

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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The American Philosophical Society's Jacques Barzun Prize 2025 Recipient, Francesca Rochberg

Philadelphia, PA, August 29, 2025: The American Philosophical Society has awarded the 2025 Jacques Barzun Prize in Cultural History to Dr. Francesca Rochberg for her book, *Worldmaking and Cuneiform Antiquity, An Anthropology of Science*. The award will be presented during the Society's Autumn General Meeting on November 14, 2025.

Francesca Rochberg is Professor Emerita of Assyriology and Catherine and William L. Magistretti Distinguished Professor Emerita of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She received her Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago. Dr. Rochberg was elected to the American Philosophical Society in 2008.

Francesca Rochberg's *Worldmaking and Cuneiform Antiquity, An Anthropology of Science* is a strikingly original contribution to cuneiform intellectual history and to the global history of science. Dr. Rochberg demonstrates that the astronomers of ancient Babylonia saw a world constituted by the distinctive ingredients of their culture, and did not simply record the fragments then visible of what modern astronomers take to be the actual world of the stars and planets. This persistently historicist approach to cuneiform learning enables Dr. Rochberg to critically engage a host of recent and contemporary theorists of science, including Nelson Goodman, Bruno Latour, Thomas Kuhn, Willard Quine, Ian Hacking, Richard Rorty, and Clifford Geertz, while simultaneously offering a critique of the standing historiography of ancient science as developed by Otto Neugebauer, David Pingree, Geoffrey Lloyd, and Olaf Pederson. This theoretically ambitious, rigorously argued, exhaustively documented volume is a highly distinctive challenge to Assyriologists and to contemporary historians, philosophers, and anthropologists of science.

The Jacques Barzun Prize in Cultural History is awarded annually to the author whose book exhibits distinguished work in American or European cultural history. The prize honors historian and cultural critic Jacques Barzun, a Member of the American Philosophical Society since 1984. "To be a recipient of the Jacques Barzun Prize in cultural history from the American Philosophical Society," shares Dr. Rochberg, "and to receive this recognition of my work alongside previous Barzun books is most humbling and utterly wonderful. I feel immense gratitude to the American Philosophical Society and to the Barzun Prize Committee for their support of my book and its subject in this way."

The selection committee consisted of chairman Robert B. Pippin, Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, David Hollinger, Preston Hotchkis Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, and Susan Stewart, Avalon Foundation University Professor in the Humanities, Emeritus and Professor of English, Emeritus at Princeton University.

The American Philosophical Society, the oldest learned society in the United States, was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of “promoting useful knowledge.” In the 21st century the Society sustains this mission in three principal ways. It honors and engages distinguished scientists, humanists, social scientists, and leaders in civic and cultural affairs through elected membership and opportunities for interdisciplinary, intellectual fellowship, particularly in the semi-annual Meetings in Philadelphia. It supports research and discovery through grants and fellowships, lectures, publications, prizes, exhibitions, and public education. It serves scholars through a research library of manuscripts and other collections internationally recognized for their enduring historic value. The American Philosophical Society’s current activities reflect the founder’s spirit of inquiry, provide a forum for the free exchange of ideas, and convey the conviction of its members that intellectual inquiry and critical thought are inherently in the public interest.