

AMÉLIE KUHRT

Amélie Thekla Luise Kuhrt

23 September 1944 – 2 January 2023

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2001

by

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Summary. Amélie Kuhrt, eminent historian of the Ancient Near East, and more specifically renowned for her teaching at University College London, for actively contributing to organising the Achaemenid History Workshops and for her many leading publications on the Achaemenid Empire and Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylonia, died on 2 January 2023, after living for several years with Parkinson's disease.

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Franklin

Amélie Kuhrt's personal and professional life did not follow a straight line.¹ On the contrary, it was full of mishaps and happy encounters. She was born on 23 September 1944 in Germany, the daughter of Edith and Wilhelm Wagner; her brother Martin was slightly older. Soon left on her own, her mother entrusted her to her grandmother Thekla while she worked as secretary for the Royal Air Force in defeated and occupied Germany. It was in this context that she met and married Ernest Woodgear, a British citizen, and the couple moved to England with Amélie, while Martin remained in Germany with his grandmother. There is hardly any need to stress the shock caused to the little girl by the separation from her brother and grandmother, and by the need to learn a new language and attend schools where she was branded a foreigner. The adaptation was made all the more difficult by the family having to move frequently (to Bath, Leamington Spa, Norwich, etc.), due to her stepfather's profession.

Very gifted, with a bright mind and a desire to fit in, Amélie quickly learned English, which she practised throughout her life with great elegance of elocution. She showed a particular interest in history, Greek and Latin. Encouraged by her teachers, she applied to Kings' College but quickly switched to University College London (UCL), where she was an undergraduate between 1963 and 1967. She met her husband David on a train whilst travelling to Berlin and they married in 1965. They had two daughters, Nastasha (1966) and Tanya (1968). In 1969, the family moved to a house on Ossian Road, not far from Finsbury Park.

At University College, in addition to courses taught by John Morris on Roman history, and by John North who, at the time, taught more Greek than Roman history, she was taught by Margaret (Peggy) Drower (1911–2012), who was the first to introduce her to the history of the Near East, and also by Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987), who held the Chair of History of Ancient History at UCL from 1951 to 1975. Together with a group of young historians (including Oswyn Murray, Tim Cornell, Antony Grafton, Averil Cameron, John North, Alan Cameron, and others), she also attended the seminars organised by A. Momigliano and Sally Humphreys at the Warburg Institute between 1965 and 1983. She took part in the tribute paid to Momigliano in 2008–2009 in the form of seminars also held at the Warburg Institute. On that occasion, she recalled a question Momigliano once asked her (she was just an undergraduate at the time): 'What is that text where the Babylonians say that even a dog in Babylon is free?' Amélie commented: 'To my eternal embarrassment, I did not know, but I did go away determined to find it'.²

¹ Some elements were recalled by Natasha Kuhrt (her eldest daughter) and by Eleanor Robson in *Iraq*, 85 (2023), 5–6. Thanks to Mehrdad Malekzadeh's patient work, a complete bibliography of Amélie is also available at https://www.academia.edu/113450540/Am%C3%A9lie_Thekla_Luise_Kuhrt_A_Bibliography

² On Momigliano's career and teaching in London, see pages from Peter Brown, 'Arnaldo Dante Momigliano, 1908–1987', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1989), 420–5. On the Warburg Institute seminars, see O. Murray, 'Preface', in T. Cornell & O. Murray (eds), *Legacy of Momigliano* (Warburg

She always recognised the benefits of Momigliano's teaching, which 'roused [her] interest in historiography and made [her] aware of the crucial importance of weighing sources critically, and resisting the seduction of good stories'.³ While admiring the scholar, she did also critically discuss some of his views on Greek, Jewish and Near Eastern historiography.⁴

As part of the preparatory work for a comprehensive survey of Achaemenid historiography (the final results of which were published in 2025),⁵ I asked Amélie about her early scientific choices. This form of *égo-histoire* began during a meeting in London, at her Ossian Road home, on 8 March 2020, followed by an email on 17 April 2020. Thereafter, Amélie's health declined rapidly, and she had to leave Ossian Road to find calm and help in a rest home on the outskirts of London. It was no longer possible for me to ask her any more questions, or even to have a long telephone conversation with her. Here is the text of her message of April 2020, word for word:

I studied for a BA in Ancient History at University College London with Arnaldo Momigliano, John North and Margaret Drower, graduating in 1967. As well as the usual Greek, Roman and Hellenistic history, i.e. c.1000 BC – 1000 AD, this included two courses on the history of the Near East, c.3000 – 330 BC. The 'special subjects' I took for intensive study were Greek Constitutional History and Greek History of the fifth century. We were also expected to study the history of political thought and (of course) Greek and Latin.

I had a break from studies 1967–1968, because I needed to recover a bit from trying to combine the final examinations with looking after Natasha (b. 1966), but was able to resume in 1968 soon after Tanya's birth. I was enrolled at the *School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, for courses in Akkadian. My teachers were David Hawkins and Nicholas Postgate. In 1969, the School granted me a scholarship to study for a PhD with Professor Donald Wiseman.

Whilst preparing for her PhD, she spent several weeks studying in Iraq and Egypt. But her collaboration with her supervisor came to an unhappy end, due to irreconcilable

Institute Colloquia, The Warburg Institute, London; Nino Aragno Editore, Turin; 2024), pp. xi-xii; this volume contains Amélie's contribution, 'Even a dog is free', pp. 77–87, and more specifically p. 87 (on the discussion with Momigliano and Amélie's reaction).

³ See her remark at the beginning of her inaugural lecture (1998), the slightly revised text of which was published as 'Making history: Sargon of Agade and Cyrus the Great of Persia', in W.F.M. Henkelman & A. Kuhrt (eds), *A Persian perspective: Essays in memory of H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Achaemenid History, 13; Leiden, 2003)*, pp. 347–61, quotation at pp. 347–8.

⁴ See 'Israelite and Near Eastern Historiography', in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2000), pp. 257–79, especially pp. 268–76.

⁵ *Sur les traces de l'empire des Grands rois: Enquête historiographique 1931–2023* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2025): see pp. 33–44, and more particularly pp. 549–51 on my survey about Amélie. As I will be quoting from my book frequently in the pages that follow, it will appear in its abbreviated form: *Sur Les traces* (2025).

differences, as Amélie put it euphemistically: ‘Unfortunately, my supervisor (Wiseman) was not at all ideal, and I never completed it despite several years of struggle’. Without a position and with no immediate hope of obtaining one, Amélie courageously took on a variety of small jobs, such as guiding visitors at the British Museum, teaching Biblical studies to pensioners, or sporadically lecturing at UCL as an occasional/visiting teacher; she was also editorial assistant for the *International Affairs* journal at Chatham House for several years. She went through another crisis in her personal life in 1976 with her divorce. It was during that time, when she held no permanent job, that she wrote her first publication, two chapters of an illustrated book on ancient civilisations aimed at a wide audience; already, she demonstrated a breadth of vision that was one of her most attractive qualities throughout her life.⁶

The year 1975 was a turning point in her career. Fergus Millar (1935–2019) succeeded Arnaldo Momigliano as Chair of Ancient History at UCL at that time, in a department ‘in which Ancient History was seen not as a branch of Classical Studies, but as part of a historical continuum which extended in time and space far beyond the Graeco-Roman world’.⁷ It was during the seminars that Fergus Millar came to appreciate Amélie’s scientific and human qualities, and it was on his initiative that she was recruited in 1979 as lecturer and then reader in Ancient History at UCL. It was also F. Millar who, as editor-in-chief, insisted on including the Near East in the *Routledge History of the Ancient World*, entrusting to Amélie the task of writing the two volumes of *The Ancient Near East*, published in 1995. She succeeded Peggy Drower in 1997, and gave her inaugural lecture in 1998. She held the position of professor of Ancient History until her retirement in 2009.

During her years of study at University College and afterwards at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Amélie, who defined herself as ‘a historian of the Ancient Near East who is (reasonably) familiar with classical sources’, had firmly defined the field of research she intended to explore and enrich. This is how she described it in the same message:

My ‘special subject’ concentrated on Greece ‘in the shadow’, as it were, of the Persian empire, which I found frustrating as there seemed to be little to read beyond Olmstead and then historians of Greece whose interest was limited to looking at Xerxes’ invasion (e.g. Burn etc). While Olmstead was obviously more centered on Persia, I felt it fell into the trap of a narrative defined by the Greek sources. Looking around for a different approach and noting the limits of material from Persia itself (as I understood them then), I focused on Babylonia where there seemed to be a lot of material for

⁶ *Ancient Civilizations* (The Sampson Low Visual World Library; Maidenhead & London, 1978). Amélie was Consultant Editor, author of the introduction (‘Setting the scene’, pp. 13–15), and co-author (with Alan Millard) of the chapter ‘Mesopotamia’ (pp. 24–37).

⁷ Citation Tim J. Cornell, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020), 1–2.

assessing how one Achaemenid province functioned. A further spur to my interest in the Persian empire was wanting to understand Hellenistic history better, where the Persian imprint was often remarked on without ever being defined – or so it seemed. So: the interest had already begun at school where – unusually – we were taught not only classical Greek and Republican Roman history, but also Hellenistic history, primarily Macedon and Ptolemaic Egypt, with a little bit of Seleucid and Attalid.

It was obviously her special interest in Achaemenid and Seleucid Babylonia that led her to begin researching as part of a PhD, which came to a sudden halt when she fell out with her supervisor. Nevertheless, the work achieved by then was not entirely lost because, as Amélie herself pointed out in her message to me, ‘a summary of what I had managed to do was eventually published in *Cambridge Ancient History* IV, ch.3a (*Babylonia from Cyrus to Xerxes*)’. Like many such collective books, the volume was published with considerable delay in 1988. The chapter itself was characterised by the precision of information and the clarity of exposition, combined with an acute sense of nuance. She completed this initial overview in 1988 with a paper published in 1990, which can be read in parallel with Matthew W. Stolper’s chapter in the following volume of *Cambridge Ancient History* covering the period 482–330 BC.⁸

In the introduction to the 1988 volume, the scientific editors emphasised what they considered to be the radical opposition between the Greek city and the Persian state, the citizens of the former being the only ones enjoying freedom and the ability to participate in political decision-making, as opposed to Persian authoritarianism: ‘The Persian state exercised absolute authority over all his subjects in all matters of religion, law and politics’.⁹ Although she did not have the opportunity to address the issue in her chapter, there is no doubt that Amélie did not share this vision of relationships between Greece and the East. She elaborated on her view in her contribution to the 2008–2009 tribute to A. Momigliano in which she demonstrated that, contrary to preconceived ideas, Mesopotamian cities enjoyed rights and prerogatives vis-à-vis the king, and that they exercised them through ‘a legally constituted citizen body’. As she clearly explained, it was the question posed by Momigliano at a seminar that prompted her ‘to begin trying to dismantle the conventional stereotype, which saw them [Mesopotamian cities] as entirely run by palaces and temples’.¹⁰ Over the years, she frequently discussed this question and closely related ones.¹¹

⁸ A. Kuhrt, ‘Achaemenid Babylonia: sources and problems’, *Achaemenid History*, 4 (1990), 177–94; M.W. Stolper, ‘Mesopotamia, 482–330 B.C.’, in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 6 (1994), pp. 234–60.

⁹ J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis, M. Ostwald, pp. xviii–xix.

¹⁰ Article cited above note 2.

¹¹ See ‘*Greeks and Greece in Mesopotamian and Persian perspectives* (The Twenty-First J.L. Myres Memorial Lecture; Oxford, 2002).

All observers have insisted on the new impetus given by Fergus Millar through the Ancient History Seminars, also open to graduate students, that were held every Thursday in an exceptional atmosphere of intellectual freedom and openness.¹² During the Spring term of 1981, Amélie co-organised the sessions, and she chose to invite colleagues working on the Achaemenid Empire, including, in addition to herself (who spoke on Babylonian material), Clarisse Herrenschildt (on Royal inscriptions), Mary Boyce, Simon Hornblower, Susan Sherwin-White, A.D.H. Bivar ('on coins, weights and measures, prefiguring the CHI chapter'), Alan Lloyd, and Christopher Tuplin. At that time, holding an Achaemenid seminar was still very exceptional. The only known precedent was the conference organised three years earlier, in June 1978, by Mac Guire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs at the Oriental Institute of Chicago on 'The Achaemenids as Overlords' (a topic that was already and would increasingly be at the heart of discussions). In addition to the organisers and Robert McAdams, other contributors included Margaret Root (on tablet seals), Richard Zettler (on Babylonian seals) and John D. Whitehead (on the Aršama correspondence). Unfortunately, the proceedings of this conference were not published.¹³ Neither was the London Achaemenid Seminar organised by Amélie. Yet, alongside the Chicago conference, and as part of a movement observed throughout the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁴ it nonetheless represented a significant step in the affirmation and development of the field of Achaemenid studies at the very beginning of the 1980s, and left a lasting impression on some of the participants.¹⁵

¹² See Tim J. Cornell, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020), 2: 'The weekly Ancient History seminars on Thursday afternoons became famous, and were the setting for many memorable occasions involving a distinguished international cast of speakers and attended by a vocal and enthusiastic audience. It was Fergus who insisted that graduate students should attend and be encouraged to take an active part. He also made it into a social event, with everyone present (including students) being invited to the bar of the Housman Room at University College, followed by dinner. [...] It was above all the atmosphere of the seminars, their scholarly intensity and their social companionship, that was so unforgettable. Fergus once remarked to me, years later, that in spite of many attempts he had never been able to recreate anything like it in Oxford'. See also A. Bowman & M. Goodman, 'Fergus Millar, 1935–2019', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 20 (2021), 28–30.

¹³ See *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 184–5, 357, 610–11. Only R. Zettler published his paper, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 38:4 (1979), 257–260. It is quite likely that the article published in 1978 by J.D. Whitehead, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 37(2), 119–34, was relatively similar to the paper he gave at the Chicago conference.

¹⁴ See *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 453–597.

¹⁵ This is how Christopher Tuplin remembers it today: 'I would board the train to London on a Thursday lunchtime with the latest bits of draft typescript of my thesis, spend the trip amending them, and then, at 5 in the afternoon in an upstairs room of the Institute of Classical Studies, withdraw excitedly into the beguiling world of the Achaemenid Empire. I am sure that the contrast between the novelty of that world and the humdrum world of a thesis whose attractions were starting to pall because of its long gestation did much to enhance the exotic quality of the former. But, of course, I wouldn't have been at the seminars in the first place except for an already formed fascination. And perhaps I would not have been so captivated

This initiative was all the more significant that it was taken independently of another, launched at the same time by Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg in Groningen, namely the first two editions of the Achaemenid History Workshops, in May and November 1981. These two Workshops mainly brought together colleagues from Groningen and the Netherlands; the first truly international Workshop took place in June 1983.¹⁶ Both born in 1944, neither Amélie nor Heleen were very well known at the time. The latter had defended her thesis in 1980 on a subject (Greeks and Persians in a different perspective¹⁷), that would lead to the questionings introduced at the first Achaemenid Workshop in 1981, as well as those that followed between 1983 and 1990. By that time, she had produced nearly a dozen articles about the Achaemenids, but having been published in Dutch, like her thesis, they were not widely disseminated. As for Amélie, she published her first two specialist articles in 1982.¹⁸ Neither the first (June) nor the second (November) Workshops held in Groningen in 1981 were published. Their existence and results only began to be known through Heleen's presentation article in English in 1982 (including abstracts of papers) in a Dutch journal with a fairly limited circulation at the time (her second article published in English).¹⁹

Their meeting was the result of another initiative taken in 1981 by Amélie in close collaboration with Averil Cameron: the convening at the Institute of Classical Studies of a conference devoted to the specific aim of 'Bringing together comparative material on women from different societies [...], from the second millennium BC to the early medieval period, and from Iran to Ireland'; its publication as a book 'offers much food, both for feminists and for historians', emphasised the organisers.²⁰ It included (among others) the text of the paper given by Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, which remained for many years the reference on how to address the issue of women and princesses at the

had it not been for the sense that it was novel not just because it was new to me but also because a new discipline was taking shape' (extract from a message sent to P. Briant on 31 March 2020 as part of the survey on Achaemenid historiography).

¹⁶ On the beginnings and developments of the Workshops, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 606–42. Among participants in the first two workshops were Josef Wiesehöfer and Dieter Metzler, who came from Munster and were regular participants in the 1983–1990 Workshops.

¹⁷ *Yaunā en Persai. Grieken en Persen in een ander Perspectief* (Groningen, 1980). On Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg's Achaemenid itinerary, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 541–9.

¹⁸ 'Assyrian and Babylonian traditions in Classical authors: a critical synthesis', in H. Nissen & J. Renger (eds), *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* (25e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale; Berlin, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 539–53; H.S. Smith & A. Kuhrt, 'A letter to a foreign general', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 68:1 (1982), 199–209.

¹⁹ 'Colloquium early Achaemenid History', *Persica*, 10 (1982), 173–284; the 1983 Workshop was presented in *Persica*, 11 (1984), 185–96.

²⁰ A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt (eds), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1983), pp. ix–xi, and the rich introduction to the revised edition of 1993 (pp. xii–xviii); regarding the book, see (*inter alia*) the review by Paul Cartledge in *History*, 69 (1984), 295–6.

Achaemenid court, as seen through classical sources. It was later expanded on by the author.²¹ It was also added to by Amélie herself, who always showed great concern for this subject matter generally and for this specific aspect in particular.²²

Sancisi took part in the London conference because Amélie had been informed of her early work by Riet van Bremen, who had been lecturing at UCL since September 1980, and who knew both of the existence of Sancisi's thesis and of an article she had written in Dutch about Atossa, which (after revision) was published in English in the Proceedings of the *Women in Antiquity* colloquium.²³ This was how the two historians got to know each other, and soon discovered they agreed on many things and had many interests in common, including women's history. They also shared the conviction that the classic Olmstead textbook²⁴ had had its day, and that the time had come to move on to a new phase of research and reflection: 'It is time, I think, to liberate ourselves from the Greek view on Persian history', wrote Heleen in *Women* (p. 32), using a phrase that Amélie could equally have coined. This was the basis of the collaboration between the two historians, who co-convened the 1984–1986, 1988 and 1990 Workshops (this last one in collaboration with Margaret Root).²⁵ The Workshops were usually held in Groningen, except in 1990 (Ann Arbor), and in 1985, when it was organised by Amélie in London with the help of the British Academy and UCL's History department. Despite their attempts, the two organisers' hope of a stable institutional collaboration between the history departments of Groningen and London never came to fruition. The project to set up a European research network for Achaemenid history, which they had envisaged, also failed to materialise.²⁶

This aspiration to be part of Achaemenid historiography manifested itself on Sancisi's part by the publication in 1982 of a small book on Achaemenid history for schools and

²¹ 'Exit Atossa: images of women in Greek historiography', pp. 20–33; see, in the second edition (1993) p. 303, the author's clarification. On the impact of the article, see also M. Brosius, *Women in Ancient Persia (559–331 B.C.)* (Oxford, 1996), 8–9.

²² See the clarification suggested by Amélie in R.V. Munson (ed.), *Herodotus* (Oxford Readings in Classical Studies; Oxford, 2013), pp. 148–50, where she insists on the new information from the recently published Persepolis tablets; see also her study 'Women and War', *Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity*, 2 (2001), 1–25.

²³ 'Exit Atossa: Vrouwen in het Achaemenidenrijk', in J. Block *et al.* (eds), *Tweede Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* (Nijmegen, 1981), pp. 14–55.

²⁴ *History of the Persian empire (Achaemenid period)* (Chicago, 1948).

²⁵ Amélie was neither convenor nor editor for the 1983 Workshop but presented a paper: *Achaemenid History*, 1 (1987), 147–58. The 1987 and 1989 Workshops were convened and edited by H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg in collaboration with her colleague from Groningen, J.W. Drijvers (*Achaemenid History*, 5 and 7); Amélie took part in 1987 with a paper (*Achaemenid History*, 5 (1990), 121–30), and in 1989 by giving the Concluding remarks (*Achaemenid History*, 7 (1991), 203–7).

²⁶ See *Sur les traces* (2025), p. 612.

the general public,²⁷ whilst Amélie published several articles, including a review of the new documentation available in the early 1980s²⁸ ending with the announcement of the publication of John M. Cook's book, a book that caused a stir in Achaemenid studies circles and sparked off a number of controversies (particularly between London and Oxford), at a time when some of the Achaemenid Workshops' orientations were being severely criticised.²⁹ Amélie's opinion of Cook's book was expressed very courteously but very firmly; she considered it to be very unsatisfactory, far removed from the new directions research was taking.³⁰ In parallel, she stated her preference for a more flexible and sophisticated approach to imperial realities, analysed both at the centre of the empire³¹ and in subject countries, in their diversity.³²

Although (by agreement between the two scholars) H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg retained organisational primacy,³³ Amélie's role and place in the Achaemenid Workshops are of course undeniable.³⁴ But it would be a serious error of perspective to limit her scientific activity and influence to her collaboration with her colleague from Groningen (and then Utrecht from 1990 onwards). In fact, intent also on setting her own national and international academic and scientific strategy independently, Amélie developed links of understanding and collaboration with many other circles and colleagues. During the early 1980s she led many such Near Eastern initiatives which, in turn, opened up long-term prospects.

The contents of *Women in Antiquity* and of the 1985 Achaemenid Workshop in London include the name of famous biblical scholar Peter R. Ackroyd (1917–2005), then Professor of Old Testament Studies at King's College.³⁵ The invitations were

²⁷ *Geschiedenis van het Perzische Rijk* (Haarlem, 1982), analysed *ibid.* pp. 589–90.

²⁸ 'A brief guide to some recent work on the Achaemenid empire', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* (8–10 December 1983), 146–53.

²⁹ J.M. Cook, *The Persian Empire*, London (1983); on this book and how it was received, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 590–5, and 617–26 (on the controversies surrounding the Workshops).

³⁰ *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 105 (1985), 211–12, whose conclusion is very clear: 'In assessing the book, a question that must be asked is whether it enhances one's understanding of the Persian imperial structure. After considerable thought the answer must be, I fear, largely negative. [...] [These statements] have turned a book [...] into little more than a compendium of useful data'.

³¹ 'The Achaemenid concept of kingship', *Iran*, 22 (1984), 155–60 (review of Margaret Root's *King and Kingship* (1979), which was one of the most influential Achaemenid essays of the 1980s and beyond).

³² *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107 (1987), 236–8 (review of P. Briant, *L'Asie centrale* (1984)).

³³ Apart from a short contribution by A. Kuhrt in *Iran*, 23 (1985), 161–2, Heleen SW presented the results and aims of the Workshops in various media: in addition to *Persica*, 10 (1982), 173–284, and 11 (1984), 185–96, see *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Rome, 1990), pp. 253–9.

³⁴ In this respect, a rereading of the co-authored introductions to the Workshops in the *Achaemenid History* volumes is illuminating: 2 (1987), ix–xiii; 3 (1988), xi–xv; 4 (1990), xi–xv; 6 (1991), xiii–xviii; 8 (1994), 1–7.

³⁵ 'Goddesses, women and Jezebel', in *Women*, pp. 245–59; 'Problems in the handling of Biblical and related sources in Achaemenid period', *Achaemenid History*, 3 (1988), 33–54.

obviously issued on Amélie's initiative. Amélie's ties with biblical studies were forged through her interest in the history of Cyrus (and therefore of the Cylinder), and they first materialised in an article she published on the subject in 1983 in a journal clearly associated with Old Testament studies.³⁶ As she herself explained to me, 'what became the 1983 article on the Cyrus Cylinder was originally presented at a regular lunch-time meeting of Old Testament historians at King's College London (1981) at the invitation of Peter Ackroyd, who also encouraged me to submit it for publication'. She returned frequently to the figure and politics of Cyrus over the years, but the interpretation of the Cyrus Cylinder was firmly established from this very first publication. The text's composition is clearly related to Assyrian-Babylonian traditions; the central subject is Babylon; nowhere is there any mention of a return of communities deported to Babylonia; nowhere is the link with a restoration of the Jerusalem community explained; the traditional view of 'Achaemenid religious tolerance' was fundamentally challenged: there were only subtle differences between Achaemenid and Assyrian policy in this area.

This position was all the more noteworthy for the fact that, at the same time, a young Dutch historian, Robartus (Bert) van der Spek, of the same generation as Amélie (he was born in 1949), was developing more or less the same theses, presented at the Groningen Workshop in May 1981 and then developed at greater length in the following years.³⁷ Amélie and Bert were subjected to full-scale attacks, in particular by a member of the Iranian diaspora in Canada, Kaveh Farrokh, who, after singling out Margaret Root, wrote: 'Bert Van der Spek went much further by claiming that Cyrus introduced no human rights policies and instead engaged in plunder, murder of civilians, and the destruction of temples (1982, p. 281–282). Amélie Kuhrt set the standard of anti-Cyrus historiography by claiming that Persian under Cyrus was as brutal and despotic as it was under the Assyrians and that the history it was the Jews who promoted the "... blatant propaganda ..." of Cyrus' humanistic benevolence towards conquered nations (1983, p. 94–95).' The same author deplored the fact that 'Kuhrt's ideas with respect to Cyrus the Great are now in the Western academic mainstream.'³⁸ More courteously, but without producing any convincing historical arguments, another author, Kersey H. Antia (Zoroastrian High Priest of Chicago since 1977) also attempted to discuss Amélie's conclusions.³⁹ Amélie never saw fit to respond to these attacks and counter-attacks, except

³⁶ 'The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial policy', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 25 (1983), 89–97.

³⁷ On this meeting, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 309–10.

³⁸ K. Farrokh, 'The attack against the History of Cyrus the Great (1979–2011)', *Persian Heritage*, 64 (2022), 18–20, <https://persian-heritage.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PH64-E.pdf>. On the context of these polemics, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 125–32, 1045–6.

³⁹ Kersey H. Antia, 'An appraisal of Amélie Kuhrt's attempt at demystifying King Cyrus' Image in history', https://www.avesta.org/antia/An_Appraisal_of_Amelie_Kuhrt's_Attempt_at_Demystifying_King_Cyrus_Image_in_History.pdf. The author was discussing another article by Amélie, 'Cyrus the Great of Persia:

by placing the figure of Cyrus in the context of the history of the Near East and Israel,⁴⁰ and by demonstrating once again and on several occasions that the Achaemenids never designed a single and unique policy to deal with an extraordinarily diverse range of populations and cultures⁴¹ – which is also why, along with others, she opposed Peter Frei's vision of a *Reichsautorisation*.⁴²

K. Farrokh also targeted Sue Sherwin-White, who had taken part in the discussion. Amélie, Bert and Sue shared another interest, Babylonia between the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods, on which they were to collaborate closely. Sue Sherwin-White (b. 1945) was an almost exact contemporary of Amélie; she completed a dissertation on Hellenistic Cos in 1974, before becoming a lecturer at Bedford College in 1978, and then taking a more specific interest in Hellenistic Babylonia, believing, like Amélie, that it was essential for specialists of the Hellenistic world to understand the Achaemenid world.⁴³ Fergus Millar, who knew them both, suggested that they begin a scientific collaboration, which produced remarkable results. They presented a joint paper on Xerxes' policy in Babylonia at the 1983 Workshop.

Their organic collaboration went a step further in the autumn of 1984 when they convened a seminar held at the Institute of Classical Studies on the following theme: 'The Seleucid Empire: Sources and Problems'. Its scientific rationale was very clearly set out in the Preface to the 1987 publication where Sue and Amélie insisted on the need to abandon a Eurocentric view of Hellenistic Babylonia, and on 'the huge importance of the Achaemenid empire and its legacy and influence on the formulation and development of the Seleucid empire'. The latter should be considered as solidly constituted, what Sue (pp. 2–3) called the 'strong view' as opposed to the 'weak view' (using a

Images or realities', in M. Heinz & M.H. Feldman (eds), *Representations of Political power: Case histories from times of change and dissolving order in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake IN, 2007), pp. 169–91, in which she revisited her 1983 theses on the *Cylinder* and the politics of Cyrus; see also her other article 'Ancient Near Eastern History: The Case of Cyrus the Great of Persia', in H.G.M. Williamson (ed.), *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel (Proceedings of the British Academy, 143; 2007)*, pp. 107–127, or 'New light on the Persian empire', *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, 19–20 (2000–2001), 185–6.

⁴⁰ 'The Achaemenid empire: a Babylonian perspective', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 214: ns 34 (1990), 119–55; 'Ancient Near Eastern History: The Case of Cyrus the Great of Persia', in Williamson, op. cit.

⁴¹ 'The problem of Achaemenid "Religious policy"', in B. Gronenberg & H. Spieckermann (eds), *Die Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin, 2007), pp. 117–12.

⁴² See her review of the first edition of P. Frei and K. Koch (1984) in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 44:1–2 (1987), 199–204, and her articles 'The Persian kings and their subjects: a unique relationship?', *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 96 (2001), 166–74 (review of the second 1996 edition of Frei and Koch's work), and 'Can we understand how the Persians perceived "other" gods/"the gods of other"?'', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 15 (2013), 149–65.

⁴³ 'Greek-Persian relations cannot be evaluated without attempting to know the "interior" of the Achaemenid world', she wrote (*Classical Review*, 36 (1984), 254; cf. *Sur les traces* (2025), p. 497).

formulation strongly reminiscent of the discussions specific to Achaemenid historiography⁴⁴). This scientific conviction was ardently expressed and made explicit throughout the volume, especially in the papers given by Sue, Amélie and Bert van der Spek, and then, a little later, in an article co-written by Sue and Amélie, which was ‘intended to complement the material in chapters one to three of *Hellenism in the East*’.⁴⁵ Amélie, who often returned to the subject, discussed the historical context in which the Babylonian Berossus devised and wrote his *Babyloniaka*: in this, her work was considered seminal.⁴⁶ Although there were also a few reservations,⁴⁷ the book was well received;⁴⁸ Simon Hornblower declared it to be ‘one of the most important contributions to ancient history’ in *TLS* no. 4435, 1988.

At the Ann Arbor Workshop (1990), Amélie presented a paper in both their names on the Achaemenid-Hellenistic transition in Babylonia. At that time, and since 1988, they had been working together on a book on the Seleucid Empire. This project was the result of an initial project Sue had been working on since 1984. In 1988, for various reasons, Sue had decided to leave the academic world. Amélie persuaded her that her manuscript deserved to be published. They worked together very regularly, and their combined efforts culminated in 1993 in a book, *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, that was given the programmatic subtitle *A new approach to the Seleucid Empire*. Jean-François Salles, who had taken part in the London seminar in 1984, and Marie-Françoise Boussac decided to convene a special event at the Maison de l’Orient in Lyon: ‘The idea for this seminar arose naturally from the “provocative” nature of the work by S. Sherwin-White & A. Kuhrt’, wrote the organisers in the introduction to the issue of *Topoi* (1994/2), where the contributions of 12 scholars were published. Curiously, half of them, Hellenist historians and archaeologists, were specialists of Central Asia, and were particularly critical. Just as curiously, with the exception of Amélie and myself, none of the participants were specialists of the Achaemenid world, and perhaps even more surprisingly, none of the contributors (apart from Amélie) were specialists of Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylonia, who would have been able to discuss the cuneiform documentation introduced and used in the book.⁴⁹ In Sue’s absence (she was detained in England for her

⁴⁴ See also *From Samarkhand to Sardis* (1993), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁵ *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111 (1991), 71–86

⁴⁶ See J. Haubold in J. Haubold, G.B. Lanfranch, R. Rollinger & J. Steele (eds), *The World of Berossos* (Classica et Orientalia, 5; Wiesbaden, 2013), pp. 8–9

⁴⁷ E.g. F.W. Walbank in *Liverpool Classical Monthly*, 13 (1988), 108112, though in the end he agreed with S. Hornblower’s complimentary review in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

⁴⁸ A. Kuhrt & S. Sherwin-White (eds), *Hellenism and the East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987); cf. *Sur les traces* (2025), 708–9.

⁴⁹ Only Antonio Invernizzi (‘Appunti sulla cultura ellenistica nell’impero seleucide’, *Topoi*, 4:2 (1994), 521–30) introduced Babylonian documentation, on monetary portraits and terracotta figurines, regretting that the books’ authors did not devote sufficient attention to archaeological documentation.

father's funeral), Amélie tried to deal with the numerous and sometimes virulent attacks by several participants against this or that statement, but there was no real discussion of 'the new approach' proposed by the authors. In a biographical article dedicated to Sue (who died in 2016) Catherine Slate condemned what she called 'an extraordinary display of outrage at a round table at the Maison de l'Orient in Lyon'.⁵⁰ Amélie was also disheartened by what she rightly considered to be a very disappointing meeting. I remember a long conversation I had with her the next day on the train journey back from Lyon to Paris. In particular, she could not understand the logic of Édouard Will's arguments in his reading notes (pp. 433–447), which she felt were wrong: she and Sue replied to him very firmly and very courteously in their written contribution (pp. 449–454). Fortunately, the book very quickly found its audience and, other than the occasional reservation,⁵¹ or misunderstanding,⁵² the 'new approach' was accepted in the world of Hellenistic studies.⁵³ Ten years later (in 2003), the conference held at the Collège de France on the Achaemenid-Hellenistic transition was a resounding success, at the end of which Amélie was able to present her concluding remarks in a tone that was both serene and confident.⁵⁴ Later on, in her assessment of R.J. van der Spek's longstanding contribution to Babylonian studies, and also in her reviews of books published in this field, she once again had the opportunity to assert that historians of the Seleucid world cannot dispense with using cuneiform sources.⁵⁵

In her analyses of the transition from Achaemenid domination to the power exercised by the Macedonian victors, Amélie could not avoid dealing with Alexander, including of course by incorporating the relevant Babylonian tablets.⁵⁶ She had already addressed the conditions of Alexander's entry into Babylon during the 1987 Workshop, showing that texts mentioning this episode were informed by previous events, namely

⁵⁰ Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, *The Brown Book* (2017), 92–98, citation at p. 95; cf. *Sur les traces* (2025), 706–10.

⁵¹ E.g. S. Mitchell, *Classical Review*, 44:1 (1994), 107–9.

⁵² E.g. W. Heckel, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 1994.03.10.

⁵³ See in particular the very precise accounts of two Assyriologists, both specialists of Achaemenid and Hellenistic Babylonia, R.J. van der Spek, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 57:2 (1994), 367–8, and J. Oelsner, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 46–47 (1999–2000), 380–3.

⁵⁴ P. Briant & F. Joannès (eds), *La transition entre l'empire achéménide et les royaumes hellénistiques* (Persika, 9; Paris, 2006); see Concluding remarks, pp. 471–6, welcoming the fact that more than half the papers dealt with Babylonia: '[That] is an acknowledgement of the prime importance of Babylonia in tracing social and political change'.

⁵⁵ "'Bert" and the history and historiography of the Seleucid empire', in K. Kleber & R. Pirngruber (eds), *Silver, money and credit: a tribute to Robartus J. van der Spek on the occasion of his 65th birthday* (PIHANS, 128; Leiden, 2016), pp. xiii–xviii; see also *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 56:3–4 (1999), 449–54 (continuities and adaptations in Babylonia from Achaemenid to Hellenistic times).

⁵⁶ A. Kuhrt & S. Sherwin-White, 'The transition from Achaemenid to Seleucid rule in Babylonia: revolution?', *Achaemenid History*, 8 (1994), 311–27, at 315–18.

the entries of Sargon II of Assyria in 710 BC on the one hand, and Cyrus in 539 BC on the other.⁵⁷ She returned to the episode and its interpretation in an article whose title itself was a vibrant call to historians to broaden their vision and to understand that, contrary to a lazy habit, the history of the Ancient Near East did not end abruptly with the death of Darius. By detailing the example of Alexander's entry into Babylon in all its aspects, the scientific alternative she offered was expressed very clearly: 'If we wish to understand the Hellenistic world, we have to make the effort to familiarise ourselves with the mani-faceted world and histories of the Near East. Such an effort can cast a new light on the historical process. [...] A further result is that it breathes life into the world he [Alexander] conquered. It is not a passive entity upon which he acts, it is inhabited by people, who can do and do, to some degree, bring pressure to bear on the great world conqueror'.⁵⁸

During all these years, Amélie also kept abreast of debates on the history of the Near East in all its extent of space and time, and wrote articles⁵⁹ and specialist reviews on particular aspects, giving her opinion on what a history of the Ancient East should be.⁶⁰ She was a regular participant in the *Rencontres Assyriologiques Internationales* (RAI). Her readings and these events fed the courses she taught on this part of history at University College. She used this material to write a textbook 'intended as an introduction to the Ancient Near East', about which she remarked, with lucidity and fully aware of her own limitations: 'I have tried to treat the periods and areas usually studied in universities, which means that, inevitably, my coverage is selective'. The manuscript was completed in the autumn of 1992 and, after endless revisions and editing (which I witnessed during a visit to Ossian Road in the summer of 1994), it was published in 1995.⁶¹ All commentators emphasised the author's exceptional ability to master the primary documentation and to offer interpretations without ever concealing the existing

⁵⁷ 'Alexander in Babylon', *Achaemenid History*, 5 (1990), 121–30; she also set Cyrus' entry into Babylon in the context of his struggle against Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian king: 'Nabonidus and the Babylonian priesthood', in M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests* (London, 1990, 117–55, at 132–5.

⁵⁸ "'Ex Oriente lux": how to widen our perspectives on ancient history', in R. Rollinger, A. Luther & J. Wiesehöfer (eds), *Getrennte Wege? Kommunikation, Raum und Wahrnehmung in der alten Welt* (Oikumene, 2; Frankfurt am Main, 2007), pp. 617–32, citation at p. 618.

⁵⁹ E.g. 'The exploitation of the camel in the Neo-Assyrian empire', in *Studies in Ancient Egypt, in honour of H.S. Smith* (London, 1999), pp. 178–84; 'The Old Assyrian merchants', in H. Parkins & C. Smith (eds), *Trade, traders and the Ancient city* (London, 2005), pp. 15–29.

⁶⁰ See in particular *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 114 (1982), 70–2.

⁶¹ *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 B.C.* (Routledge History of the Ancient World, 1–2; London and New York, 1995).

difficulties, contradictions and gaps.⁶² In 1997, the book was awarded the James Henry Breasted Prize by the American Historical Association.

Among the remarks by reviewers, three are worth noting. To those who considered collective works preferable, G. Frame replied: 'A major advantage of Kuhrt's work is that it is the result of the study, work, and thoughts of *one* scholar, a scholar with wide knowledge and undoubted ability. One approach is used consistently through the book'. Mark W. Chavalas wondered why the book did not go further than 330 BC, especially considering that, citing from *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, 'Kuhrt herself had argued elsewhere that the advent of Hellenism and Hellenistic kingdoms in the Near East in 330 BC were logical continuations of Near Eastern traditions for at least two centuries after Alexander, continuing into the Parthian period'. This was a fair observation, but it was not in fact Amélie's decision, as the choice of editors for the collection was imposed upon her, as she herself implied.⁶³ Moreover, the final words of the book (II, 701) left no doubt as to the consistency of Amélie's approach from one book to the next. Referring to *From Samarkhand to Sardis*, she stressed the importance of the legacy of the Achaemenid Empire: 'The very length of time it survived and the fact that Alexander's successors, the Seleucids (311–146 B.C.) were able to build on Achaemenid institutions to hold their own substantial dominions together are measures of the success of the imperial system evolved by Persian kings'. Finally, while emphasising that 'Kuhrt's approach to and familiarity with the sources are outstanding, and in this she certainly excels in imparting to her readers a clear sense of just how fragmentary the historical record of the ancient Near East is', Daniel T. Potts noted in particular the excellence of the section devoted to the Achaemenids (II: 647–701): 'Encompassing just over 50

⁶² Among the reviews, see M.A. Dandamaev, *Orientalia*, 66:1 (1997), 103–4; J.E. Richards, *Classical World*, 92:1 (1998), 76–7; D.T. Potts, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 101 (1997), 166–7, citation at p. 166; G. Frame, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 123:4 (2003), 860–1, citation at p. 861; Mark W. Chavalas, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 59 (2000), 38–40, citation at p. 39.

⁶³ 'The only reason, then, for ending this introduction to Near Eastern history with Alexander is the structuring of the series in which it is published, which reflects the European perspective on ancient history' (I, 8–9). This point was particularly highlighted by R.J. van der Spek in a lecture given on 24 April 2023 at the *London Center for the Ancient Near East (Online Lectures in Honor of Amélie Kuhrt)*, quoted here with his permission: 'The editors of the series promised Amélie that the volume on the Hellenistic period would pay due attention to the indigenous civilisations of Western Asia and Egypt. However, they bluntly broke that promise and they were very open about this break in view of the title of the volume, when it appeared: *The Greek World after Alexander: 323–30 BC* (Routledge, 2000). The author was of course a classical scholar: Graham Shipley. In his preface he admits that he is not the right person to write a book that would have had the scope that Amélie had in mind: "Given its limited size, the work cannot pretend to complete coverage, particularly in areas where the author is not an expert. For particular topics and regions it will be obvious that I have relied heavily on earlier investigations; this is particularly the case with Egypt and the Seleucid empire, for I have no knowledge of the non-Greek languages". [...] It is as if a writer of a monograph on the history of Europe in modern times could come away with the statement that he will more or less ignore Germany and France, because he does not know French or German'.

pages, Kuhrt's chapter on the Achaemenid Empire is probably the best compressed synthesis on the subject now available in the English language'. Published at the very moment when my manuscript of *Histoire de l'Empire perse* was accepted by Fayard (the book was published in May 1996), this chapter 13 of Amélie's textbook came at just the right time and showed how historians of the Achaemenid Empire aspired to synthesis, alongside the books by Edwin Yamauchi (1990) and Josef Wiesehöfer (1994), both cited in the bibliography of *The Ancient Near East* (II, 762).⁶⁴

Amélie's writings and addresses were characterised by their elegance and fluidity, but also by her ever-ready sense of humour: the words of her inaugural lecture are the finest example of this.⁶⁵ This is why conference organisers liked to call on her to round off discussions: rich in content and peppered with inspiring suggestions, Amélie's concluding remarks were quite renowned in Achaemenid circles.⁶⁶ She also commented frequently on books published on Achaemenid history in particularly elaborate reviews,⁶⁷ she took part in specialist symposia,⁶⁸ and she set out how (in her opinion) this history ought to be approached.⁶⁹

It was at this time that, together with Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, she decided to edit a collection of commented documents illustrating the history of the Achaemenid Empire. This collaboration could not go ahead, in part because the Utrecht historian was considerably slowed down in her activities by a long period of hospital treatment for a cancer diagnosed in 1995 that would claim her life on 28 May 2020. Amélie thought of launching a vast collective programme, but this did not come to fruition.⁷⁰ After the death of her colleague and friend from Utrecht (to whom she paid due tribute⁷¹), she

⁶⁴ See also *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 811–12.

⁶⁵ See note 3 above.

⁶⁶ See, for example, her concluding remarks at the 2004 and 2006 Collège de France colloquia on topics as diverse as the transition between the Achaemenid Empire and the Hellenistic kingdoms (*Persika*, 9 (2006), 471–6) and the Elamite archives of the Persepolis fortifications (*Persika*, 12 (2008) 563–70).

⁶⁷ See e.g. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 40:1 (1995), 93–5 (on Achaemenid Syria-Palestine); *Institute of Archaeology Bulletin*, 25 (1988), 173–6 (on the archaeology of Palestine); *Phoenix*, 52:3–4 (1998), 366–80 (on M. Miller, *Athens and Persia*).

⁶⁸ E.g. 'Assyria in the Achaemenid period', in P. Briant (ed.), *Dans les pas des Dix-Mille* (1995), pp. 239–54.

⁶⁹ E.g. *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 105 (1985), 211–12 (on Cook, *Persian Empire*); *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 107 (1987), 236–8 (on Briant, *L'Asie centrale*); *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109:2 (1989), 290–2 (on *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol 2); see also her article for the general public, 'Persia, how to run a great Empire', *Omnibus*, 25 (1993), 15–20.

⁷⁰ In February 1997, Amélie submitted a pioneering project to the Humanities Research Board of the British Academy to create a region-by-region documentary database on the Achaemenid Empire (Sources for studying the Achaemenid Empire).

⁷¹ See the biographical article published in 2009 in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sancisi-weerdenburg-heleen/> and the edition (with Wouter Henkelman) of a *Mélanges* in honour of the late historian (*A Persian perspective, Achaemenid History*, 13, 2003), where, in their

embarked on this immense task alone, which resulted in 2007 in a very impressive volume of over 1,000 pages, within which documents (translated from several languages) and illustrations were reproduced with greatly detailed and up-to-date comments. The aim was ‘to provide a guide to the problems involved in trying to reconstruct the history and workings of the Achaemenid Persian empire’.⁷² Whilst presenting their differing views and alternative suggestions on this or that aspect, reviewers warmly welcomed the publication of such a fundamental tool for students and researchers alike.⁷³ Amélie never intended to publish an exhaustive synthesis on the Achaemenid Empire – of which there were many between 2000 and 2020 – but she was often asked to write the Achaemenid chapters in comparative history books about empires.⁷⁴

Appreciated though they were, some of her studies did not escape critical scrutiny and questioning. She knew when to recognise that one of her interpretations had become obsolete in the light of new documentary publications.⁷⁵ However, when she felt that one interpretation of hers was supported by strong evidence and that her opponents, in her opinion, were not taking account of the documentary elements she was presenting, she would not hesitate to take up the fight and retaliate, blow for blow, becoming *ipso facto* an active participant in the controversy. This is how Amélie and Sue Sherwin-White’s paper published in 1987 on Xerxes’ Babylonian policy started a scholarly controversy that lasted for decades, even after Amélie attempted on several occasions to shed light on her/their approach, scrupulously incorporating newly published and interpreted Babylonian documentation.⁷⁶ She never gave up, never hesitating to respond with

preface, both editors stress the role played by Sancisi-Weerdenburg in revitalising Achaemenid research and studies.

⁷² *The Persian Empire: A corpus of sources from the Achaemenid period* (London and New York, 2007).

⁷³ See e.g. K. Ruffing, *Sehepunkt* (2010) (<https://www.sehepunkte.de/2010/07/14159.html>), where he calls Amélie a ‘grande Dame’ der Achaimeniden-Forschung; H. Koch, *Orientalia*, 78:1 (2009), 105–11; B. Jacobs, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan (AMIT)*, 42 (2010), 318–24; C. Nimchuck, *Classical Review*, 60:1 (2010), 157–60.

⁷⁴ In S. Alcock et al. (eds), *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (2011), pp. 93–123; in K. Radner (ed.), *State correspondence in the Ancient World* (2014), 112–40; in P. Leriche (ed.), *De la confrontation à la koine* (2014), pp. 3–12; in C. Tuplin & J. Ma (eds), *Aršāma and his world*, vol 3 (2020), pp. 123–35. On the many Achaemenid reference books published in those years, see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 1013–14.

⁷⁵ In 1997 (*Topoi*, supp.1, 302–4), faced with still patchy Babylonian documentation, she came to doubt the existence of Babylonian revolts against Xerxes. The publication of new documents and their interpretation by C. Waerzeggers (*Archiv für Orientforschung*, 50 (2003/4), 150–73) definitively dispelled doubts about the existence of the revolts and their date (484 BC).

⁷⁶ ‘Xerxes’ destruction of Babylonian temples’, *Achaemenid History*, 2 (1987), 69–78, arguing that neither the passage in Herodotus (I.183) nor the Babylonian documentation known at the time led to the conclusion that Xerxes had destroyed the Babylonian temples after the revolts. As she did in all her successive studies, C. Waerzeggers described Kuhrt’s position as ‘revisionist’. (It is not for me to take sides here. I have retraced how the controversy developed elsewhere: see *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 695–7, 865–70, 1031–3.)

sometimes corrosive irony,⁷⁷ nor to reiterate her arguments with a keen sense of pedagogy.⁷⁸

Another of Amélie Kuhrt's distinctive traits was her open-mindedness and generosity, as her former student Makis Aperghis attested during 'A day in honour of Amélie', an informal gathering held at University College on the occasion of her retirement, on 19 June 2009.⁷⁹ He prepared his MA under Amélie's direction.⁸⁰ This is what he says about the professor-student relationship: 'Such was my interest that my Master's thesis was actually on an aspect of the administration of the Persian empire. In 1995–1996, I was the sole student to take the relevant M.A. course. [...] This was, I imagine, the last time that anyone had received private tuition from Amélie. This proved to be so worthwhile that I went further and, on my own, wrote a separate paper on some other aspect. Here I saw another trait of Amélie's, which I appreciated, one of encouraging independent research and generously allowing it to receive all the credit even though she had contributed with her comments'.

At the risk of giving (for a moment) an autobiographical tone to this article, I would also like to underline Amélie's exceptional intellectual generosity towards me, from our first meeting in Paris in July 1980, and my first visit to Ossian Road during the Achaemenid Workshop in June 1985, to the last years of her fully active life. We found ourselves in agreement on many points, in particular on how to approach the question of continuities/ruptures between the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. This is why, from 1985 to 1987 and in collaboration with Sue Sherwin-White, she provided the English translation for my short history of Alexander, which unfortunately did not find a British publisher. Amélie took up the project again later thanks to an agreement with Princeton UP, and a fully revised and greatly expanded version was made available in English in 2010.⁸¹ She also translated into English the launch documents of the Achemenet programme – a

⁷⁷ See the conclusion of her 2011 paper on the subject, published jointly with three colleagues (W.F.M. Henkelman, R. Rollinger and J. Wiesehöfer): 'We have not the slightest doubt that the picture of Xerxes as the destroyer of Babylonian temples, with its supposed repercussions for the cult, for the theologically global position of Babylon, and for the city itself will continue to resurface time and again. The suggestive power of the tradition and the historical image it transmits will ensure as much. The same, after all, is true of the decline of Birs Nimrud, Borsippa's ziggurat, which the local Arab inhabitants still insist was struck by lightning on Allah's order' (in R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg & R. Bichler (eds), *Herodot und das persische Weltreich* (2011), p. 465).

⁷⁸ 'Reassessing the reign of Xerxes in the light of new evidence', in M. Kozuh *et al.* (eds), *Extraction and Control: Studies in honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (Chicago, 2014), pp. 163–9.

⁷⁹ Also speaking were John North, Lindsay Allen (who had prepared her PhD under Amélie's supervision, 2002), and myself. Natacha and Tanya were also present, as was Tom Holland.

⁸⁰ 'Travel routes and travel stations from Persepolis: A computer-aid analysis of the Persepolis Fortification texts', MA (1996); cf. *Sur les traces* (2025), pp. 660–1.

⁸¹ *Alexander the Great: A short introduction*, translated by Amélie Kuhrt (Princeton & Oxford, 2010).

programme to which she remained deeply attached over the years.⁸² But that is not all. I would particularly like to stress how, considering (as she told me then) that she had published everything she had planned to do, she offered in 2013 to translate around thirty of my articles, bringing them together in a single volume. Thanks to Amélie's hard, selfless work, and with the help of our mutual friend Josef Wiesehöfer, who agreed to publish the manuscript in the *Oriens et Occidens* series, a collection of more than 630 pages was published in 2017.⁸³ A few years later, as her health was failing by the day, she regretted not being able to contribute to the *Mélanges* offered to me in 2020.⁸⁴ But she did point out, quite rightly, that the translation of my articles was a worthy substitute, and she insisted on being a member of the editorial committee, thus delicately expressing her loyalty to forty years of friendship and dialogue founded on freedom and trust.

Throughout the years, Amélie was undoubtedly a relentless worker. But she had many other personal and social interests. Above all, she loved seeing her daughters Natasha and Tanya and their family, especially her grandchildren, who adored their grandmother. With her partner Patrick Chorley (himself a historian of medieval Italy), she took great pleasure in going to the theatre and concerts and in travelling to explore cities and the countryside, particularly in Italy and France, but also in Germany and elsewhere. She enjoyed visiting her friends (I remember her regular stays in my successive homes in France, from Toulouse and the Lot to Paris and Brittany), and she loved to entertain at her Ossian Road home. Delicately paired with good wines, meals at the large kitchen table were joyful, peppered with light-hearted remarks and conversations ranging from Achaemenid history to a recent concert at the Barbican, or a book or film that a guest had read and enjoyed. She showed herself to be what she was always: a free, intelligent, witty and friendly woman with strong views, but ready to listen to her opponents and engage them in a courteous but uncompromising *disputatio*. We miss her.

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⁸² See <http://www.achemenet.com/dotAsset/de7c5033-a8ad-44f7-b5cf-1468c05fdca4.pdf>. On 8 June 2012, she chaired the Collège de France Seminar (*Achaemenid History and the Internet II: a pre-presentation of the new www.achemenet.com website*), which also marked the end of my teaching.

⁸³ *Kings, Countries and Peoples: Selected studies on the Achaemenid Empire*, translated by Amélie Kuhrt (*Oriens et Occidens*, 16; Stuttgart, 2017).

⁸⁴ D. Agut-Labordère, R. Boucharlat, F. Joannès, A. Kuhrt & M.W. Stolper (eds), *Achemenet vingt ans après (Persika*, 21; Leuven, Paris & Bristol CT, 2020).

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