so relevant: 'they have no water to drink' or 'they have to drink the blood of their own people'. Alternatively, it could signify the river bearing the blood of the people it should feed, although this is a more complex interpretation which I do not intend to follow here. See Zgoll, Der Rechtsfall (fn. 8).

43. "Once you have extended your province over the hills, the <u>vegetation there is ruined</u>.[17]
44. You have reduced to ashes its grand entrance.
45. <u>Blood</u> is poured into <u>their rivers</u> because of you, and their people drink it."

[Signs: 'flora' + 'rotted' (ruin) + 'water' + 'fluidity' + 'input' (drinkable water)]

Agriculture is not mentioned directly, instead the interlocutor perceives a once balanced landscape that is now disturbed. The river is shown as an allegory of death rather than life, which should represent a harmonious world in the riverine farming landscape. A semantic value is created by the river carrying blood or literally death ($uš_2$)[18], which can serve here as an inversion of the idea of 'water of life' found in the imagery of Sumerian and Latin literatures.[19]

Inana is presented as having a power capable of destroying fields and killing plants, which would inevitably mean death by starvation. This meaning is conveyed by the image of vegetation that has become somehow 'abnormal' (^{d}ezina$_2$ niĝ$_2$-gig-bi) and the visual death of the landscape is extended through the image of human death, namely the blood ($uš_2$) in the river (id$_2$-ba). Indeed, the intensity of this metaphor can be identified in the inversion of value from life to death. The river, provider of life (cf. fig. 2, table 1), is presented as a symbol of disruption, bringing to the scene the extreme opposite of this value.[20] A symbol that should represent life becomes the manifestation of death, which can be found, among other sources, in the following example from Lucan (39–65 CE):

(...) Quantum scelerum quantumque malorum in populos lux ista feret! Quot regna iacebunt! Sanguine Romano quam turbidus ibit Enipeus! (Luc. 7.114–16):

"How much crime and how much suffering this day will bring to people! How many kingdoms will fall! How turbid the Enipeus will flow with Roman blood!"

[Signs: 'water' + 'fluidity' + 'quantity' + 'blood']

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[17] This translation follows William W. W. Hallo/K. Lawson Younger (eds.), Context of Scripture. Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical World, Leiden 2003, 519.
[18] See Damu, CAD 3 75–80.
[19] See Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3) 65–71, 78–82, 93–97.
[20] On the beneficial effects of the flood see Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3) 65–71, 78–82.

Naturally, the riverine landscape in the agricultural context has a great multiplicity of 'signs of meaning.' In relation to the river, we can find the following signs and compounded symbols:
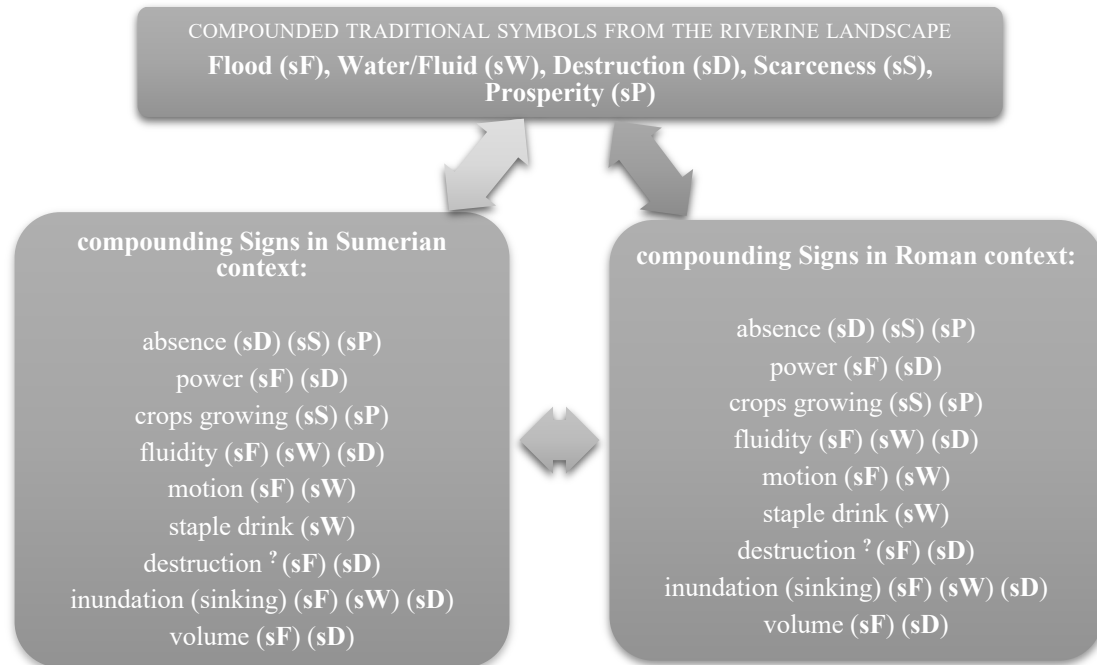

Fig. 2. Signs of meaning from riverine landscapes (from the sources listed in table 1)

The water landscapes from agricultural contexts generate signs of meaning in the collective thought of rural people and people in some way familiar with the natural landscapes of rural contexts. Signs can be found in Sumerian or Roman literature along with traditional symbols. Such symbolic language was generated from the process of interacting with nature for centuries and brings together visual signs of the landscape. If natural frames for different regions and chronology carry the same signs of meaning, the results in the abstract language will be the same. The Latin author Lucan uses a similar image to the above when commenting on the number of Sulla's (138–78 BCE) victims. Sulla was a prominent Roman general and politician who was at the epicenter of the first great civil war in Roman history. Again, this vivid description includes the signs of the flood (Luc. 2.209–220) to create a clear dimension of the impact:

congesta recepit
omnia Tyrrhenus Sullana cadavera gurges.
(…) iam sanguinis alti
vis sibi fecit iter campumque effusa per omnem
praecipitique ruens Tiberina in flumina rivo
haerentis adiuuit aquas; nec iam alueus amnem
nec retinent ripae, redditque cadauera campo.

tandem Tyrrhenas vix eluctatus in undas
sanguine caeruleum torrenti diuidit aequor.

"The corpses of Sulla's victims were all piled up and thrown into the Tyrrhenian Sea;
(...) at this very time the river of blood soon made a way for itself
and flooded all the plain; it rushed in violence through the Tiber course
and swelled the impeded current till its bed and
banks could not contain the stream; and the river brought the corpses back to the plain;
finally forced its way with difficulty to the Tyrrhene sea,
where it divided the blue evenly with a wave of blood."
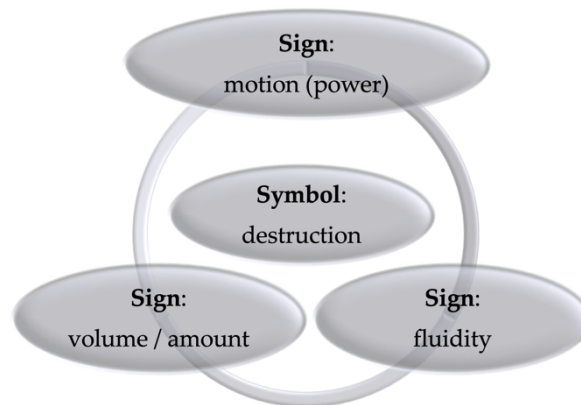
Fig. 3. Symbol of destruction through the compounding of signs of meaning from the flood

Here, literary metaphor and traditional signs converge into a symbolic scene. The direct and indirect consequences of the negative signs of the flood follow the below chain of events, extensively recognized in ancient tradition:
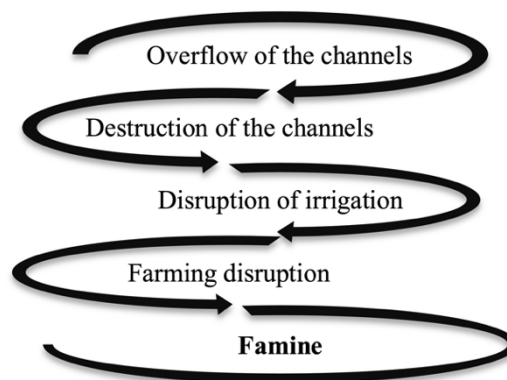
Fig. 4. Chain of action/effects

The corruption of the river and the power of the flood are expressed in the same symbol. Ultimately, famine may be the final consequence – indeed, the flooding of the Tiber is explicitly linked to food shortages, which empirically supports the

Roman people's experience of excessive and unexpected floods (*SHA, vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini* 8.4–5):[21]

> *sed interpellauit istam felicitatem securitatemque imperatoris prima Tiberis inunda-tio, quae sub illis gravissima fuit. quae res et multa urbis aedificia uexavit et plurimum animalium interemit et famem grauissimam peperit.*

> "But a flood of the Tiber, which was the most serious of those times, interrupted the emperor's happiness and tranquillity. It shook many buildings in the city and slayed many animals and caused a severe famine."

> [Signs: water + volume + animal + quantity + disruption]

Objectively, Inana's landscape and Lucan's description are rather difficult to compare or relate, since the symbolic representation in each of the previous images leads to different realities and hermeneutic results. However, the mechanisms of meaning construction are the same and use an identical base frame: the agricultural landscape and the signs of meaning within it. Those linguistic dynamics are universal to any society engaged in rural livelihood. The interlocutors recognize the scenario and consequently understand the symbolic meaning. Such signs of meaning create a bridge between the practical reality of life experience and the idea that is to be conveyed to the interlocutor. The following overview of examples of signs of meaning and the texts where they can be found in Sumerian and Roman literature exemplifies this clearly:

Signs	Sumerian Textual references	Latin Textual references
Production	*CT* 42 4 rev. iii 1–2; Išme-Dagan D ll. 24–26; DI D$_1$ ll. 60–63; CLAM 272–318, ll. c+153–4, CLAM 221–249, ll. c+279-c+280; Gudea E3 /1.1.7. CylB col. x ll. 16–23; LSUr ll. 498–502; Rīm-Sîn G ll. 31–33; Nanna L ll. 21–23; *Enlil and Ninlil* ll. 91–99	Verg. *G.* 2.203, 2.255, 4.125–126, 4. 369, 4.371–373; Col. 10.1.23–24, 10.1.1.136–139, 10.1.281–286, 11.3.8; Plin. *Nat.* 3.54, 3.49, 3.54–55, 5.118–119, 15.137; *Mela* 2.6.1–6; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.5–16; Sen. *Oed.* 41–43
Absence	LUr ll. 144–146, 269–270; *Hymn to Enlil* ll. 115–23; LSUr ll. 49–51, ll. 127–130.	Col. 11.3.9–10; *Sen. Oed.* 41–43

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[21] See Paul Garnsey, Famine and food supply in the Graeco-Roman world. Responses to risk and crisis, Cambridge 1988; Gregory S. Aldrete, Floods of the Tiber in ancient Rome (Ancient society and history), Baltimore 2006, 132 mentions the records of various periods of famine associated with the Tiber: 54 BCE, 23 BCE, 22 BCE, CE 5, CE 69, CE 162, and CE 371.4. On the register of great floods in Rome, See Aldrete, Floods 241–246 (cf. CLAM 120–151, ll. 15–25; CLAM 271–278).

Power	Inana B ll.9–12; CLAM 123–137, ll. 15–24; CLAM 271–288, ll. B+93-b+101; CLAM 319–332, 1–14, 28–98; LSUr l.73, ll. 76–78, ll. 405; Nungal A ll. 31–33; Cooper 1978 l.119; Išme-Dagan S l. 13; Gudea E3/1.1.7.CylA col. xv ll.24–26; CA ll.149–151	Verg. *G.* 4.371–373; Plin. *Nat.* 3.54, 3.55, 3.118–19; 15.137; Liv. 4.49.2–3, 24.9.6, 35.21.5–6; *Hor. Carm.*1.2; Sen. *Nat.* 3.27.9; Luc. 2.209–220; *SHA, vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini* 8.4–5
Crops Growing	DumDr ll.131–132, ll. 138–143; DI D$_1$ ll. 60–63; LSUr ll. 498–502, *Blessings of Kesh, CT* 36 col. iii, II. 13, 15, 19, 21, 23; ETCSL c.1.1.3 ll. 259–60; ETCSL c.1.6.2 ll. 359–62	Verg. *G.* 4.125–126, 4.371–373; Col. 10.1.1.136–139, 10.1.23–24, 11.3.9–10; Cato *Agr.* 1.6.3; Mela 2.6.1–6; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.5–16; Sen. *Oed.* 41–43
Fluidity	LSUr l.73, ll. 76–78, ll. 107–8, 216–217, ll. 293–294, ll. 389–391; Inana B ll.9–12; Išme-Dagan S ll. 13–15; CLAM 123–137, ll. 15–24; CLAM 120–151, ll. 15–25; CLAM 271–288, ll. B+93-b+101; CLAM.106, ll. b+253–254; CLAM 319–332, 1–14, 28–98; CA ll. 149–151; Nungal A ll. 31–33; Angim l.119; Gudea E3/1.1.7.CylA col. xv ll.24–26); Nanna L ll. 21–23	Verg. *G.* 4.371–373; Col. 10.1.23–24, 10.1.1.136–139, 11.3.8; Mela 2.6.1–6; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.5–16, *S.* 1.4.9–11; Liv. 24.9.6; Sen. *Nat.* 3.27.9, *Oed.* 41–43, *Phaed.* 498–500; Plin. *Nat.* 3.118–19; Catul. 64.357–60; Luc. 2.209–220, 7.114–16
Motion	LSUr ll. 389–391, ll. 405; Išme-Dagan S ll. 13–15; CLAM 123–137, ll. 15–24; CLAM 106, ll. b+253–254; CLAM 271–288, ll. 34–35; CLAM 319–332, 1–14, 28–98	Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.5–16; Liv. 24.9.6; Sen. *Nat.* 3.9; Plin. *Nat.* 3.118–19; Prop. 3.3.43–46; Luc. 2.209–220; *SHA, vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini* 8.4–5
Drink (Irrigation)	Angim l. 171; *hoe and plough* l. 157–158	Col. 1.5.2–3, 1.5.6, 10.1.1.143–144, 147–148, 10.1.23–24, 11.3.8, 11.3.9–10; Plin. *Nat.* 19.55; Verg. *G.* 4.125–126; Mela 2.6.1–6
Destruction [?]	Inana B ll.9–12; CLAM 106, ll. b+253–254; CLAM 120–151, ll. 15–25; p. 271–288, ll. 34–35; CLAM 319–341, ll. f+164; LSUr ll. ll. 107–8, ll. 127–130, 405; LUr ll. 49–51, ll. 98–99, ll. 144–146, l. 197, ll. 269–270; Gudea E3/1.1.7.CylA, col. viii ll. 26–27; *Hymn to Enlil* ll.115–23	Plin. *Nat.* 3.54; 3.55, 3.118–19; 15.137; Liv. 4.49.2–3, 24.9.6, 35.21.5–6; Hor. *Carm.* 1.2; *SHA, vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini* 8.4–5; Sen. *Nat.* 3.28.7.5
Inundation (Sinking)	CLAM 120–151, ll. 15–25; CLAM 271–288, ll. 34–35; CLAM 319–341, ll. f+164;	Liv. 24.9.6, 35.21.5–6

	Cooper 1978, l.119; LSUr ll. 405; Išme-Da-gan S l. 13; Gudea E3/1.1.7.CylA col. xv ll.24–26	
Volume/ Quantity	CLAM 106, ll. b+253–254; CLAM 195–199, ll.33–38; CLAM 271–288, ll. 34–35; CLAM 319–341, ll. f+164; DI D$_1$ ll. 60–63; Nungal A ll. 31–33	Hor. *S.* 1.4.9–11; Liv. 35.21.5–6; Sen. *Phaed.* 498–500; Luc. 2.209–220

Table 1. Textual sources for signs of meaning from riverine landscape

Returning to the Sumerian text, Inana B, the value lies in the destruction reflected in the river, regardless of its direct effect on people's lives. If the river is blood, nothing will live, because that river is no longer the source of life in these lands, but the result of death.

Blood is literally the liquid of life when considered part of the human body, but when it flows from the body, it can be a symbol of death. Whereas Inana's river conveys the idea of consummated death, or death by thirst (depending on the interpretation of the text), in Vergil's metaphor it represents past death. Such death, like the mud of the river, fertilized the fields. It is future life for the farmers who will subsequently occupy the land (Verg. *G.* 1.489–492).

Inana B contains references to possible acts in foreign lands and how they can correspond to an outcome in the present through the compound symbol constructed in the text. On the other hand, the author of the *Georgica* is marking a past in opposition to the present: the past is the destruction and, after chaos, only life can follow, and the agricultural frame is needed to convey this idea spontaneously. The reason literature uses these landscapes to construct meaning has to do with people's familiarity with such images.

In the Latin example, the farmer represents a time of peace that also serves as a memory of the chaos of war; the same war that brought fertility to the present. In the Sumerian text (Inana B ll. 43–46), whether past or present, Inana's river of death destroys life. The actions of the Roman army have the same effect on reality and therefore on the semantic value with the framework being the agricultural space. Considering both examples, it can be said that only when the conflicts are over can nature reclaim its spoils and return to harmony, and the landscape is necessary to mark that transition:

> *scilicet et tempus ueniet, cum finibus illis*
> *agricola incuruo terram molitus aratro*
> *exesa inueniet scabra robigine pila,*
> *aut grauibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanis*
> *grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris.* Verg. *G.* 1.493–497

"(…) time naturally shall come that, in those fields,
the farmer toiling the soil with a curved-plough
will unearth corroded javelins and rusted swords
or clank with a heavy hoe on empty helmets
and wonder at the huge bones found in uncovered graves."[22]

[Signs: 'field/soil' + 'work' + 'tool']

A scenario like this confines the work of the land. The farmer marks the balance of nature, as the normal order of things is being followed after a period of turmoil. The landscape explains the harmony that is humanized in the form of a peaceful life working the land. This idea of ordeal has parallels in the Sumerian context because the setting is similar and shares signs of meaning (cf. DI D_1 60–63). For this reason, a similar landscape may have a similar meaning in two unrelated contexts and literatures.[23] In short, the farmer and the riverine background of his activity are the key to prosperity, and therefore if his work is done properly, society survives and prospers, even after a period of chaos, as manifested in the Sumerian diatribe 'the hoe and the plough':

172. ^{d}en-lil$_2$-le šu nu-me-en-dag
173. ^{ĝiš}al zu$_2$ dili bar-rim$_4$-še$_3$ ba-an-šum$_2$
174. me-en-de$_3$ en-te-en buru$_{14}$-gin$_7$ mu-e-la$_2$[24]

172. "Enlil did not abandon us.
173. The single-toothed hoe was struck against the dry soil.
174. You carry the winter with the harvest for us."

[Signs: 'tool' + 'work' + 'soil' + 'output']

In Vergil's verses, working on the landscape revives memories of a battle that may have been fought in the fields. Vergil himself suggests an image of a land where things that were not supposed to grow are thriving. The vivid image of abundance is also a reminder of the dangers of destroying the fields. In the present the farmers are happy, under a natural harmony. But in the past, there was death and, consequently, sadness. Inana's river of death (or blood) (Inana B ll. 43–46) shows the potential negative consequences of the goddess's powers, explained through a very familiar and emotional interpretation of the destruction of the fields, whereas Vergil's example presents the actual and future outcome. In terms of abstract imagery, it is possible to establish a dialogue between the semantics of the images in both texts, since the processes for constructing meaning

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[22] Following translation in Ambühl, Thessaly (fn. 15) 297–322.
[23] Cf. Hoe and Plough ll. 1–17 (ETCSL c.5.3.1) and Summer and Winter ll. 1–11, ETCSL c.5.3.3.
[24] Cf. Hoe and Plough ll. 151–158; ll. 165–173. For this text we are following and have adapted the ETCSL translation. Regarding the figure of the farmer see Ferreira, The silent (fn. 3) 124–199.

are similar. Thus, what can be said about the differences in the construction of imagery in different cultures? How does this approach contribute to Sumeriology or Roman cultural history? The symbols of the landscapes of abundance or scarcity and the signs of meaning that make them up in both cultures help to answer it:

COMPOUNDED TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS FROM THE LANDSCAPE OF ABUNDANCE AND SCARCENESS
richness (sR), beauty (sB), prosperity (sPP), harmony (sH), happiness (sHa),
poverty (sPPP), famine (sF), sadness (sS), ugly (sU)

compounding Signs in Sumerian context:

work (sB)(sH) (sHa) (sS) (sU)
growing (sR) (sB) sPP (sH) (sPPP)(sF)(sHa) (sS) (sU)
crops (sR) (sB) sPP (sH)(sF)(sHa) (sS) (sU) (sPPP)
providing (sR) (sB)(sH) (sF) (sPPP)
quantity (sR) (sB) (sPP)(sHa) (sS) (sU)
variety (sR)(sB) (sPP) (sHa) (sS) (sU)

compounding Signs in Roman context:

work (sB)(sH) (sHa) (sS) (sU)
growing (sR)(sB) (sPP) (sH) (sPPP)(sF)(sHa) (sS) (sU)
crops (sR)(sB) (sPP) (sH) (sPPP)(sF)(sHa) (sS) (sU)
providing (sR)(sB) (sH) (sPPP) (sF)
quantity (sR)(sB) (sPP) (sHa) (sS) (sU)
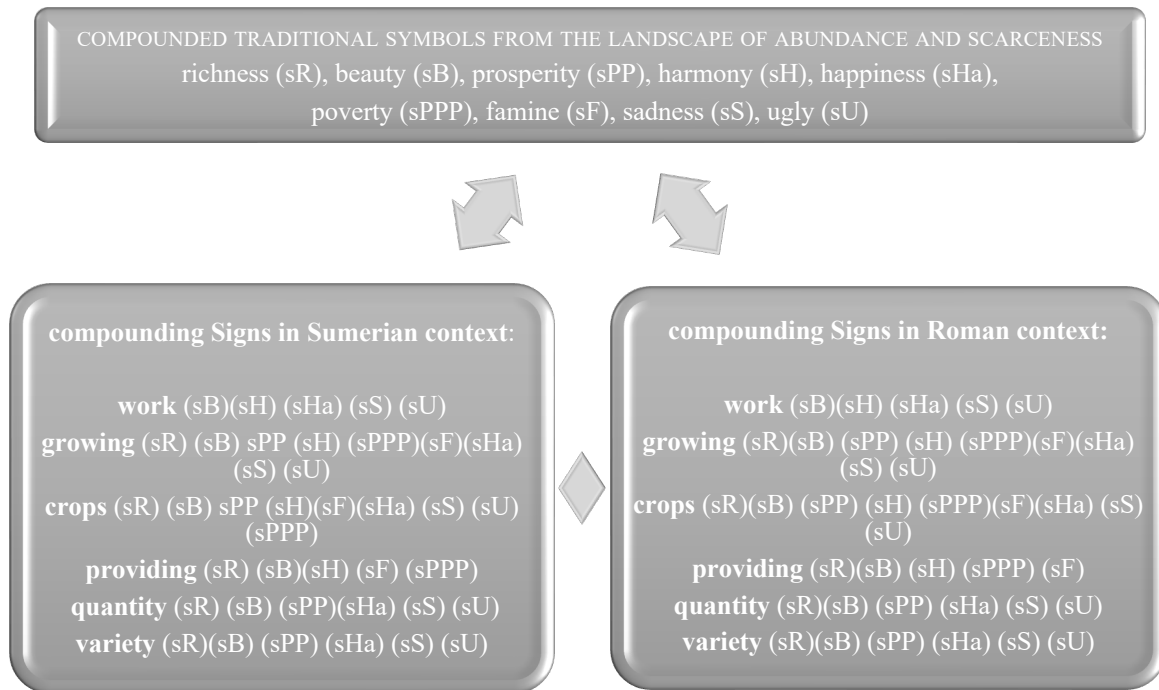**variety** (sR)(sB) (sPP) (sHa) (sS) (sU)

Fig. 5. Signs of meaning from productive and abundant landscape

Textual sources and signs from the productive landscape:

Signs	Sumerian Textual references	Latin Textual references
Work	DI A ll. 51–56; Enlil A ll. 109–123; DI I 23–28; CA ll. 256–280; LUr ll. 271–274	Col. 1.2.3, 1.3.8, 1.3.9, 2.1.3–4, 10.1.1.100–109, 10.1.1.242–254; Verg. *G*. 2.412–413
Growing	*Summer and Winter* ll.19–25; CA ll. 157–175; Išme-Dagan S ll. 4–7; DI T ll. 2–8; EnlSud ll.156–166; UrN D (Ur Version) ll.32–38; LUr ll. 3–11, ll. 38–44; LSUr ll.49–51, ll.85–91, ll. 123–132, ll. 271–274, ll. 303–317; Enlil A ll. 109–123; CA ll. 170–175, CA ll. 222–236, ll.245–255; *Enlil and Ninlil* ll. 143–150; DI A ll. 2–10; DI D ll. 4–11; DI F ll.1–16, 29–32; DI O ll. 15–30; DI W ll. 7–34; E1.14.20.1, col. iii ll.22–31; E3/1.1.7.CylB col. xv ll. 1–4; ELA ll. 551–555, ll. 596–599; *Enki and the World Order* ll. 52–60; Ninurta F ll. 1–11	Verg. *G*. 1.489–492, 2.440–445, 4.118–126, Col. 1.2.3, 1.3.8, 2.1.2–4, 3.8.1, 3.8.4, 3.9.4, 10.1.1.2–15, 10.1.1.139–149, 10.1.1.185–189, 10.1.1.242–254; Var. *R*. 3.16.29–30; Hor. *Ep*. 1.16.1–4, Sen. *Oed*. 648–653
Crops	*Summer and Winter* ll.19–25; DI A ll. 51–56; DI D ll. 4–11; DI F ll. 29–32; DI O ll. 15–30; DI R ll. 5–8; DI T ll. 2–8; CA ll. 12–18, 25–28, ll. 37–39, ll. 46–56, ll. 157–175, ll. 222–236, ll.245–255; Išme-Dagan S ll. 4–7; EnlSud ll.103–123, ll.156–166; Rīm-Sîn G ll.1–10, 11–21; DumDr ll. 110–114; *The song of the ploughing oxen: an ululumama to Ninurta* ll. 14–37; DumDr ll. 136–139, ll. 142–143; *Sheep and Grain* ll. 190–191; UrN D (Ur Version) ll.32–38; LUr ll. 3–11, ll. 38–44, ll. 251–253, ll. 266–268, ll. 275–276; LSUr ll.49–51, ll.85–91, ll. 123–132, ll. 303–317; Enlil A ll. 109–123; *Ninurta's exploits: a šir-sud (?) to Ninurta* ll. 358–367; *Enlil and Ninlil* ll. 143–150; DI A ll. 2–10; DI B ll. 7–9; DI F1 ll. 11–20; CLAM 195–199, ll. a+51-a+52; E1.14.20.1, col. iii ll.22–31; ELA ll. 596–599, ll. 619–625; *Nanna-Suen's journey to Nibru* ll. 186–97, ll. 294–305; *Enki and the World Order* ll. 52–60; Ninurta F ll. 1–11; *Enemani Ilu Ilu – His Word Is a Wail, a Wail!* ll. 13–17; SP 3.23; E3/1.1.7.StB, col. iii 12–19+col. iv 1–13; E3/1.1.7.CylB col. xv ll. 1–4; *Ewe and Grain* ll. 1–36	Col. 1.2.3, 1.3.8, 2.1.2–4, 3.8.1, 3.8.4, 3.21.3–4, 10.1.1.2–15, 10.1.1.100–109, 10.1.1.139–149, 10.1.1.185–189, 10.1.1.242–254; Var. *R*. 3.16.29–30; Hor. *Ep*. 1.16.1–4; Var. *R*. 1.16.2–3; Verg. *G*. 2.485–86; Sen. *Oed*. 49–51, 648–653
Providing	DI F ll.9–16; DI A ll. 51–56; DI O ll. 15–30; DI R ll. 1–11; DI W ll. 7–34; DI T ll. 2–8; *Summer and Winter* ll.19–25; CA ll. 12–18, ll. 25–28, ll. 37–39, ll. 157–175; EnlSud	Verg. *G*. 1.489–492, 2.412–413, 2.440–445, 4.118–126; Col. 1.2.3,

	ll.103–123, ll.156–166; Rīm-Sîn G ll.1–10; *The song of the ploughing oxen: an ululumama to Ninurta* ll.14–37; DumDr ll. 136–139, ll. 142–143; UrN D (Ur Version) ll.32–38; LUr ll. 3–11, ll. 38–44, ll. 251–253, ll. 271–274; Enlil A ll. 109–123; *Ninurta's exploits: a šir-sud (?) to Ninurta* ll. 358–367; *Enlil and Ninlil* ll. 143–150; E1.14.20.1, col. Iii ll.22–31; E3/1.1.7.CylB col. xv ll. 1–4; *Nanna-Suen's journey to Nibru* ll. 186–97, ll. 294–305; *Enki and the World Order* ll. 52–60; Ninurta F ll. 1–11; *Ewe and Grain* ll. 1–36	1.3.8, 2.1.2–4, 3.8.1, 3.8.4, 3.9.4, 3.21.3–4, 10.1.1.100–109, 10.1.1.139–149, 10.1.1.242–254, 10.1.1.2–15; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.1–4; Var. *R.* 1.16.2–3; Sen. *Oed.* 49–51
Quantity	*Summer and Winter* ll.19–25; DI A ll. 2–10, ll. 51–56; DI R ll. 1–11; DI O ll. 15–30; DI T ll. 2–8; DI W ll. 7–34; CA ll. 25–28, ll. 37–39, ll. 46–56, ll. 157–175; Išme-Dagan S ll. 4–7; EnlSud ll.103–123, ll. 159–166; Rīm-Sîn G ll.1–10; *Sheep and Grain* ll. 190–191; UrN D (Ur Version) ll. 32–38; LSUr ll.85–91, ll. 123–132; Enlil A ll. 109–123; *Ninurta's exploits: a šir-sud (?) to Ninurta*, ll. 358–367; E1.14.20.1, col. Iii ll.22–31; ELA ll. 551–555, ll. 596–599; *Nanna–Suen's journey to Nibru* ll. 186–97, ll. 294–305; *Enki and the World Order* ll. 52–60; Ninurta F ll. 1–11; Gudea E3/1.1.7.StB, col. iii 12–19+col. iv 1–13	Col. 1.2.3, 1.3.8, 3.8.4, 3.21.3–4, 10.1.1.185–189, 10.1.1.2–15; Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.1–4; Var. *R.* 1.16.2–3
Variety	*Ninurta's exploits: a šir-sud (?) to Ninurta* ll. 358–367; DI R ll. 1–11; DI B ll. 7–9; DI W ll. 7–34; ELA ll. 596–599; Ninurta F ll. 1–11	Hor. *Ep.* 1.16.1–4, Col. 1.2.3, 3.21.3, 10.1.1.185–189, 10.1.1.242–254, 10.1.1.2–15; Var. *R.* 1.16.2–3

Table 2. Textual sources of signs of meaning from agricultural fields

The parallels between constitutive elements of cultures help to standardize certain impacts of the landscape on the anthropological constructions. Such constructions compound a universal abstract language that at the same time is a conceptual language based on the rural world. The recognition of such ancient concepts in different cultures provides us with the tools to compare related imagery, such as telluric feelings or the farmer as a moral stereotype.[25] However, it should be stressed that one can compare symbols and signs of meaning, but not cultures,

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[25] See examples of this in Nelson H. S. Ferreira, Emotion Constructed upon Sumerian Agricultural Landscape. The Anthropology of Meaning, Archivi Delle Emozioni 3,1 (2023) 103–122.

since cultures are complex constructions. Nevertheless, understanding how abstract language crystalizes due to its relationship to landscape enhances the process of 'listening to' the silent people from different cultures, using similar methodologies. If one can know how the landscape these people grew up in was, one can understand how it shaped their minds and vice versa.

Although there is no clear demonstration of telluric feelings or what might be called an artistic representation of a farming landscape in Sumerian texts, it is likely that there was, since the necessary abstract concepts also existed, just as in Roman culture. Certain texts can therefore be approached in a more literary sense, knowing that some concepts expressed in Sumerian texts are telluric and the language of expression is literary. This is because the listener or the reader has the necessary tools to perceive such imagery. Besides it being possible to propose that similar physical contexts create similar abstract thought, one can also argue for a way of approaching the archaeology of ancient people's thought even when personal accounts of their lives are not available and only language from an elite that would not, at a first glance, reflect the cross-cultural matrix of the common people.[26]

Despite their clear literary dimension, the following lines can be seen as a way of reinforcing the answer to a crucial question in our hypothesis (below) and highlighting the purpose of our argument (Verg. *G.* 1.505–508):

> quippe ubi fas versum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem,
> tam multae scelerum facies, non ullus aratro
> dignus honos, squalent abductis arva colonis,
> et curuae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem.

> "Indeed, here justice and sin have changed places,
> so many wars around the world,
> so many shapes of evil, and no respect for the plough,
> fields roughed by bereft of farmers
> and the curved scythes are forged into hard swords."

> [Signs: 'tool' + 'ruin' + 'work' (absence)]

Given the scenario constructed here, how strange would this image (Verg. *G.* 1. 505–8) have looked to a Sumerian farmer, or indeed to any farmer? Would

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[26]   On the existence of abstract expression in the Sumerian or Akkadian language, Marc Van De Mieroop, Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia, Princeton 2016, 9 states: "All ancient Babylonian scholars were aware of the underlying principles and displayed remarkable skill and inventiveness in their application. These were not word games, but analyses that aimed to reveal truth. Babylonian scholars grasped reality through its written form. Their readings were thus exercises in epistemology."

rural persons have been familiar with such symbolic imagery, since she/he had experienced war and turmoil? The answer comes in the form of another question: would she/he have suffered the same consequences? The Sumerian lamentations about the lost cities give an affirmative answer to this question.

> 38. ^{id2}idigna ^{id2}buranun-na gu$_2$ tab 2-a-ba u$_2$ ḫul mu$_2$-mu$_2$-de$_3$ (…)
> 42. gan$_2$-ne$_2$ zid-de$_3$ ^{ĝiš}al nu-ru-gu$_2$-de$_3$ numun ki nu-tag-de$_3$
> 43. e-el-lu šir$_3$ gud sub$_2$-sub$_2$-ba edin-na nu-di-de$_3$
> 44. ^{e2}tur$_3$-ra i$_3$ gara$_2$ nu-ak-de$_3$ šurum ki nu-tag-e-de$_3$ (LSUr) [27]

> 38. "Bad weeds should grow on the two banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, (…)
> 42. the hoe should not plough the arable fields, the seed should not touch the soil;
> 43. the sound of the cowherds should not be heard in the open country,
> 44. butter and cheese should not be made in the cattle-pen, dung should not be spread on the land."

> (signs: 'river' + 'work'(absence) + 'tool' + 'field/soil' + 'animal' + 'output' + 'ruin')

Here, the fields and pastures are empty: no one is working in the fields (gan$_2$-ne$_2$ zid-de$_3$ ^{ĝiš}al) or putting cattle out to graze; in short, production/supply no longer takes place. Therefore, there is no future. The compounded meaning draws on the signs of meaning of a harmonious landscape that does not exist. In other words, it distorts the crystalized depiction of how things should be, and food or its potential are the sources of images that express the desolation in an agricultural landscape that should frame prosperity. In this sense, the signs of meaning for a balanced society can be identified through their absence or corruption/disruption (LSUr):

> 3. me ki-en-gi-ra šu bal ak-de$_3$
> 4. bal sag$_9$-ga e$_2$-ba gi$_4$-gi$_4$-de$_3$
> 5. uru$_2$ gul-gul-lu-de$_3$ e$_2$ gul-gul-lu-de$_3$
> 6. tur$_3$ gul-gul-lu-de$_3$ amaš tab-tab-be$_2$-de$_3$
> 7. gud-bi tur$_3$-bi-a nu-gub-bu-de$_3$
> 8. udu-bi amaš-bi-a nu-daĝal-e-de$_3$ (cf. LUr ll. 266–268)
> 9. id$_2$-bi a mun$_4$-na tum$_3$-u$_3$-de$_3$
> 10. gan$_2$-ne$_2$ zid-de$_3$ ^{u2}KI.KAL mu$_2$-mu$_2$-de$_3$
> 11. edin-e u$_2$-a-nir mu$_2$-mu$_2$-de$_3$

> 3. "To overturn the divine powers of Sumer,
> 4. to change the favorable reign in its household,
> 5. to destroy the city, to destroy the house,
> 6. to destroy the cattle-pen, to level the sheepfold;

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[27] See Piotr Michalowski, The lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur (MC 1), Winona Lake 1989.

7. so that the <u>bull should not stand</u> in the <u>pen</u>,
8. the sheep should not multiply in the sheepfold,
9. <u>watercourses</u> should carry <u>salty water</u>,
10. <u>weeds should grow</u> in the <u>good fields</u>,
11. <u>mourning plants</u> <u>should grow</u> in the <u>open country</u>."

[Signs: 'water' + 'work'(absence) + 'tool' + 'field/soil' + 'animal' +'weed' + 'ruin']

Given the unstable and constantly changing natural processes that distribute water and sediment in an alluvial landscape, agricultural civilization is a powerful countervailing force in nature. Field crops, gardens and orchards, canal systems for irrigation, storage and transport facilities are cumulative livelihoods and capital investments that are threatened by changes in water courses and have parallels in ancient agricultural cultures.[28] Although the production techniques are quite different in many aspects, the disruption has similar consequences and this is demonstrated in a similar symbolic way in *vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini* (*SHA* 8.4–5) and in the *Lamentation on the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (LSUr)

> *sed interpellauit istam felicitatem securitatemque imperatoris prima Tiberis inundatio, quae sub illis grauissima fuit. quae res et multa urbis aedificia uexauit et plurimum animalium interemit et famem grauissimam peperit* (SHA, vita Marci Antonini Philosophi Iuli Capitolini 8.4–5)

> "But a flood of the Tiber interrupted the emperor's happiness and tranquility, which was the most serious of those times. It shook many buildings in the city and slayed many animals and caused a severe famine."

> 107. a-ma-ru ki al ak-e šu im-ur$_3$-ur$_3$-re
> 108. ud gal-gin$_7$ ki-a mur mi-ni-ib-ša$_4$ a-ba-a ba-ra-e$_3$ (LSUr ll. 107–108)

> 107. "The flood, a working hoe on the ground, wipes away everything.
> 108. Like a great storm it roared over the earth; who could escape it?"[29]

In short, there is a group of signs within the symbol of the river that give the flood a negative value (see fig. 3), describing it basically as a calamity that leaves nothing untouched. Of course, its absence should not be forgotten, as the flood also has a benign value. In fact, abandonment is presented in the LSUr through the compound symbol of the flood, which clearly describes an image of total abandonment due to drought, with the following consequences:

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[28]   Robert M. Adams, Heartland of cities: Surveys of ancient settlement and land use on the central floodplain of the Euphrates, Chicago 1981, 19.
[29]   Cf. Gudea E3/1.1.7.Cyl. A, col. viii ll. 23–25 (Edzard, Gudea [fn. 11] 74).

127. id₂-bi šag₄-sug₄-ga i₃-ĝal₂ a nu-un-de₂
128. id₂ ᵈen-ki-ke₄ nam ku₅-ra₂-gin₇ ka-bi-a ba-uš₂
129. a-šag₄-ga še gu-nu nu-ĝal₂ uĝ₃-e nu-gu₇-e
130. pu₂-ĝⁱˢkiri₆-bi gir₄-gin₇ ba-ḫur-ḫur edin-bi sag₂ ba-ab-di

127. "There is emptiness in the water course, no water flows there.
128. Like a canal cursed by Enki, its opening is blocked.
129. There is no grain or flax in the fields, people had no food;
130. the orchards were scorched like an oven, the open country was scattered (trans. Michalowski 1989)."

[signs: 'water'(absence) + 'tool' + 'field' + 'output' (absence) + 'fluidity' + 'motion']

The consequence of the lack of floods is the paralysis of farming. This fact is described in later lines, where the desertification caused by the drying up of the river is clearly presented. (LSUr ll. 144–146; ETCSL c.2.2.3) Similarly, in the tragedy *Oedipus*, Seneca (4 BCE– 65 CE) uses the image of dry rivers to highlight a problematic situation widespread in the region of Thebes (Sen. *Oed*. 41–43):

deseruit amnes umor atque herbas color
aretque Dirce, tenuis Ismenos fluit
et tinguit inopi nuda uix unda uada.

"Water has deserted the streams, and the color the vegetation.
Dirce is dry, and Ismenus flows tenuously,
scarcely wets the naked channel with its scanty water."

[signs: 'water'(absence) + 'vegetation' (absence) + 'fluidity' + 'motion']

The Latin philosopher uses a wide range of symbolic tools in the text dedicated to the fall of the king of Thebes, Oedipus. As Schiesaro notes: "Oedipus himself is aware that the city has undergone a dramatic transformation and is now the very antithesis of a *locus amoenus,* as an *inferna facies,* 'hellish vista' (49) dominates even the dwellings of the gods (37–43, 49–51)."[30] This awareness comes from common sense, by analyzing the text, we can understand that the situation in the city is bad because the rivers are dry and the crops cannot grow: there is starvation and despair.[31] The description of the landscape surpasses the literary context, as it is being used as an image of meaning. It could be an allegory, as indeed it is, but the metaphorical potential lies in the selection of signs that a

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[30] Alessandro Schiesaro, A Dream Shattered? Pastoral Anxieties in Senecan Drama, in: Marco Fantuzzi/Theodore D. Papanghelis (eds.), Brill's companion to Greek and Latin pastoral, Leiden 2006, 427–449: 435.

[31] On the frequent food crises in the Roman world, see Garnsey, Famine (fn. 21) 8–39, 169–181, 271–277.

portrait like this can contain. If this text is transposed into a simple symbolic image, the meaning remains the same and anyone familiar with rustic life will understand what is implied in such circumstances: the disruption of riverine lands ends with famine and loss.

Conclusion

Summing up, by using semiotics as analytic tool of ancient sources, once cultural prejudgment is set aside, one can perceive fragments of the ancient rural world as ancient people did. Two dimensions can be identified in the construction of ancient abstract landscapes: 'cultural interpretation' and 'sensory knowledge.' Regarding the former, it is inevitable that one's background directs the interpretation of the landscapes of the ancient texts used here as sources; even though our main argument stands for common sense as an instrument for collecting signs of meaning. Thus, it cannot be blindly argued that all symbols of the compounding of signs of meaning identified here can definitively be considered universal, since historical knowledge on both cultures concerning the matrix of popular culture is rather incomplete and superficial. Nevertheless, many of the examples from riverine and productive landscapes strongly favor that hypothesis. The second dimension of landscape meaning, 'sensory knowledge,' provides the foundation for the argument defended here and, to some extent, contradicts the argument that landscape interpretation is entirely culture dependent – if, of course, we consider human culture a general 'macro-culture' prior to interpreting context.

It is difficult to investigate everyday life, despite the achievements of archaeology and epigraphy, because there is not sufficient primary data and reality cannot be observed through fragments or administrative documents. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to listen to the Southern Mesopotamian and Italic people through the cracks of their literary resources and their symbolic language based on the agricultural landscape; i.e. to hear the voices of the past by identifying the signs of meaning that make up the discourse of the Sumerians and Romans.

The Sumerian and Latin texts contain important data to promote and broaden the debate on how our cultural assumptions are expressed in abstract thinking, regardless of linguistic context or literary conceptions. Sumerian culture, whatever this word implies, and Roman culture cannot be compared in any sense. However, these are human cultures that depended on farming and herding and the benevolence of nature, and this was the conceptual basis of the Sumerian and Roman experiences.