

## Studies on Micro Histography Based on Ancient Mesopotamian, Western and Chinese Historiographic Traditions

### *Kadim Mezopotamya, Batı ve Çin Tarih yazım Geleneğinden Hareketle Mikro Tarih yazımı Üzerine Tetkikler*

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ABSTRACT	ÖZ
<p>In 21st century; micro history is the most innovative school of historiography. We all know that more and more specific topics are being studied. There are unquestionably several reasons why historians prefer micro titles. At this point, it does not seem possible to deal with the confusion between people and events with macro-historiography. The fact that the historian makes a balls-up more solvable, which he deals with, depends on the limitation of the problem and making it micro as much as possible. When ancient and modern historiographies are compared, it is likely to find many common traits between them in this regard. The writing of gods and goddesses, the lives of emperors, and certain titles in ancient civilizations are micro titles. For instance, there are gods and goddesses in the center of Mesopotamian historiography. In ancient Greece, history begins with the writing of Legends. Documents describing dynasties in ancient China are also examples of micro-history. Probably, this was the reason of the explanation of micro subjects for the understanding of ancient history. It is obvious that the goal was more than the life story of that person. The intent to reach a macro perspective and generalization with a micro title addressed is the same as the effort of the modern historian. In consequence, it is exciting to see that those who know the smallest part, the 'one', can understand and make sense of the whole and thus the chain of events that appear untidy is regular.</p>	<p>21. yüzyılda mikro tarih, tarih yazımının en yenilikçi okuludur. Giderek daha spesifik başlıkların çalışıldığı hepimizin malumu. Tarihçilerin mikro başlıkları tercih etmesinin şüphesiz birçok sebebi var. Geldiğimiz noktada insan ve olaylar karmaşası ile baş edebilmek makro tarihyazımı ile pek mümkün görünmüyor. Makro tarihyazımını sınırlandırmak modern çağda epey zor. Tarihçinin ele aldığı problemler yumağını daha çözülebilir kılması, problemin sınırlandırılmasına ve mümkün olabildiğince mikrolaştırılmasına bağlı. Bu şekilde daha net bir bakış kazanılıyor. Eski Çağ ve modern çağ tarihyazımı mukayese edildiğinde bu anlamda aralarında birçok ortaklık bulmak mümkündür. Kadim Medeniyetlerde tanrı ve tanrıçaların, hükümdarların hayatlarının, spesifik bir başlığın yazımı mikro başlıklardır. Misal; Mezopotamya tarih yazımında merkezde tanrı ve tanrıçalar vardır. Eski Yunan'da tarih, Efsane yazımı ile başlar. Yine Eski Çağ Çin'de hanedanlıkların anlatıldığı kayıtlar ve belgeler de mikro tarih örneklerinden. Belki de kadim tarih anlayışında mikro konuların anlatımının sebebi bu idi. Belli ki amaç; o kişinin hayat hikayesinden daha fazla idi. Ele alınan mikro bir başlıkla makro bir bakış ve genellemeye gidilmek istenmesi modern tarihçinin çabası ile aynı. Sonuç itibarıyla en küçük parçayı 'bir'i bilen (tanımlayanın) 'bütün'ü anlayabileceği, anlamlandırabileceği ve böylece savruk olarak görünen hadiseler zincirinin kurallı olduğunu görmek ise heyecan verici.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>Mesopotamia, China, Histography, Micro History, Western.</p>	<p><b>Anahtar Kelimeler</b></p> <p>Mezopotamya, Çin, Tarihyazımı, Mikro Tarih, Batı.</p>

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## 1. Introduction

People are extant with their memory. The memory defines and completes a person. It shapes the people's life through the questions that people address to their soul and the universe, and the answers they find. The stability of your life is only possible by the memory. Memory is sort of a root that holds a person in time. That's why people hold on to their memories. They know that they cannot hold on to the past and the present and that they cannot have any envisagement and imagination of the future without the memory. All that a man does bears the mark of a man. It's like the science of history. Therefore, people have tried to record everything they do according to their knowledge and skills and to transfer it to the future. Because all of the process of conveying time to its successors, such as what they are and where they belong, is a natural tendency of man. Therefore, it would be an insufficient description to say that the science of history started with the transition to written sources. However, such a generalization is made because humanity can only have the ability to find and understand historical records close to the present day. The question of why we need a concept of collective memory apart from history is inescapable (Ross, 2008:150)

The birth of history and man is the same. The science of history and the fate of humanity are intimate (Demiriş, 1994: 231). History is a social science that studies human actions based on certain and sometimes changing, renewing principles and criteria (Ekizoğlu, 2018, 17). The past period of time forms the root of history. The history cannot survive without the past (Kağnıcı, 2012: 49). It is likely to see some differences in the understanding of history between the historiography and methods of each country and nation, as well as each historian (Yediyıldız, 2014:39). The most significant element that causes differences between historiography and its methods is geography. It is highly interesting that geography has a direct impact on people and thus their thoughts and actions. Therefore, different human minds and different human imaginations and concepts emerged in different geographies in the same time period. Within this direction, it is crucial to address the relationship between geography and history in order to understand human beings and their actions.

## 2. Mesopotamian Historiography

The geography, in which the first samples of recorded history are given, is Mesopotamia since it hosts the oldest civilizations of the world (Reyhan, 2000:22-24). Because the Ancient Mesopotamian Tribes, who have given plenty of evidence and documents that they have reached the level of legal order and systems shaped in a known period of history, deserve to be considered worthy of special interest on this point (Bilgiç, 1963:103). In the third and second millennium BC, numerous written works belonging to Egypt, Sumerian, Assyrian, Akkadian, Hittite, and Babylonian civilizations have survived until today.

Historical knowledge of Mesopotamian civilizations is recorded in epigraphs and annals (Reyhan, 2000:44-47). Sumerian Kings List, Epigraphs of Akkadian Sargon, Babylonian Annals are examples of myths, epics, and epigraphs that reflect the conception of the history of that period (Reyhan, 2000: 25-31). In this kind of understanding of graphy- even if not in the modern sense - it is entirely likely to see the consciousness of history. The place and time of events are not

indicated in this expression of history. There are gods and goddesses at the center - and these gods and goddesses are eventually people who lived, died, and were sanctified by their generations - in the end. Collingwood denominates this historiography as theocratic history. Gilderhus argues that these documents have no historical value since they do not consist of any commentary expressions or analyses. The understanding of history in Hebrew texts is universal despite the religious perception in Mesopotamia and Egypt that is restricted to geography. The Hebrews was conscious that there was only one God who created the world. The historiographies have also developed in parallel with this belief. A statist understanding of history and historiography with religious elements draw attention in the period of Hittites (Gilderhus, 2014:14, 24, 25, 26).

Mesopotamians' historical perception was based on the idea that events in the past and now would recur in the future (cyclical history). Therefore, the events should be recorded and the managers should take lessons from them. The universe of the Mesopotamian was assuredly not a man centered one; his mode of awareness drew his attention first to the external world, and secondarily, at best, to himself (Finkelstein, 1963: 461). Most of the texts were making propaganda to the political authority of that period due to the language they used and the events they told and the expression manner of these events. Consequently, the propagandized kings both glorified and sanctified themselves and supported the legality of their domination with religious factors. Along with the states established by the Sami peoples, a single and divine king understanding has appeared with absolute authority in the expression of history. Mesopotamia's understanding and tradition of history continued until the Persian domination and even they took the advantage of this saving (Kağnıcı, 2017:126-129 ).

### **3. Western Classical Histiography**

In the majority of ancient societies, historiography was usually about writing myths or keeping them annually (Temelli, 2013:2). In Ancient Western historiography, there are three periods; Greek, Hellenism, and Rome (Kağnıcı, 2012:55). Although Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who made history by going beyond the writing of legends, is known as the father of history (Collingwood, 1996:50), this term belongs to the West and binds the West. Herodotus wrote about the wars of the Persians and the Greeks based on the testimonies of the eyewitnesses and some official records of the state, and the chronicles (Gilderhus, 2015: 15, 28, 29). Herodotus aimed to ensure that the actions of people were not lost and could be learned. This has shaped the history (Temelli, 2013:15). It is considerable that Herodotus wrote about the cultures and history of the peoples he visited and mentioned in his books about Pelasg, Kars and Lelegians, who lived in Greece before (Tekin, 2018:43). Thukydides went down in history as the person who laid the foundation for the understanding of pragmatic (utilitarian) history by aiming to ensure that history is a result of human actions and that people can more easily predict the results of their actions by considering these events in the future (Temelli, 2013:19, 20).

By the emergence of Alexander, the Great on the history stage, significant changes occurred in the understanding of Greek history (Demiriş, 1994: 237). After the Alexander period, Hellenistic

Period history began to gain a universal character. Historiography based on documents starting with Hellenism later became a method used by Roman historians (Collingwood, 1996:63, 64, 65).

In Rome, history was aimed at recognizing the lineage and taking lessons from the experiences. With Rome becoming a state in the future, the understanding of history advanced with the keeping of important events and minutes. The Roman school of history gained a new school with the impartial writing of Cincius and Cato's beginning to write in Latin. The first example of this school was the work of Cornelius Tacitus, the Germania. After the Sulla period, the understanding of history advanced and gained a philosophy, politics and critical perspective. Titus Livius, which is the greatest name in Roman history, is a man who writes neutral history. Livius wrote the longest work in Roman history, writing Roman history from its founding to the death of Drusus. Roman historiography has developed with the school received from the Greeks and brought an investigative and critical perspective to history (Esmek, 2019:4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13).

Both the Greek and his successor, the Romans, believed that history had three functions: a school for future leaders and commanders, a material for litterateurs, and an element that promotes individual morality (Demiriş, 1994: 232). The perception of Western history has mythological and theocratic features as well as being humane. The phenomenon of Western history is in integrity that carries traces of today's modern history and defends the principle of continuity but gives works in line with the principle of circularity (Collingwood, 1996: 49, 56, 74-76).

#### **4. Chinese Classical Historiography**

There are also many differences of opinion about the beginning of China's written history. The earliest sources that have survived to the present day are the writings in the prophetic bones dated to the end of the Shang Dynasty and the howls about the dynastic functioning (Özmen, Buluş, 2017: 10-17). Zuo Zhuan, Gongyang and Guliang written between 722-482 BC, which is the classical texts of China, shows us that these periods and the Chinese understanding of historiography are not just the annual attitude. Since the classical texts were interpreted and rewritten, historians were rationally examining and interpreting the texts (Kirilen, 2013: 266-268). However, it is difficult for us to know the history of China before the Qin clan when Shi Huang Di burned the dynastic records before the Chinese dynasty - with the concern that it would harm his domination (Özmen, Buluş, 2017:17). Chinese historiography, which has a Chinese-centered perspective, carries a chronological, narrative, didactic and interpretive style. The events are explained in short sentences and the cause-effect relationship is taken into consideration. On the other hand, Chinese historiography, which was written in a question-answer style, serves the purpose of educating politicians and enabling them to take lessons (Kirilen, 2013: 266, 267, 270-272, 289). The Chinese had a retrospective and cyclic understanding of history, and this understanding remained unchanged for a long time (Aydın, 2016: 36, 49, 50). Because, during the Han dynasty, scattered annalistic traditions were pulled together and woven into a much stronger historical fabric by the founders of imperial historiography (Cosmo, 2014:260).

## 5. The Birth of Micro History in 20th Century

According to Meier, both macro and micro history: everyone knows what they represent until they have to describe them. Firstly, it seems like that there is an obligation to make a determination. Simply put, the understanding of history that has been accepted so far is what is now more or less described as macro history (Meier, 2012: 108-109). Actually, these historiographies, called macro history, were generally considered as the expression of great events, wars, and personalities. This situation lasted until the 20th century. However, the changing world had led people on new searches in the 20th century. Historiography was also affected by this situation, and schools such as Annales emerged. Well, is micro-history really improving? Or is it the history in which people who are ignored and left in the dark of history and whose voice was not heard are placed in the focus of history (Özcan, 2022: 201)?

Actually, macro history and micro history are linked. Scholars from various disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology and sociology, adopted the method (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). As long as micro history exists, macro history realize. In the interest of brevity, what history has explored so far in so many different ways is the area that is now called macro history. Indeed, these definitions are the theories of micro historians. It is another problem if they are right or not (Meier, 2012: 108,109).

Georg G. Iggers says that the first half of the 20th century was the scene of a challenge to social history against classical historiography. He notes that the second half of the 20th century is the scene of the challenge of micro-history and post-modernist history against the understanding of social science-oriented history. Classical historiography rejects all kinds of historiography that are not based on preliminary sources. The most suitable area for a documented understanding of history is a political history narrative that places the state in its focus. Furthermore, the assumptions of classical historiography did not face a serious threat at a time when societies were not yet actively involved in political decision-making processes and did not take the stage of history as a social subject. The last quarter of the 19th century, the first half of the 20th century in particular, brought along to changes in historiography in parallel to the changes in the social order. Democratization, which was based on the participation of large masses in politics, required a historiography that took into account the wider segments of the population and the conditions they were exposed to. The focus of historiography has shifted from politics to society, and the emphasis has started to be placed on the social conditions that reveal them rather than on the history of the great men. This social science-oriented understanding of history that focused on social structures was considered as a science that aimed to identify historical causations (Ertan, 2012:10).

## 6. Conclusion

Nothing is as hidden as the one that is clear as day. This is a sentence that fully describes the profession of historiography as of the Classical to the Modern Age. Annals are in some way obvious, but still hidden in many ways. Unknown and hidden aspects are clarified by the questions asked by the historian about the events. The historian is the one who seeks answers to why and how questions. Ecoles are constructed with different perspectives given by the historian to the

questions asked about the events. Although it is correct that historical schools and types of historiographies have developed over time, it is not likely to say that they have totally changed and become different. It is the human beings who create the history and are influenced by history. History repeats that annals are similar to each other, but each historical event is subjective, unique, and unusual because the perpetrator of each event is a different person.

In addition to the uniqueness of each event, it is an undeniable fact that historical events are related, connected, and linked to each other. Actually, historians in the ancient and modern world have always tried to find the mathematics of annals. Couldn't it be a law or algorithm of annals, like the laws of physics? This search for historiography is highly reasonable. Because man seeks logic in every event. The idea that events are unspectacular and incidental is not realistic. The fact that coincidence is the main thought put in the center of annals is a gross injustice for the historiography effort from ancient times to today. If so, nothing written makes sense. Because the main purpose of historiography is that the causes and consequences of time –past, present, and future- and human actions are meaningful and understandable, and knowable, isn't it?

In the 21st century, science and technology are growing at an unprecedented pace. Science and technology in the 21st century are becoming more and more micro. Innovations such as medicine, genetic science, robotic technology, the defense industry, quantum physics, the discovery of subcellular particles, etc. are only a few of the revolutionary examples of micro-discovery. So, why are the micro studies an increasing value? Basically, becoming micro means becoming more professional. Because the way to understand the 'whole' is to understand the 'one', which is the smallest part. It is like to understand a body, which is a macro-world, through a drop of blood. In consequence, micro-diving gives rise to a macro perspective.

Micro-historiography is one of the innovations, which are the contribution of the 21st century for the historiography in this context. We are all aware that more and more specific titles are being studied. There are unquestionably several reasons why historians prefer micro titles. At this point, it does not seem possible to deal with the confusion between people and events with macro-historiography. It's quite hard to limit macro-historiography in the modern era. The fact that the historian makes a balls-up more solvable, which he deals with, depends on the limitation of the problem and making it micro as much as possible. Thus, a clearer view is obtained.

When ancient and modern historiographies are compared, it is likely to find many common traits between them in this regard. The writing of gods and goddesses, the lives of emperors, and certain titles in ancient civilizations are micro titles. For instance, there are gods and goddesses in the center of Mesopotamian historiography. In ancient Greece, history begins with the writing of Legends. Records and documents describing dynasties in ancient China are also examples of micro-history. Probably, this was the reason of the explanation of micro subjects for the understanding of ancient history. It is obvious that the goal was more than the life story of that person. The intent to reach a macro perspective and generalization with a micro title addressed is the same as the effort of the modern historian. In consequence, it is exciting to see that those who know the smallest part, the 'one', can understand and make sense of the whole and thus the chain of events that appear untidy is regular.

(Interestingly, the Qur'an gives all the messages about human beings through the lives of 28 prophets – micro titles-. "Man, his actions and results" are told through the lives of the prophets. The concept of time is inseparable in the Qur'an. In our mind; past is known, present is seen, future is unknown. In Quran, third of them are known. Future is known exactly. Because events are not accidental. There is no coincidence in the universe. Surprisingly, the Qur'an makes the mathematics of human relations obviously. What causes what? Quran gives what causes what. The concept of "Te'vilü'l-Ehâdis" -especially in Surah Yusuf- means that; reading the events, knowing the underlying causes and consequences, etc. The reader who reads the events correctly can know which actions will result in what. Since it is relevant to the article, the subject I briefly touched on here will be an exciting exploration of my other article.)

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