The Memory of The Tower of Babel: between Mith, History and Art

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RES Antiquitatis 2 (2020): 16-34

Abstract

In this article we propose to identify the transmission of cultural memory of the Tower of Babel's myth by means of artistic connections between Eastern Antiquity and Renascentist Europe, through perceptions of esthetic information. We also bring up a counterpoint to hegemonic view of art history, whose artistic references have been eurocentric and/or North-american, by presenting the works of a contemporary artist who lives in Southern Brazil.

Keywords: Babylon, Myth, Cultural Memory, Art.

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The Memory of The Tower of Babel: between Myth, History and Art

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Introduction

Visual history is a battlefield of considerable strategic importance for historic knowledge of society, its organization, operation and transformation (Bezerra de Meneses 2005, 33). Thus, we think that visual dimension is present in the whole social aspect, and its interpretation is essential, once esthetic is a legitimate field of investigation, based upon sensitivity and reason.

Images are grounded on material base, and are products of their own time, made of matter and transmitted as patrimonies, collections and languages. In this study, cultural memory is seen as esthetic memory, created through a language with expressive relevance in artifacts, which in turn yield idiomatic traditions.

Under the influence of Maurice Halbwachs' and Aby Warburg's ideas, German academic Jan Assmann (1995, 132) stated the concept of cultural memory:

> The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.

Past is a social construction marked by the need of sense and references of a certain present. Culture and society are the main conditions of mankind for creating identity, be it individual or collective, and this identity is reflexive, once it takes place through communication and interactions with others. As personal identity is shaped through relations with one another, it is necessary a common world of simbolic meaning, which is culture itself. According to Aby Warburg (2010, 3), "The conscious establishing of certain distance between yourself and outside world can be featured as the primal act of human civilization". But in order to adapt to a symbolic sense world of culture, its rules and

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meanings, man should establish some distance between the world and himself, which is legitimated by culture (Assmann 2010, 123).

Thus, we believe that cultural memories of Ancient Mesopotamia, XVIth Century Europe or Contemporary Brazil, do adapts ancient forms and concepts, and that this mimetic transmission of information is the maker of cultural tratidions.

The study of cultural memory or transmission of esthetic information by cultural connections in the long term, founded by Aby Warburg, claims that transmission of elements highly expressive, along with the language of superstitions, esthetics, beliefs and cultural dinamics, make up the literary, artistic and religious background of each culture and of how all of these are experienced in some cultural environment.

For Warburg, there is a long iconographic history which took shape with a higher explanatory power, and these forms change in time and space. There are many contexts where a sign, symbol, concept, science or knowledge is transformed by each civilization. In his theory of cultural memory, the author (Warburg 2013, 453) says that the specific form which gathers that patent power is called *pathosformeln*, forms full of passion or expressiveness. One of the aspects studied by Warburg is the construction of gestures, formula and symbols which, for their expressiveness, become elements carrying affection, central ideas for art which will also explain the main canons of art expression, like melancholy, love, potential, love life, sacred objects, power, and so forth. These forms are also evidences of complex cosmologies, expressing languages and historical context of cultures. These patterns are improved in a language whose main goal is to render this expressive power, making that icon clear in every language, time or place.

According to Warburg, what matters is how the language of art has made itself along millennia, how it was built up while language, set of themes and indexes, and how these icons were established as forms of expressive energy. In his unfinished great work, Mnemosyne Atlas, he started approximating images, recognizing fractals showing some similarity, and from that he brings the question: if there was visual similarity, there would be some explanation.

Regarding the challenge launched by Aby Warburg which recommended expansion of borders between science and art, Didi-Huberman (2013, 34) claims that this proposition is a "deterritorializing of image and time which expresses its historicity. It means that the time is not the same of history in general".

Artistic traditions of Ancient Mesopotamia were noticed by Aby Warburg (2010, 23), which recognized in Panel 1 of Mnemosyne Atlas, the Eastern Mesopotamian conceptions as a deep root of a cultural legacy called "Cosmos Projection over a piece of the body to make predictions. Babylonian official astrology. Practice born in the East". Editors H. Breedekamp and M. Diers, in the preface to the issue of Aby Warburg studies (2013, xviii) state that "The iconology of Warburg nature goes from the form of works of art and transition of pictorical motives, but it developes from understanding these figurations in the context of an accurate and broad combination of the history of culture".

We can also transpose these cultural conditions of image to the modern and contemporary world, highlighting pictorical elements which involve dinamic processes of time, and which imply the perception of discourse nature, by understanding image phenomenology inside that culture.

Thereby, from that conception we will perform the analysis of pictorical forms in some European Renaissance and Brazilian contemporary pieces of art. We understand that the binomials East-West, Renaissance-Contemporary, Europe-Brazil can become an interesting counterpoint for analysis, once it decentralizes the prevailing discourse of art history and includes peripheral history (Hall 2019; D'Alleva 2015).

In this article we propose to identify the transmission of a cultural memory of the Tower of Babel myth by means of artistic connections between Eastern Antiquity and European Renaissance, through perception of esthetic information. By way of challenge, we present an example of this remaining subject which is the work of a contemporary artist who lives and works in Southern Brazil.

The historical Tower of Babel

Babylon was the main religious and cultural pole in Southern Mesopotamia (Fig. 1), and the capital of the biggest empire of Eastern world before Persian, between 7th and 6th centuries BCE. It was built by the Euphrates River, around 55 miles (90 km) from the South of current Baghdad (Huit; Thalmann; Valbelle 1990, 232).

Fig. 1. Map of ancient Near East.
Source: Adapted from Collins, 2008:165.

Babylon is still an emblematic city in West tradition, and its tower gave way to many representations along history. Reports on the Tower of Babel building, present in some verses from the Book of Genesis (Gen. 11, 1-9) make references to ziggurat of Marduk

temple, the city's protector, made of clay bricks. The Hebrew name of the place mentioned in the text is Senaar, in Sumerian it was KÁ.DINGIR.RA, and in Akkadian, Bābilim. The etimology of Bābilim says that this word is composed of two Akkadian words: *bâbum,* meaning gate, and *ilî,* meaning gods. Therefore, literally Babylon means Gate of Gods, possibly due to its great ziggurat (tower), once Mesopotamians believed it would made easier the Gods access to Earth through its monumental staircase.

Ziggurat, which in Akkadian language is *ziqquratu,* comes from the verb *zaqāru,* meaning "to construct a high building", was a solid building with raw bricks in staggered-shaped pyramid, with a small sanctuary at the top (Fig. 2). In Sumerian it was called É.TEMEN.AN.KI, literally "the house of Heaven and Earth foundation" (Pozzer 2010). The original structure of The Tower of Babel was built by Hammu-rabi (1792-1750 BCE), and afterwards destroyed by Assyrian king Sennacherib, in 689 BCE, when he conquered Babylon. Its restoration was finished by Nebuchadnezaar II (604-542 BCE), the king of Chaldea dinasty (Westenholz 1995:59).
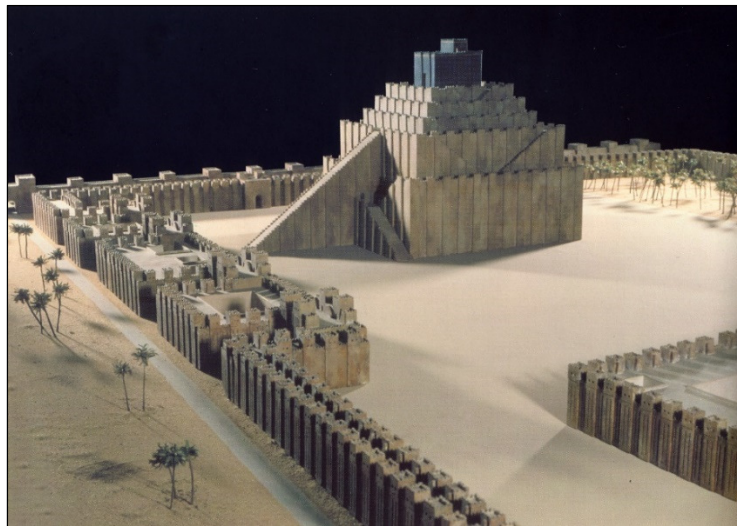

Fig. 2. Model of the walls and Tower of Babylon. Pergamonmuseum, Berlin.
Source: Curatola, 2006: 92.

In the picture above, we see the Euphrates River like a curved line to the left, a pit surrounding the center of the city, and in the midst a small dark square pointing to the foot of the ziggurat (Fig. 3).

At the top of the image (Fig. 4) we see the Euphrates River and thick woods in both river banks. There are many archeological traces, and at the bottom we can distinguish the square foot of old Tower of Babel and the base of its huge staircase.

Fig. 3. Wide view of Babylon site.
Source: Google Earth.

Fig. 4. Aerial view of Babylon site.
Source: Huot; Thalmann; Valbelle, 1990:245.

Nowadays we can only see traces of theTower of Babel, like the pit of its foundations, built on a 91m side, and a bar as the base for the once great runway, making up an área of 8.100m². The area inside was made up of sun-dried bricks while outside walls were made of 15m thick backed bricks, having about 90m high. It's estimated that 36 millions of bricks were used, and three thousand men were employed to work day and night, during two years (Pozzer 2003, 71).

The Tower of Babel would probably had two major functions of two different natures: scientific and religious. Scribes used to make daily astronomic observations, reporting the results on clay tablets. The Tower's great staircase had also a religious function, once according to the imaginary of that time, it would make easier for gods go down from Heaven to relieve men's pains and sufferings.

During Nebuchadnezaar II reign, VIth Century BCE, Babylon had about 1 thousand hectares extension, and its wall, 8 gates, was estimated at about 18km lenght and 30m width (Marzahn 1993, 9). Some classical Greek and Latin authors after the apogee of Neobabylonian empire, described a real legendary Babylon. Despite distortions in some historical data, these authors' reports guided German archaeologists by the end of XIXth Century to locate this huge archaeologic site, since they provided information on the city's topography (André-Salvini 2008b).

In his Histories (1.178-186), Herodotus (485-420 BCE), describes the city during Persian domain and mentions the big walls, the architectural complex for Marduk worship, the Euphrates river, the streets and hydraulic works. The legend of Babylon has passed from generation to generation through secondary or tertiary sources till reaching Hellenistic times, when the tradition of Babylon as one of the "wonders of the world, having big walls and hanging gardens" emerged (André-Salvini 2008a, 13).

Renaissance reframing

Ambivalence of Babylon myth between biblical damnation and men's fascination with power, between a real ancient city and a contemporary symbolic one, has tempted men in Renaissance, who lived under the influence of debates over Protestant Reformation and criticism of the popedom.

In the mid XVIth Century Northern Europe was shaken by violent political-religious uprisings, and these historical events have surely contributed to the emergence of many representations of the Tower of Babel. The idea of peoples scattering, caused by languages confusion, evoked religious schism, the translation of Bible into vulgar language and the assertion of powerful nations and dinasties announced the end of Christianity, formerly linked to Rome. Renaissance took the myth to glorify the epic conquest of Men over Nature, and renew Hellenistic culture. Let us analyse, therefore, some reframing of the Tower of Babel myth by three Renaissance artists.

In the mid XVIth Century, precisely in 1547, Dutch artist Cornelisz Anthonisz made a carving where the tower appears in fire coming from the sky. The tower looks like Rome's Coliseum, and an inscription on the top right corner says: Babelon/Genesis 14, connecting Bible's report to Babylon. We see the sky with many clouds from where rays of light/fire sprout in sidelong lines (Fig. 5).
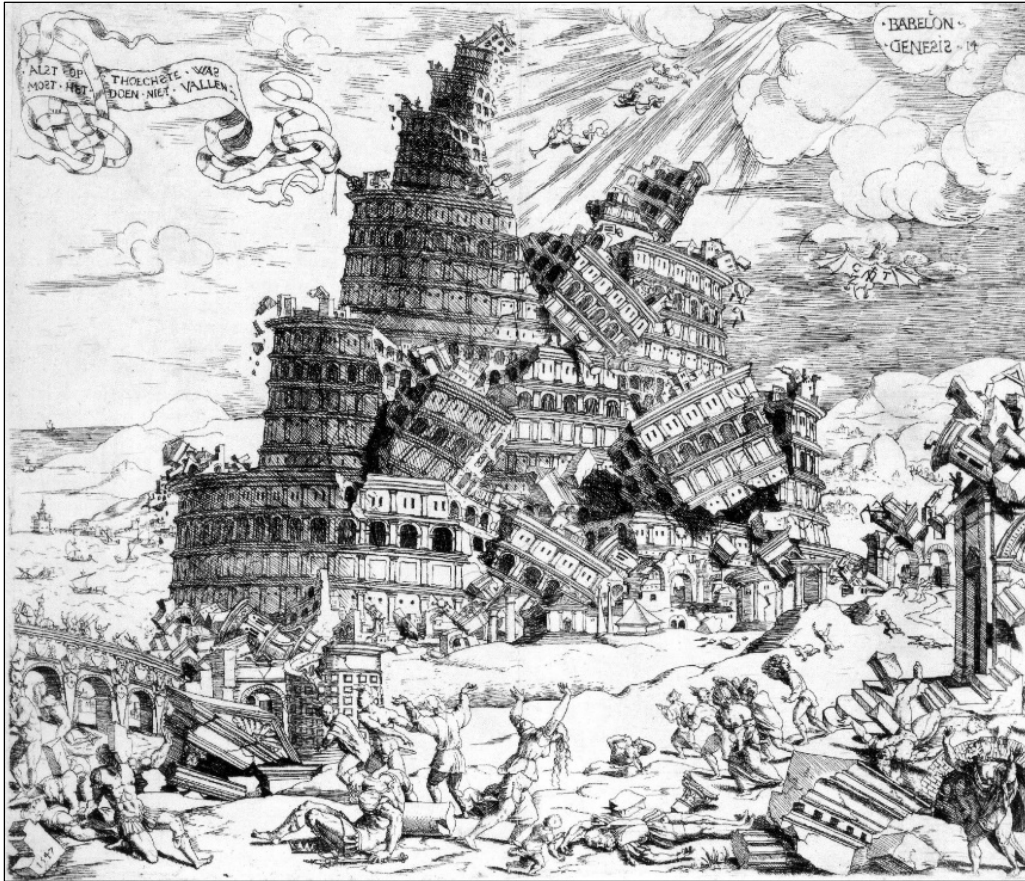
Fig. 5. Destruction of the Tower, Cornelisz Anthonisz (1505-1553), 1547. Etching, 32,3X38,3cm.
Source: André-Salvini, 2008b: 457.

In the center of the image we see the massive round tower being destroyed by fire from the sky. Besides the two inscriptions, one in archaic Dutch and the other showing Babelon/Genesis, we see Cornelisz Anthonisz's anagram CAT on a bat's wings, animal with a negative connotation connected to death, evil or devil, and on the lower left corner the date: 1547.

Fig. 6. The Destruction of the Tower, Cornelisz Anthonisz (1505-1553), 1547. Detail.

Fig. 7. The Destruction of the Tower, Cornelisz Anthonisz (1505-1553), 1547. Detail.

The foreground is full of men, women and children (some dead), showing desperate gestures, raising their arms as signs of dread or mercy. A whole city is destroyed, not only the tower.

Fig. 8. The Destruction of the Tower, Cornelisz Anthonisz (1505-1553), 1547. Detail.

The archs architecture, present in the aqueduct on the left corner, is clearly Roman-inspired, disconnected from historical reality. In the background, to the left, we see a river or the sea with small ships.

Fifteen years before Bruegel, Cornelisz Anthonisz connected the Tower's architecture to that of Roman Coliseum's, and broke up with square standard of medieval towers.

This picture is one of the first examples known as representing the destruction of the Tower of Babel by fire from the sky. In the Bible's texts there is no reference to this monument's ruin, but only the confusion of languages and the scattering of men in the world. The tower's destruction refers to a late tradition from rabbi Benjamin de Tudela's writings. This text written in XIIth Century was probably inspired by the travel reports by Harpocritium of Alexandria (355), which refered to a lightning hurting men (André-Salvini 2008b, 430):

You see, my child, these high towers numbered three [...] the third had been built by giants who desired to reach the sky. For this insane profanity, some were hit by the lightning; others, under God's order, could not recognize themselves among them; all the remaining left and died in the isle of Crete, where they were thrown by God is his anger.[2]
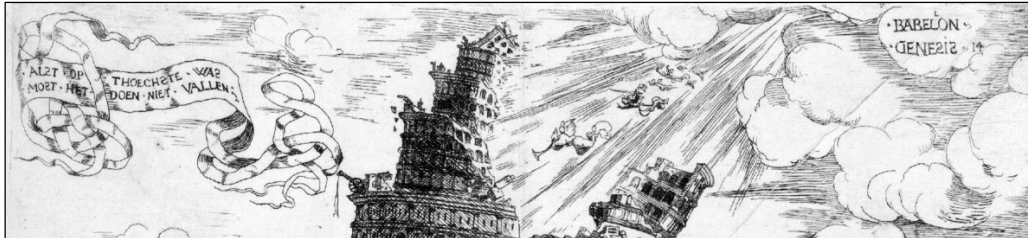

Fig. 9. The Destruction of the Tower, Cornelisz Anthonisz (1505-1553), 1547. Detail.

Sébastian Allard (2008, 457), art historian and current manager of Painting Department of Louvre Museum, explains the rereading of the subject-matter in the context of big excitement of Hebrew culture in Amsterdam at that time. We can see a direct connection among Genesis texts, the city of Babylon and the narrative of Apocalypse, pointed by the inscriptions on left and right upper corners, and the angels' trumpets announcing the end of times. It is interesting to see the image of lifting structures in all floors, as a way to remind us the unfinished condition of the construction.

Still according to Allard (2008), this picture was made only twenty years after the traumatizing sack of Rome carryied out by Spain and Holy Roman-German Empire, when more than 30.000 soldiers destroyed part of the city. Roman people then eyewitnessed many murders of men and children, and rapes of women. This terrible memory must have inspired the artist, and kept alive cultural memory of that collective imaginary.

From 1550, references to Genesis's texts took a broader connotation with a strong moral appeal, establishing pride as the main capital sin. And it is exactly Babylon's pride which is refered in the Bible, being its punishment the consequence of citizens trying to compete with God.

Another artist influenced by this motif was Renaissence painter Pieter Bruegel, the Elder, born in the Netherlands, who made two oil paintings portraying the Tower of Babel. The first one is at the Kuntshistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria (Fig. 10), and the other belongs to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen's collection, in Rotterdam, Netherlads (Fig. 11). Both paintings were made around 1563.

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[2] Tu vois, mon enfant, ces hautes tours au nombre de trois [...] la troisième avait été construite par de géants qui voulaient escalader le ciel. Pour cette impiété folle, les uns furent frappés de la foudre; les autres, sur l'ordre de Dieu, ne se reconnurent plus désormais entre eux; out le reste s'en alla tomber dnas l'île de Crète, où Dieu, dans sa colère, les précipita.
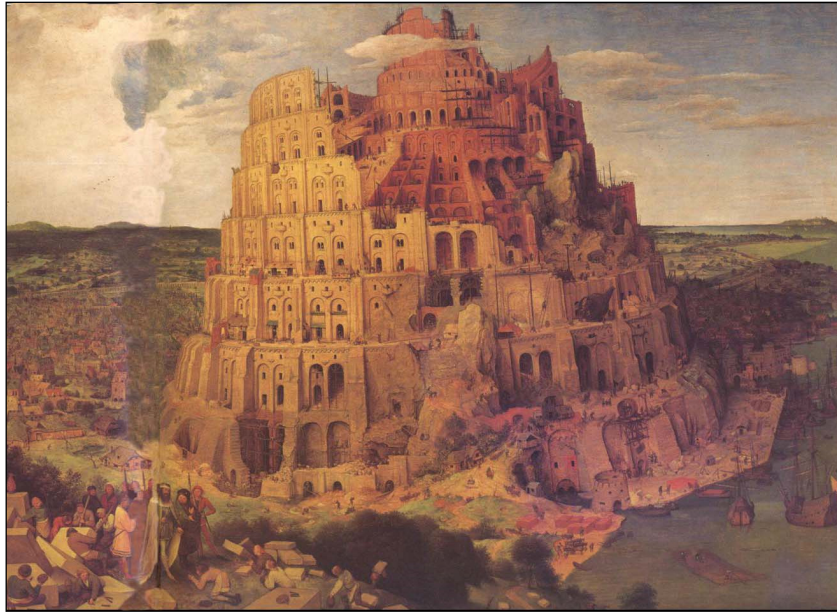
Fig. 10. The Construction of The Tower of Babel, Pieter Bruegel, 1563, Vienna. Oil on wood
(114X155 cm).
Source: Kuntshistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 11. The construction of the Tower of Babel, Pieter Bruegel, 1563, Rotterdam. Oil on wood
(60X74,5 cm).
Source: André-Salvini 2008b: 459.

In the painting at Vienna, the monument under construction seems to devour the stone
mountain, in trying to desecrate Nature, seen as a divine work. Emphasis is given to the

excitement during the tower construction, depicted as an unfinished and monumental architectural work. Besides, we have in the foreground the representation of stone carving workers and the arrival of king Nimrod to inspect the construction. The several activities in this site and the city in the background reinforce the historical nature of this painting. The artist reinterpreted the motif of that mountain as a place for alliance with God and also as a scale of values of Nature. In a relevant article on this paiting, Barbara Kaminska (2014, 4) places this landscape in the city of Antwerp, and also refers to Roman Coliseum to represent the tower.

In the second painting, known as Rotterdam panel, the condemnation of human pride is made metaphysiclly: the monument is turned into landscape and history, which surpasses its creator in magnitude. The connection Tower and Coliseum reasserts a break with square tower style and points to the idea of vanity in human actions. Let us remember that from 1530, Rome turned into a huge construction site with several large buildings, due to popedom's agency and desire to assert its own prestige. That moment a connection between these big edifications and the accounts of the Tower of Babel consctruction became inevitable. Allard (2008, 459) amazingly summarizes his writings by saying that: "Rome has turned into a Babel finally completed".

Although the two towers had been inspired by the Coliseum, which the artist saw for the first time in 1553 in his travel to Rome, Rotterdam's painting is distinct. In the painting at Vienna, Bruegel describes the construction of the tower, king Nimrod's arrival and the city of Babylon, presenting historically the divine condemnation. In the painting at Rotterdam, the Tower is the only object represented. Viennas's tower points to the history of Babel myth and its chaotic construction. In Rotterdam's, the metaphysics perspective of the myth is represented along with its monument and its hugeness. In this work, the artist followed Herodotus' description of an eight floor tower made of bricks, mostly red on the top and left corner and with stone façade. Here, the colors give an impression of massiveness, the piling up dark clouds and their shadows create an anguish atmosphere, pointing to the oncoming catastrophe and the end of the dream when peoples could be unite (Allard 2008).

And, as a way to honor our Portuguese colleagues, I bring a rereading of the Tower of Babel, or yet, an iconographic element of the myth's survival assigned to Joos Momper, from the collection of splendid *Museu Nacional de Arte de Lisboa* (National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon) (Fig. 12).

Dutch painter Momper mostly depicted landscapes, wherewith he stood out throughout his life. From 500 paitings assigned to him, only few of them has his signature, and only one is dated. It is known that he often collaborated with painters like Pieter Snayers, Bruegel, the Elder and the Young, usually in big mountain landscapes.

In this painting, Momper made his work from a high point of view, employing a conventional transition of brown in the first plan to gold color highlighted by the backing copper plate, and finally blue color in the background. Following Vienna's version of Bruegel, in this landscape he portraits in the first plan a group of small figures, king Nimrod being depicted as a long-beared elder, dressing a red tunic.

Fig. 12. Tower of Babel, Joos Momper, ca. 1600, Lisbon. Oil on copper.
Source: author's photo, 2017.

On the lower half of the scene we see Momper's contemporary constructions in Renaissance style, and in the background the sea with countless ships. In the upper right corner we see thick clouds suggesting some oppressiveness only relieved by some birds in the sky. It is important highlighting that despite stylization of natural effects, Momper depicted stone carving workers in full activity of carving and carrying stones by using traction animals in the first plan, which also confirms the Tower under construction.

The survival of the myth in the art of Southern Brazil

I bring to this analysis a Brazilian contemporary artist[3] which in a period of his artistic trajectory, dialogued with references of the Tower of Babel likewise. Thus, I intend to contribute a conterpoint to hegemonic view of art history, whose references have been often eurocentric and/or North-american. This artist lives and works in the Southern Brazil, being renowned over this country, and whose works are exhibited in museums and galleries at the center of the country. He also participated in collective shows in Portugal: *Portáveis*, at Faculdade de Belas Artes de Lisboa (Faculty of Fine Arts, Lisbon) - FBAUL'S Gallery, in 2014, and *Parergon*, promoted by the Câmara Municipal de Torres Vedras (Common Hall of Torres Vedras) - Paços Galeria Municipal (Town Gallery), Torres Vedras, in 2013.

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[3] Many Brazilian artists – some of them known abroad – have works based on that myth, but our intent here is focusing on a local artist's contribution.

Alfredo Nicolaiewsky is a visual artist who works with different languages, like drawing, painting, photography, film and collage, creating *assemblages* and using softwares to compose his recent works. He is also professor of Visual Arts and History of Art at the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul). He has been present in many individual and collective shows, and has been given many awards in painting and drawings. According to Paulo Gomes (1999, 15):

> Alfredo Nicolaiewsky is an artist whose manual abilities are on the best form, practicing a critical process of creation of an attentive visuality to historical contexts he witnesses, both social and artistic points of view; his purpose is to build an artistic work connecting the skillful craftsman and the refined thinker.[4]

In 1990, Nicolaiewsky created a series of artworks composed by lithographies hand-colored individually by using watercolor and colored pencil, thus making of each one a unique piece of art. He recreated the theme of the Tower of Babel in a set of these pieces, and named it *Cobra de fogo sobre a Mesopotâmia* (Fire snake on Mesopotamia), suggesting the likely destruction of the tower by fire from the sky, as well as Antonisch's picture. In these small lithographies we see the stylized reproduction of the Tower of Babel like a spiral in the center of the image, framed by polychromatic borders. The artist made a series of images with chromatic variations over this theme.[5] At the top of five floors is a small illuminated lighthouse-like temple, and over it we can see a multicolored snake.

In Fig. 13, the background is in light blue dabbled with red triangles like fire tongues, what conveys a kind of order to the image. In pictures 14 and 15 we see other versions of the theme with chromatic variations from pink background with yellow flowers to degradations of red-blue. The artist himself states that the purpose:

> (...) was thinking over the influence of color on the same image, paying attention to how much it could change. At the same time, it was a way to revisit my coloring books, when I painted using water and the colors emerged as if by magic (Gomes 1999, 37).[6]

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[4] Alfredo Nicolaiewsky é um artista que, em plena posse de suas habilidades manuais, exercita um processo crítico de construção de uma visualidade atenta aos momentos históricos que vive, tanto do ponto de vista social quanto do ponto de vista artístico; seu desígnio é o de construir uma obra em que se unam o hábil artesão e o refinado pensador.

[5] The artist kindly ceded these images for this article.

[6] (...) foi refletir sobre a influência da cor sobre uma mesma imagem, observando o quanto esta se alterava. Ao mesmo tempo, foi uma forma de refazer os cadernos de colorir que tive quando criança, nos quais se pintava com água, e as cores surgiam como num passe de mágica.
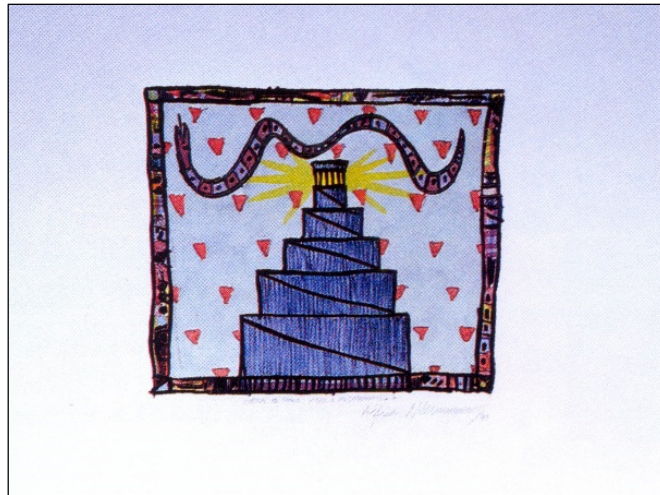
Fig. 13. Fire snake on Mesopotamia (blue), Alfredo Nicolaiewsky, 1999, Porto Alegre. Watercolor w/o lithography on paper (35X50,5 cm).
Source: Artist's files.

Fig. 14. Fire snake on Mesopotamia (pink), Alfredo Nicolaiewsky, 1999, Porto Alegre. Watercolor w/o lithography on paper (35X50,5 cm).
Source: Artist's files.

Fig. 15. Fire snake on Mesopotamia (red-blue), Alfredo Nicolaiewsky, 1999, Porto Alegre.
Watercolor w/o lithography on paper (35X50,5 cm).
Source: Artist's files.

On the one hand we can recognize in these watercolors an exercise of memory (childhood) and a pact with the current creative process, in addition to a fine irony – the artist's strong features. On the other hand, we can identify the universal nature and recurrent theme of the Tower of Babel, which still instigates contemporary artists.

As well as Cornelisz Anthonisz, Alfredo Nicolaiewsky reflects upon the destructing power of fire, but includes a new and significant element – the snake. Main character in Bible's narrative about men's fate, the snake connects to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. But Nicolaiewsky plays with forms and disrupts the drama: the curved-line snake contrasts with the hard square geometry of the tower. The colors effect, striking feature of his works, also provides some litghtness to the composition. These pieces of art show the process of transmission of a cultural memory which is collective, then is possessed by the artist, who reframes it with his own talent.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say that in Ancient Mesopotamia, the Tower of Babel represented a complex symbolic system, where ziggurat was the connection between Heaven and Earth. The tower had been built by men who desired to get closer to heavenly world, in a city they hopefully created to live their lives free of evil.

Though rooted in Jewish-Christian imaginary, in Renaissance, the Tower of Babel's symbology refered to ideas marked by religious criticismo of protestant movement, in

which Babylon was connected to Rome, the pope's city. This belief inspired European Renaissance artists, who resumed the theme of the Tower of Babel from Genesis' Bible reports. However, Brazilian contemporary art also made new questioning from the Tower's myth, pointing to a Jewish-Christian memory in national imaginary.

Babylon's myth is based on the tension between destruction and (re) construction, whose origin is in the very city's history, often destroyed and rebuilt. Nevertheless, Babylon was also a destructive empire, which has annihilated Jerusalem and banned its population. According to the Bible's texts, it was the evil city whose purpose was controlling the world, and its ziggurat was considered the symbol of human pride challenging gods. Human pride and men's desire to overcome Nature was the reason for this punishment: confusion of languages and peoples dispersion. This view is shared with A. Karabiyik (2018, 44), who says:

> The Babel Tower is a universal image, a symbol of both humanity's separation and its unity. It signifies the ironic power of language in human relationships, in that it is a means of both communicating and misunderstanding. Language emerges between humans as a method of interaction and relationship; yet when the language, which is the medium of communication, is ruptured, this separation becomes the symbol of the antagonism. The Babylonian image in contemporary art begins an attempt to encapsulate these contradictions and to demonstrate the destructive powers of language to express differences, dissolutions, incompatibilities, disintegrations and helplessness.

On the other hand, Mesopotamian sources point that Babylon was the political and cultural capital of a great empire, where power was manifested through its monumental constructions, like the ziggurat, the palace and the temples. In Antiquity Age, the city gathered the cultural elite from most of the lands conquered, to where thousands of people were banned[7]. Therefore, in Babylon many languages of Eastern world were spoken at that time, and this fact was taken by the Babylonians as the evidence for their empire's greatness[8], and not as obstacle for their domination.

The biblical version of the Tower of Babel's myth has survived over time and thus prevailed as textual and pictorial narrative in history. Recent studies in history of art are still based on Jewish-Christian discourse to elaborate their analyses, failing to realize their limitations to the view of East created by the West (Said 2001).

Memory depends on social assumptions in which individual memory can only be preserved in a context of collective memory. That is, society defines their members' memories; in other words, the individual's memory is made in a process of comunication among social groups (Assmann 2010). This realization was inspired by sociologist Maurice Halbwacks'

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[7] There are evidences that "crossed-deportation" (people from many plances moving at the same time) would have involved about 4.5 millions of people between 830 and 640 BCE (Liverani 2008, 193).

[8] It is interesting to think of Mesopotamian cultural practice of writing texts in trilingual versions (Charpin 2011).

thoughts (1925, 240), in which ideas should take a sensitive form before reaching memory, and that there was a puzzling connection between concept and image:

> Every character and every historical fact, when gets in that memory and transforms itself into a lesson, a notion, a symbol, it is given a meaning; it becomes an element in the system of ideas in a society.[9]

From this conception, Jan Assmann (2010, 35) questions the subject, and suggests that ideas should take a sensitive form before reaching memory, and that there was a puzzling connection between concept and image:

> From this comfrontation between conceptions and experiences, what we call figures-memories emerges. They are characterized more exactly by three things: concrete connection to time and space, concrete connection to a group, and reconstructivity as an independent process.[10]

Therefore, these figures-memories can refer to both iconic forms and narratives, but are not limited to an established geographic and historical space. A common symbolic system enables the shaping of a collective identity, that is, the sense of belonging to a social group, which depends on common knowledge and memory.

Maybe this is one of the reasons to explain the survival of forms full of passion refered by Warburg.

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[9] Tout personnage et tout fait historique, dès qu'il pénètre dans cette mémoire s'y transpose en un enseignement, en une notion, en un symbole; il reçoit un sens; il devient un élément du système d'idées de la société.

[10] De ce va-et-vient entre concepts et expériences naît ce que nous appellerons les figures-souvenirs. Elles se caractérisent plus spécifiquement par tois choses: le rapport concret au temps et à l'espace, le rapport concret à un groupe, et la reconstructivité comme processus autonome.

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