GREEK MYTHS and MESOPOTAMIA

Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod

CHARLES PENGLASE

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Charles Penglase

ABBREVIATIONS

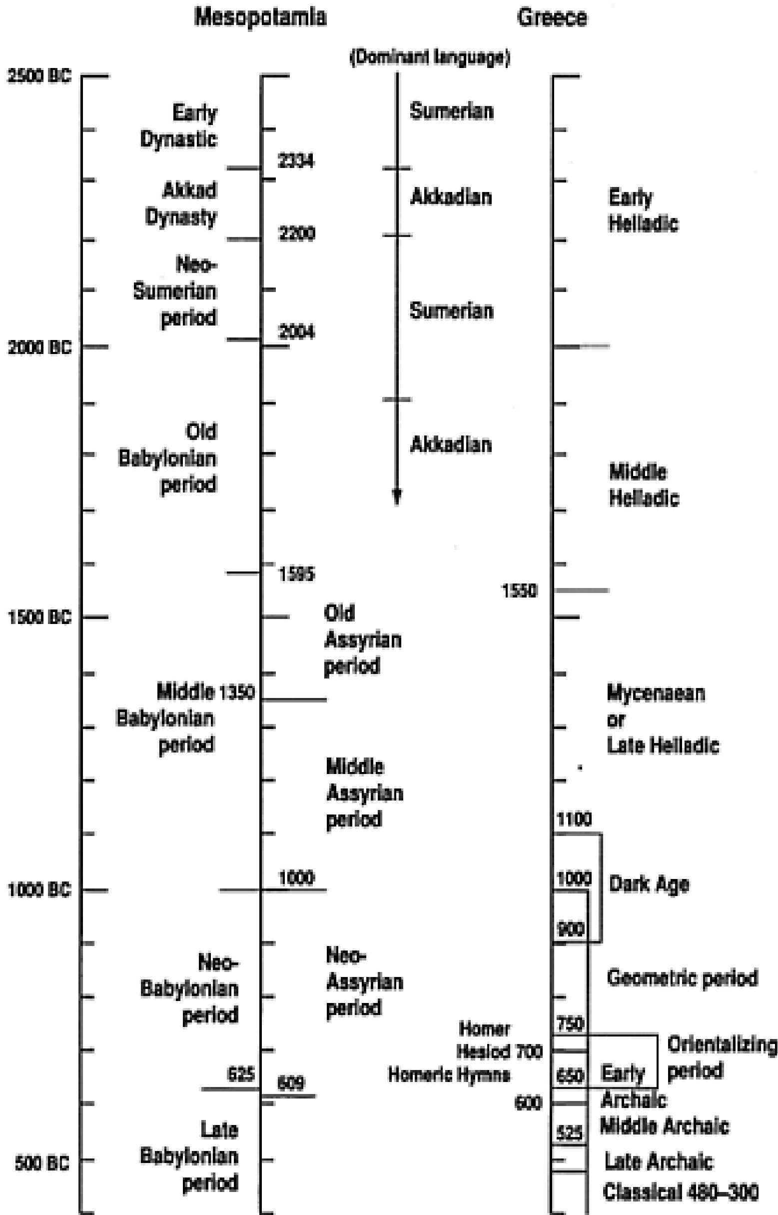
ARV	—J.D.Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters,* 2nd edition, volumes 1 and 2, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963
AV	—*Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld*
ID	—*Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld*

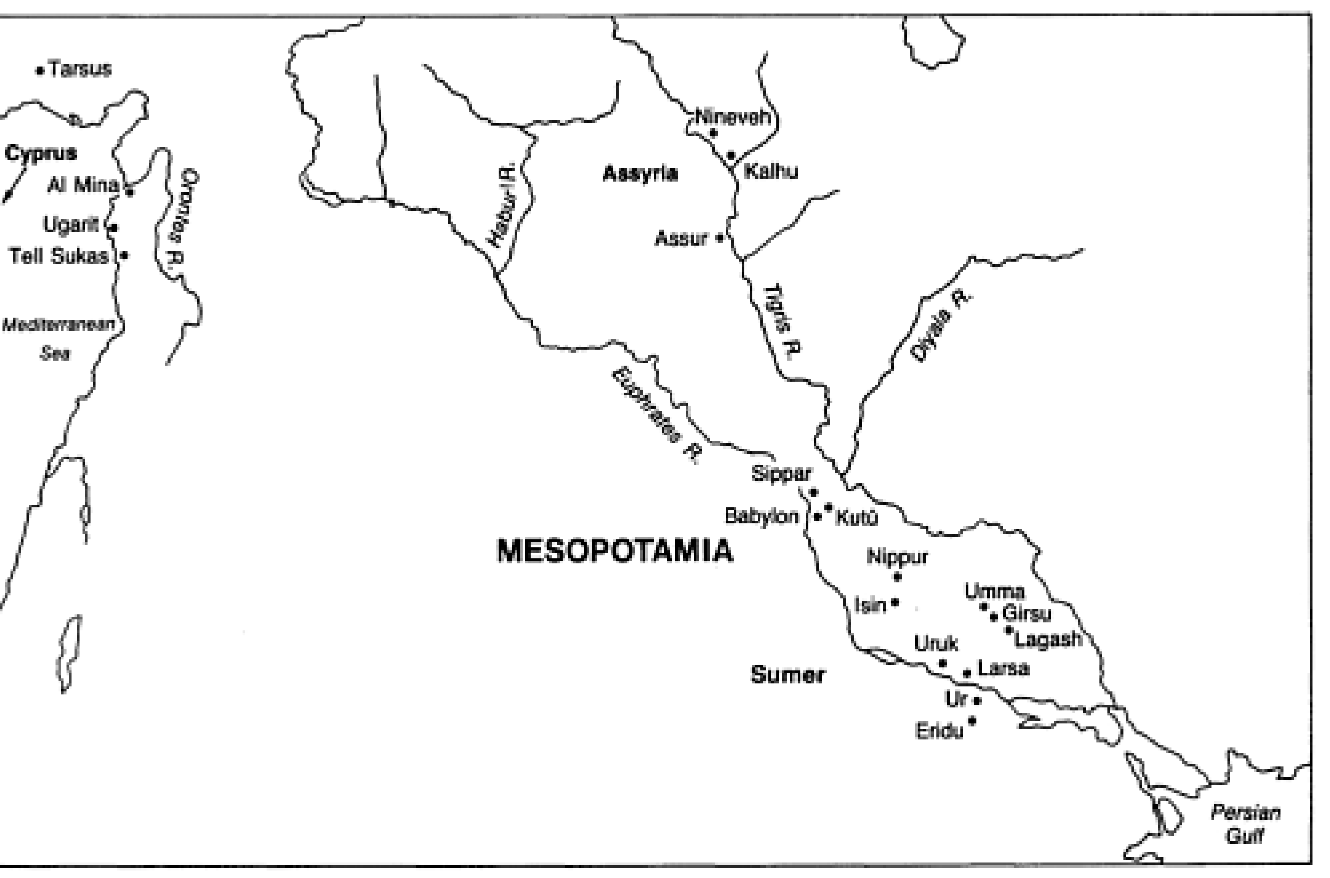
Periods: see the following chronological chart

NS	—Neo-Sumerian
OB	—Old Babylonian
MB	—Middle Babylonian
NB	—Neo-Babylonian
LB	—Late Babylonian
SB	—Standard Babylonian
OA	—Old Assyrian
MA	—Middle Assyrian
NA	—Neo-Assyrian

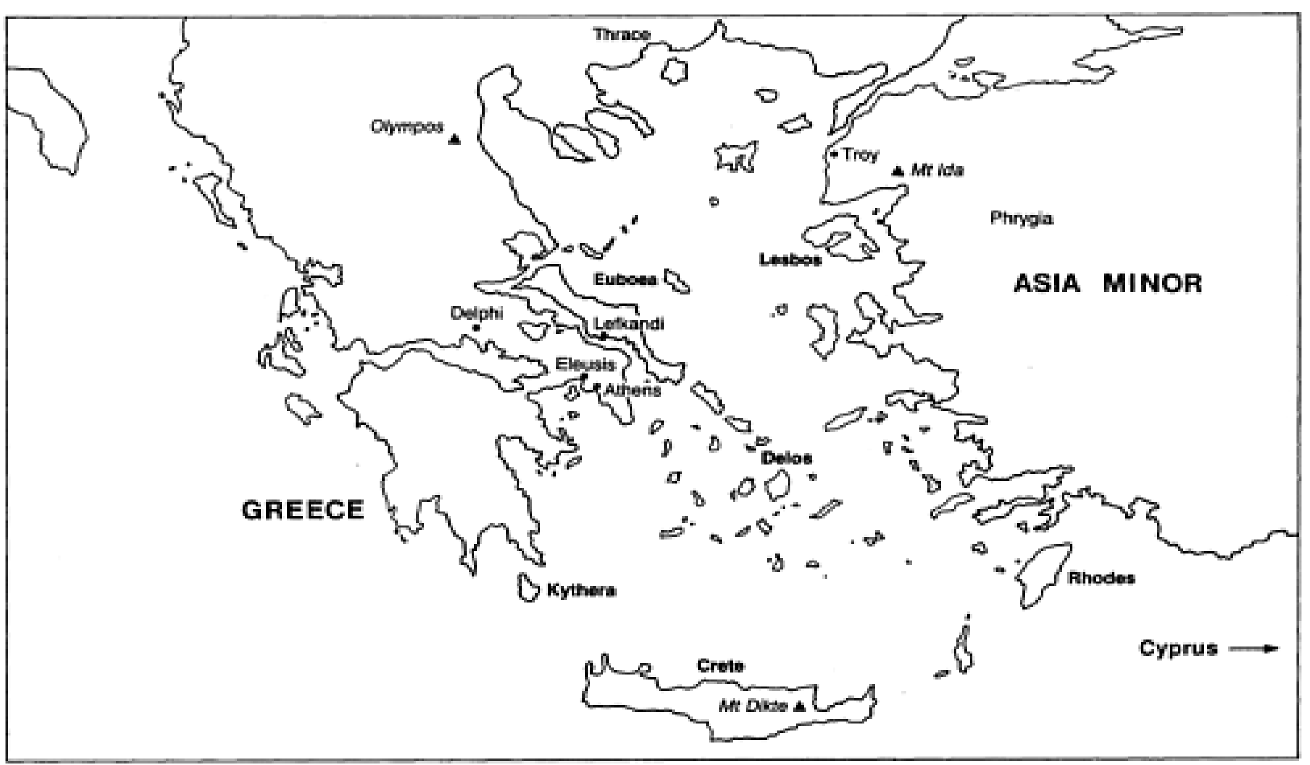
For the abbreviations of journal titles, see for instance, Leland G. Alkire, Jnr, ed., *Periodical Title Abbreviations: By Abbreviation,* 4th edition, Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1983.

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART


Mesopotamia
Greece
(Dominant language)
2500 BC
2000 BC
1500 BC
1000 BC
500 BC
Early Dynastic
2334
Akkad Dynasty
2200
Neo-Sumerian period
2004
Old Babylonian period
1595
Old Assyrian period
Middle Babylonian period
1350
Middle Assyrian period
1000
Neo-Babylonian period
Neo-Assyrian period
625
609
Late Babylonian period
Sumerian
Akkadian
Sumerian
Akkadian
Early Helladic
Middle Helladic
1550
Mycenaean or Late Helladic
1100
1000
Dark Age
900
Geometric period
750
Homer
Hesiod 700
Homeric Hymns
Orientalizing period
650
Early Archaic
600
525
Middle Archaic
Late Archaic
Classical 480–300



Map 1 Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean



Map 2 Greece and the Aegean

1
FOUNDATIONS

Apollo strides through the halls of Olympos bending his radiant bow, and the gods spring up from their seats in alarm at the sight of the young god. His mother Leto comes forward and takes the bow and quiver from her impetuous son and hangs them on a golden peg. She bids him sit and presents him to the supreme god Zeus, his father, who offers him nectar and ambrosia.

The scene is found at the beginning of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo,* in which it is one of the descriptions of the first arrival of the young god in the Assembly of the supreme god. The scene is typically Greek but, like the whole hymn to Apollo, it is full of motifs and ideas which are central features in Mesopotamian myths. In fact, the profound significance and purpose of these motifs and ideas in the hymn become clear only in the light of the mythology of Mesopotamia, where they are found in texts dating from the end of the third millennium BC to the middle of the first millennium BC.

The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* is not alone. There are several other Greek myths of the early archaic period which display a similar number and range of parallels and the same awareness of the significance of the ideas underlying the activities of the gods which are presented in the myths. These ideas are of central importance to the myths analysed in this study, which, in the discussion of Greek myths, confines itself to literary works of the early archaic era or slightly later. The main works are the longer Homeric hymns, which were composed for the most part in the seventh century BC, and the poems of Hesiod, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days,* which slightly preceded the Homeric hymns. Almost all of the Mesopotamian and Greek myths analysed in this investigation of parallels and influence involve journeys, and one of the major ideas which is followed through them is the idea of the god's acquisition and demonstration of power in the journey.

Parallels between Near Eastern and Greek myths, and the question of influence have been pursued for a long time with varying degrees of success. Some Near Eastern, including Mesopotamian, origins and influence have long been generally accepted in certain areas of Greek religion and mythology. Possibly the most famous parallels with Near Eastern material are found in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Close parallels in the succession myth which forms the backbone of

the plot in the work have been found with Hurrian/Hittite and Mesopotamian, specifically Babylonian, cosmological myths, and these have been discussed at length since the discovery and reconstruction of the Near Eastern texts.[1] The difficulty in the comparison in many cases is just what kind of connection is involved. Near Eastern influence is generally accepted in the case of aspects of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

An example of religious and perhaps even cultic influence rather than just mythological influence is found in the case of the goddess Aphrodite. The general view of classicists is that many aspects of the goddess that the Greeks worshipped in historical times appear to have come ultimately from the major Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. Even those who look for Indo-European origins of Greek myth and religion are apt to concede that Aphrodite seems to have received aspects from the Mesopotamian goddess or her derivatives.[2]

A remarkable case of Mesopotamian influence in Hesiod's poems was pointed out by Jacqueline Duchemin in the 1970s and early 1980s. The parallels in role and function of the god Prometheus in the myth of Pandora and Prometheus with those of the god Enki in some of his myths were discussed by Duchemin and by other scholars.[3]

While the correspondences which have been discussed are striking, there are, in fact, a phenomenal number of parallels between the myth of Prometheus and Pandora and the myths of Enki which have not yet been treated. These correspondences are found especially in ideas of the creation of Pandora and of

---

1 Hans Gustav Güterbock, 'The Hittite Version of the Human Kumarbi Myths: Oriental Forerunners of Hesiod', AJA 52 (1948) 123–34; W.G. Lambert and P.Walcot, 'A New Babylonian Theogony and Hesiod', *Kadmos* 4 (1965) 64–72; P.Walcot, *Hesiod and the Near East,* University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1966, *passim;* M.L.West, ed., *Hesiod Theogony,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966, pp.19ff.; G.Komoróczy, 'The Separation of Sky and Earth', AAntHung 21 (1973) 21ff.; G.S.Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974, pp.26–7, 116ff.; Jacqueline Duchemin, *Prométhée: Histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes,* Société d'édition «Les belles lettres», Paris, 1974, pp.33ff.; Jacqueline Duchemin, 'Les mythes de la Théogonie hésiodique. Origines orientales: Essai d'interpretation', in Jean Hani, ed., *Problèmes du mythe et de son interprétation,* Actes du Colloque de Chantilly (24–25 avril 1976), Société d'édition «Les belles lettres», Paris, 1979, pp.51–67; Albert I.Baumgarten, The *Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary,* E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1981, pp.94–139; Henry Podbielski, 'Le mythe cosmogonique dans la *Théogonie* d'Hésiode et les rites orientaux', LEG 52 (1984) 207–16; Robert Mondi, 'The Ascension of Zeus and the Composition of Hesiod's *Theogony*', GRBS 25 (1984) 342ff.; M.L.West, 'Hesiod's Titans', JHS 105 (1985) 174–5; Gérard Naddaf, 'Hésiode, précurseur des cosmogonies grecques de type «évolutioniste»', RHR 203 (1986) 339–64; Friedrich Solmsen, 'The Two Near Eastern Sources of Hesiod', *Hermes* 117 (1989) 413–22; Robert Mondi, 'Greek Mythic Thought in the Light of the Near East', in Lowell Edmunds, ed., *Approaches to Greek Myth,* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1990, pp.151ff. and *passim;* Christoph Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang: 'Schöpfung' in Mythos und Ritual im Alten Orient und in Griechenland am Beispiel der Odyssee und des Ezechielbuches,* Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 1991, pp.129–30.

the origin and early history of mankind. The Flood story is one of the more recognizable motifs, one which has been discussed to a certain extent, and there are many more parallel ideas and motifs which all point convincingly to Mesopotamia.

Hesiod's works in which most of these parallels are found, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days,* were composed in the early archaic period or slightly before, and there are other works of this period in which parallels with Near Eastern, especially Mesopotamian, material have been discussed. Prominent among these works is the *Iliad* of Homer, who is generally believed to have sung his epic shortly before Hesiod composed the *Theogony*. Homer is placed between 750 and 700 BC. The most notable possibilities have been stressed by Walter Burkert. One parallel is that between Okeanos and his wife Tethys and the corresponding Babylonian pair Apsu and Tiamat, respectively the fresh- and salt-water oceans.[4] Okeanos and Tethys are spoken of as the origin of the gods, or even of all (*Iliad* 14.201, 246, 302), and Apsu and Tiamat in the Babylonian cosmological epic *Enuma Elish* are certainly the origin of all, including the gods (Tablet I.1–5).[5] Another parallel is the scene in which Aphrodite is wounded by Diomedes and withdraws and complains to her parents Zeus and Dione in Olympos (*Iliad* 5.311–430) with the scene in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in which Ishtar is insulted by Gilgamesh and goes off to her parents Anu and Antu in heaven to complain (Tablet VI. 1–106). There are several correspondences in these scenes.[6]

In addition to these parallels between Greek and Mesopotamian myths, there are many other correspondences and indications of influence which have been pointed out. Some are complex and even detailed parallels, while others are mere suggestions.[7]

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2 Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths,* p.258; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), and London, 1985, pp.152ff., and *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, 1992, pp.97–9 (this book is the translation and up-date of *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur,* Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg, 1984); Lewis Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States,* II, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1896, pp.618ff.; Hans Herter, 'Die Ursprünge des Aphroditecultes', pp.61–76 in *Éléments orientaux dans la religion grecque ancienne,* Travaux du Centre d'Études Supérieures spécialisé d'histoire des religions de Strasbourg, Colloque de Strasbourg, 22–24 mai 1958, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1960; Deborah D.Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic,* Mnemosyne Supplement 32, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1974, pp.5–6; Paul Friedrich, *The Meaning of Aphrodite,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, pp.9–10, 22–3.

3 Jacqueline Duchemin, *Prométhée*; 'Le mythe du Déluge retrouvé dans des sources grecques?', RHR 189 (1976) 142–4; 'Le Zeus d'Eschyle et ses sources proche-orientales', RHR 197 (1980) 27–44; also her, 'Le mythe de Prométhée et ses sources orientales', REG 88 (1975) viii–ix.

Difficult and hazardous are words which describe the study of Mesopotamian influence in Greek myths, and an appropriate method is essential. To establish influence, or at least the likelihood of influence, there are two main steps. First it is necessary to establish the historical possibility of influence, and then the parallels between the myths of the two areas must fulfil a sufficiently rigorous set of relevant criteria.

There are two main parts to the first step of establishing the historical possibility of influence. First, there must be connections between the two regions involved—for instance, trade and cultural connections. Cultural contact generally follows trade-routes. The second requirement is that the literary material needs to have existed in some form at the time of trade and other contacts between the two regions.

The second step of the method is to demonstrate the existence of parallels of the correct nature between the Mesopotamian and Greek literary material. Parallels must have qualities which conform to a suitable set of criteria in order to indicate influence or its likelihood.

The first concern is therefore to demonstrate the existence of contact between Mesopotamia and Greece and the periods of such contact. There were two periods when Greece was especially open to influence from the Near East, including Mesopotamia, and this existed in trade and cultural contacts. The first period was in the late Mycenaean times of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries BC, when Greeks established settlements in cities like Tarsus and in the northwest of Syria. The second period of extensive contact is in the first millennium: according to one view, from about 800 BC onwards or, according to

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4 Contrast A.Kragerud, who considers them to be the upper and lower waters in *Enuma Elish:* 'The Concept of Creation in Enuma Elish', in C.J. Bleeker, S.G.F.Brandon, and M.Simon, eds, *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren,* vol. 1, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1971, p.41.

5 Walter Burkert, 'Oriental Myth and Literature in the Iliad', in Robin Hägg, ed., *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century BC: Tradition and Innovation,* Proceedings of the Second International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1–5 June, 1981, P.Aström, Stockholm, 1983, p.54; 'Homerstudien und Orient', in Joachim Latacz, ed., *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung: Rückblick und Ausblick,* B.G.Teubner, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1991, p.171; Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang,* pp.131–40.

6 Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution,* pp.96–9.

7 See the footnotes above. Additional recent works on the subject: G.S.Kirk, 'Greek Mythology: Some New Perspectives', JHS 92 (1972) 74–85, and *The Nature of Greek Myths,* pp.254,274; Gerald K.Gresseth, 'The Gilgamesh Epic and Homer', CJ 70/4 (1975) 1–18; Walter Burkert, 'Itinerant Diviners and Magicians: A Neglected Element in Cultural Contacts', in Hägg, ed., *The Greek Renaissance,* pp.115–19; Walter Burkert, 'Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels', in Jan Bremmer, ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology,* Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1987, pp. 10–40; Christopher A.Faraone, 'Hephaistos the Magician and Near Eastern Parallels for Alcinous' Watchdogs', GRBS 28 (1987) 257–80.

another, from about 850 BC onwards, when Greece was especially open to Near Eastern, including Mesopotamian, cultures. These two periods were eras of intensive contact which involved the establishment of entrepôts. Without these signs of extensive commercial activity, less intensive contact existed in the socalled Dark Ages between these periods, although it was comparatively limited. The recent finds at Lefkandi on Euboea, where Near Eastern artifacts dating from the tenth and ninth centuries BC were found, are some of the strong indications of this.[8] Before these recent finds, scholars had already concluded, on the basis of pottery remains and other objects revealing Near Eastern origin or influence, that a certain degree of continuing contact existed between the two periods of more intensive interaction.[9] However, the most visible effects in surviving material in Greece are seen in what is called the Orientalizing period of Greek art, which lasted for about a century from approximately 750 to 650 BC. In the first millennium the Greeks returned generally to the same areas, and to others such as Tell Sukas.[10] Generally speaking, both periods of heightened level of contact with this area of the Near East were times of Assyrian power. Babylonian influence is, of course, not excluded, but the contacts with Mesopotamia in the first millennium especially may have been a result of Assyrian activity, especially the expansion to the West from the ninth century on, but in particular after the mid-eighth century with the activities of Tiglath-Pileser III. Extensive contacts therefore existed between Mesopotamia and Greece at these times, with limited contact possible in the couple of centuries preceding the reestablishment of the notable level of contact in the second half of the ninth century BC.

The second part of the method involved in establishing the historical possibility of influence concerns the literary material which needs to have been in existence at that time. The Mesopotamian works relevant to this study seem to have been extant down to at least NA times, the latest period when they, or rather the ideas which are seen in them, could have influenced the Greek works analysed here. Regarding the Mesopotamian literature, the time of composition and the dates of the extant tablets are included, and discussed where necessary, in the chapters in which the works are analysed. Their dates and existence in the first-millennium libraries will also be discussed in the chapters in which they are relevant to the Greek myths. Tablets of most of the texts of relevance existed in Neo-Assyrian libraries at a time when contact with Greece was intensive.

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8 Peter Blome, 'Die dunklen Jahrhunderte—aufgehellt', in Latacz, ed., *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung,* pp.45–7, 58–60; Günter Kopcke, *Handel,* Archaeologia Homerica, Kapitel M, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1990, pp.90–100; Auffarth, *Der drohende Untergang,* p.142.

9 Jeffrey H.Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1100–480 BC,* Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985, pp.125ff.; Burkert, *Greek Religion,* p.52; Martin Robertson, A *History of Greek Art,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.21.

The literary texts in the libraries were clearly not confined to the use of a few scribes. For instance, a version of the Gilgamesh epic was found in the remains of Hattusha, the Hittite capital. In fact, extended usage of the texts and acquaintance with the stories is indicated: scribes took copies of tablets, and taught private schools of students, who learnt the texts. In addition, no doubt worshippers in the various cults concerned would have known of the stories and myths. Indeed, one would expect extended knowledge of these stories in a form similar to those in the texts, and a thorough acquaintance with the ideas involved in them, since they are part of the basis of the belief system of Mesopotamia. The forms in which the stories and ideas were transmitted from one culture to another and the methods can be manifold. As the subject relates to Mesopotamia and Greece in the present state of knowledge, it is also speculative and is not the concern of this study since it is not essential to the discussion at hand.

The second step of the method involves the discussion of parallels in the myths, and this comprises the major part of this book. In the discussion, very careful adherence to a set of appropriate criteria for parallels and for the indication of influence, if any, is essential. It is all too easy to run eagerly after superficial parallels which cannot really be sustained under a closer scrutiny. Accordingly, the parallels must have similar ideas underlying them and, second, any suggestion of influence requires that the parallels be numerous, complex and detailed, with a similar conceptual usage and, ideally, that they should point to a specific myth or group of related myths in Mesopotamia. Finally, the parallels and their similar underlying ideas must involve central features in the material to be compared.[11] Only then, it would seem, may any claim stronger than one of mere coincidence be worthy of serious consideration. These criteria also require that literary material be used, as literature is the only source that provides the necessary context to allow the underlying ideas behind the motifs and other features to be identified and adequately defined. In this book, a vast number of parallels emerges from the comparison of the Mesopotamian and Greek myths,

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10 West, *Hesiod: Theogony,* p.28; P.J.Riis, *Sukas I,* Copenhagen, 1970, pp.127, 161–2; Dolores Hegyi, 'Die Griechen und der Alte Orient in 9. bis 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.', in Hans-Jörg Nissen and Johannes Ringer, eds, *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn. Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.,* 25e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (1978 Berlin), Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 1, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin, 1982, pp.531–8; Peter Walcot, *Hesiod and the Near East,* University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1966, pp.53–4; William Culican, *The First Merchant Venturers,* Thames & Hudson, London, 1966, pp.90–4; John Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1964, pp.61–9; E.Gjerstad, 'The Stratification at Al-Mina (Syria) and its Chronological Evidence', *Acta Archaeologica* 45 (1974) 107–23; J.M.Cook, *The Greeks in Ionia and the East,* Thames & Hudson, London, 1965, pp.64–5; Walter Burkert, 'Oriental and Greek Mythology: The Meeting of Parallels', in Bremmer, ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology,* p.13.

11 Robin Osborne, 'Orientalism in Eighth- and Seventh-Century Greece', unpublished article, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1990.

and although the criteria of the method are very strict, it is only by adhering to these that any assessment of influence that is the consequence of the study can be considered reliable.

All of the myths analysed here involve journeys carried out by the gods, and the comparisons between the myths are based almost entirely on the structural composition of the journeys and the ideas which are expressed in them. One of the central ideas is the god's acquisition and demonstration of power in the journey. This 'journey for power' is one of the major purposes of the god's performance of the journey sequences, and it is pursued throughout the Mesopotamian and Greek myths. In these myths, it often forms the context in which many other ideas can be understood and defined clearly.

The idea of the journey for power must be thoroughly demonstrated in the Mesopotamian myths before the parallels between the ideas in Mesopotamian and Greek myths can be appreciated. The idea has a special place in the comparison in the Greek myths, and together with the journey sequences it forms the context for the definition of many other features. Since no study of the Mesopotamian myths has yet discussed this idea comprehensively, the analysis of the Mesopotamian myths in the two following chapters concentrates on the exposition of the journey and this accompanying idea. The other features of the myths, which also become important in the discussion of the Greek myths later, are seen in the course of the discussion of the journey and the power involved.

This comparison between the journey myths concentrates on the comparison of ideas or motifs in the journeys, not on their concretizations or crystallizations, which vary considerably from myth to myth. For instance, it is not the chariot and trophies of Ninurta on his return journey to Nippur that matter, but the fact that they represent the god's power in the situation and are clearly seen to be functioning with such a significance in the light of surrounding elements. Similarly, the elements of apparel which Ishtar wears in her ascent from the netherworld are not important, but the fact that they, like the chariot and trophies of Ninurta, represent power in the journey is crucial. Again, the importance of the object which Gilgamesh plucks from the bottom of the sea in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* lies in the fact that it is a food of life and another symbol of power. The fact that it is a plant and perhaps may be explained as a piece of coral is not of significance. Once again, the function of the plant as a food of life is clearly demonstrated by the context of the story. In short, it is the ideas which underlie the actions of the gods and the accompanying elements in the stories that are of concern here, for it is they that express the belief system of the peoples concerned. This is one of the keys to understanding the myths in this study.

To help to make the ideas in the exposition as clear as possible, some definitions are necessary. Myth has been defined generally as a 'traditional tale'.[12] A slight qualification is required for this study, in which myths are considered to be tales about the gods and the divine world, or tales involving this world. However, the nature of the Greek myths in this study as 'traditional' is open to question. It depends on the extent to which they were altered by the poets who

composed the works in which they are found, and how old they really are. At any rate, the inclusion of the religious aspect in the definition has the purpose of emphasizing the fact that the religious element forms the core of the literary works, in which form the myths are presented, since the material analysed in this study is religious mythological literature. While the literary works may incorporate political, religious, social, historical, cultic, scientific, environmental, folktale and other elements, it is the religious element that forms their core.

The study concentrates on concepts underlying the myths and the material involved in them, and other terms reflect this preoccupation. The term 'motif is used generally to refer to the idea underlying certain elements in the narrative: for example, the 'noise' motif. This motif lies behind such situations as that where Apollo plays his lyre as he approaches Olympos, and where Ninurta thunders like a storm as he approaches the city Nippur. The term is sometimes used to refer to the concretization of this idea in the myth, but the distinction in usage is always made clear.

The term 'idea' is generally used to refer to a complex concept, like that of the ascent sequence, which usually involves many motifs. However, it is sometimes employed to refer to an element that is otherwise described as a motif, but this occurs when it stresses that the motif is a concept in the myth under discussion. The context makes the relevant meaning of the term clear in the exposition of the myths.

An important key to assist in unlocking the ideas in the myths is the approach which forms the basis of the analysis and is a crucial feature in this study. The ideas are isolated by simple analysis of the primary sources, the myths themselves. Use of various philosophical approaches such as anthropological, sociological, psychoanalytic, Lévi-Straussian structuralist, and so on, is avoided.[13] The intention is to stay as close as possible to the myths and, as far as possible, within them, to define the structures and their elements. It seems to be a general rule in the interpretation of a myth that after the elements have been isolated they are interpreted according to schemes imposed from outside the myth, and from other parts of the culture, or even from beyond the chronological and cultural context of the myth: that is, the elements of the myths are generally understood in terms of possible origins of the material, or of social environment, and by theoretical approaches such as those mentioned above. These have their place in the study of myths, of course, but it appears to be necessary, before leaving the myth, to go one step farther and to look at the underlying ideas of the material, to see from inside the myth what may be causing the effects – the characteristic and repeated patterns.

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12 Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths,* pp.19ff., 30; Burkert, *Greek Religion,* pp. 120–1, and *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual,* Sather Classical Lectures 47, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, pp.1ff., 23.

In other words, the purpose is to let the myths speak for themselves, as far as this is possible: to reveal the structures which reflect the abstract, or belief, system of the people concerned, rather than to impose one upon them from outside. This is at least the aim. While it may be theoretically possible, it is actually difficult, perhaps impossible, to achieve. Nevertheless, one should at least attempt to reach the goal, and in pursuit of this it seems vital to avoid the premises of philosophical theories like those above, since these theories involve modern belief systems. When a philosophical approach of this age is applied to the ancient material, the inherent belief system of a different people and a different age is automatically superimposed on the source. The effect is to rewrite the past and present it in terms which satisfy dogmas of the present day. If such a method helped to reveal the beliefs of these past societies at the same time, it would possibly be acceptable. However, all it seems to do is to obscure the beliefs of the ancient peoples regarding their religions and societies, beliefs which are subtly presented in the texts and which underlie the narrative of the literary works. There is thus the ever-present danger of misrepresenting concepts which are quite explicit in the myths, and so giving a largely false impression of these ancient societies. It is crucial, therefore, to avoid interpreting the sources according to theoretical premises, and to attempt, instead, to ascertain the abstract system of the peoples concerned by means of straightforward analysis of their texts.

What is possible to achieve, and necessary, is complete objectivity, in the sense of being free of subjectivity to philosophical schema: to be able to stand outside the modern belief systems with all of their assumptions. The suitable method seems to be to analyse the material with a mind clear of preconceptions and then check the results thoroughly for residual contamination by recognizable theoretical premises and emotive responses. Of course, a person of the present era thinks differently from these ancient peoples because of his different mental and physical environment, so that he will never be able to think himself completely out of the present era into another. Total objectivity of this sort appears impossible. However, an objective approach in the terms outlined should bring one as close as it is possible to come to the desired goal. This sort of objectivity is difficult to achieve, but it does not seem to be an unreasonable requirement for this sort of study.

Another point of logic also argues for the avoidance of philosophical premises. Using a theoretical viewpoint which involves assumptions concerning the origin and nature of religion and society as the basis for an interpretation of the deities and their myths, and assuming that the results validate the initial

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13 Cf. Kirk on various philosophical approaches: *The Nature of Greek Myths,* pp.38–91, and ‘Aetiology, Ritual, Charter: Three Equivocal Terms in the Study of Myths’, YCS 22 (1972) 83–102, especially 101–2. Also Malcolm Heath, ‘The Structural Analysis of Myth’, CR 33 (1983) 68–9, on Lévi-Straussian structuralism and criteria.

theory, appears to me to constitute a circular argument, a circumstance eminently undesirable. Similarly, the interpretation of the sources using theoretical prior forms is also avoided. To form a theoretical premise of an original state of a literary work, or an original form of a myth, and then interpret it according to this premise, is obviously unsupported assertion. Unfortunately, reasoning of this sort is common.

In both Mesopotamia and Greece, the myths exist as literature. However, while they are of a literary nature, in the sense that they are written and exist in the form of literary works, this study does not approach the myths as literature, in the manner which occurs frequently, as principally *belles-lettres,* without regard to the essential core of a religious belief system. It is important to remember that these are works of religious mythology which express belief systems of great importance to the composers and the audiences. The ideas about the divine world and man's place in it are not literary motifs and conceits which have no other purpose than literary effect. The profound and timeless significance of the ideas discussed in this study is attested by their recurrence again and again over a period of more than two thousand years.

The analysis of the literary works begins with some of the earliest extant mythological material, Sumerian works of the Neo-Sumerian (NS) and Old Babylonian (OB) periods. The material discussed was part of the religious mythological heritage of Mesopotamia which persisted into the latter half of the first millennium BC. The Greek myths are taken from Greek sources, primarily from the Homeric hymns and Hesiod, which belong generally to the early archaic period. Pindar, Aeschylus and other authors also provide valuable material, although sources dating after the early archaic period are used only for confirmation of aspects of the earlier material. Excursions are also made where relevant into the résumés of Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* for comparison with the material of the early archaic period. The study confines itself for the most part to the discussion of literary works because their context is required for precise analysis and definition of the ideas involved.

This study is intended for a wide range of readers, so before beginning the analysis of the myths, a brief word needs to be said about the Mesopotamian languages and the ways of writing these in transliteration, since some passages from the sources are cited below. There are two Mesopotamian languages, Sumerian and Akkadian, and they both use the cuneiform script. This is usually changed into the roman script, and the results have many idiosyncracies. The Sumerian and Akkadian languages were written with cuneiform signs, mostly on clay tablets. Cuneiform refers to the shape of the signs made by the wedge-shaped end of the reed stylus which was used to inscribe the tablets—Latin *cuneus,* 'wedge'. The signs stood for syllables and words rather than for alphabetical signs. There are often many ways of writing syllables. For instance, there are fourteen ways of writing gu.[14] The Sumerian word gu means 'ox', but the homophone gu is 'thread', and it has a different sign. Numbers are given to the signs to differentiate them, generally according to the relative frequency of

occurrence. The word gu, 'thread', is the first sign for gu and it is written without a number. The second sign is marked with an acute accent, so the second gu is written gu. The third is marked with a grave, i.e. gù; the fourth and so on have numbers, e.g. gu$_4$, which is the word meaning 'ox'. Signs can also have several values. Signs representing syllables are linked together into words by hyphens: for instance in the sentence me šu ga-mu-ra-ab-du$_7$, 'I will make the *me* perfect for you', the set of signs linked together is a finite verbal complex. Two diacritical signs which affect the pronunciation are used: the hachek above the *s* as in šu. The word is pronounced as in the English word 'shoe'. The other sign is ĝ, which is pronounced like the *ng* in 'sing'. The letter *h* sounds like the *ch* in 'loch'.

Sumerian is an agglutinative language, with each unit of sense, such as a noun or a verb, expressed in an unchanging syllable or polysyllable. This may be modified by a series of prefixes or postfixes, for instance é, 'house', can become é-a-ni, 'his house'. The verb ku$_4$, meaning 'enter', can become ì-ku$_4$, 'he entered'. The verbal complex ga-mu-ra-ab-du$_7$ is the verb du$_7$, 'to be perfect' or 'to make perfect', with a series of prefixes.

The Akkadian language took over the cuneiform script used for the Sumerian language. There are historical and geographical forms or variants of the main Mesopotamian cuneiform script in different periods: for instance, the Neo-Assyrian script of the first millennium BC. Signs can signify consonant+vowel (e.g. ba), vowel+consonant (e.g. ab), consonant+vowel+consonant (e.g. tam), or logograms, such as KÙ.BABBAR, a Sumerian word which is used to write the Akkadian word *kaspum* meaning 'silver', 'money'. Logograms are always written in capitals and the other signs in lower case. The cuneiform signs are transliterated and joined by hyphens to form words, for instance, *a-wi-lum,* in the Old Babylonian form. This is then normalized to the Akkadian word complete with vowel lengthening where necessary: *aw lum,* 'man'. There are two diacritical signs—the macron and the circumflex: the macron lengthening the vowel as in *aw lum;* the vowel contraction, which is marked with a circumflex as in *ukân.* The contracted vowel is pronounced as a lengthened vowel. There are other marks such as the hachek above the *s*, as in *šarrum,* 'king', which signifies that the letter is pronounced like the *sh* in ship; the emphatic dot beneath the *t* and *s*: ṭ is conventionally pronounced like the normal *t,* and ṣ is often pronounced *ts* to distinguish it from *s*. The letter *h* is pronounced like *ch* in 'loch'.

According to convention, Akkadian is written in italics, e.g. *ana š b t sarr tim,* and Sumerian in plain text, e.g. é-a-ni. Akkadian is a Semitic language based on the triliteral root, for instance, the root 'rkb' as in *rak bu,* 'to ride'. The writing system was designed for Sumerian, so it does not suit Akkadian well.

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14 For a thorough exposition of cuneiform script used to write Sumerian and Akkadian, see C.B.F.Walker, *Cuneiform,* British Museum Press, London, 1987.

These are, then, the ways of writing the languages in transliteration and it is to be hoped that this brief outline suffices to give the unaccustomed some understanding of the script in the passages which are cited in the following analysis of the Sumerian and Akkadian myths.

2
INANNA

Inanna is the most expansionist-minded of all the Mesopotamian goddesses, so it is perhaps inevitable that her activities should be the first to receive attention in this study, which involves the discussion of power in Mesopotamian journey myths. Inanna is, of course, the most important goddess in the Mesopotamian pantheon and she has the greatest number of myths surviving about her of any of the goddesses. She is most famous as the love goddess, goddess of sexual procreation of humans and animals, but she also features as the great warrior goddess. In Akkadian literature, she is known as Ishtar. In Semitic times, Ishtar, the ‘Great Goddess’, takes over the roles and attributes of a number of other major goddesses, such as the mothercreatrix Nintu/Mami, and her name comes to be used generally to mean ‘goddess’. The process of the exaltation of the goddess seems to be evident already in Sumerian literature.[1]

Better-known myths of the goddess are the Sumerian *Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld’,* the Akkadian version of this; *Inanna and Enki; Inanna and Ebih;* and *Inanna and Shukalletuda.* There are also various myths in which she participates as a secondary character, myths such as the Sumerian *Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld,* and later the great Akkadian work *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. A number of Sumerian hymns to the goddess survive, hymns such as nin-me-šár-ra and in-nin šá-gur$_4$-ra, both of which are attributed to Sargon’s daughter, Enheduanna, en-priestess in the temple of the moon god Nanna in the Sumerian city of Ur; and there is also a number of Akkadian hymns to Ishtar. Another group of her myths which should receive a mention are those which tell of her relationship with her lover/consort, the shepherd/herdsman Dumuzi.[2]

Some of these myths involve journeys, and in these myths the goddess travels to various destinations for the purpose of obtaining power of various kinds, after which she returns with the power that she has gained. At the same time, these

1 John Gardner and John Maier, *Gilgamesh: Translated from the Sîn-leqi-unninn Version,* Alfred A.Knopf, New York, 1984, pp.20–2; J.van Dijk, *Lugal ud me-lám-bi nir-g̃ál: Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création,* vol. 1, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1983, p.41.

myths present major motifs and ideas associated with the goddess, and these will be seen in the course of the discussion of the journey and the power involved.

The most important of Inanna/Ishtar's myths for the discussion of these points are *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld,* its Akkadian version *Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld, Inanna and Enki* and a section of the hymn in-nin šá-gur$_4$-ra. While the myths of Inanna form the main subject of this chapter, certain liturgies of Damu are also a concern here, specifically edin-na ú-saĝ-ĝá and TRS 8. Damu is closely connected with the goddess, because he is an aspect of, or identified with, the great goddess's consort Dumuzi.[3] These liturgies present journeys which also demonstrate the idea of the 'journey for power', and which, together with other motifs and ideas found in them, will be relevant in the discussion of various Greek myths later. The stories presented in these works of Inanna and of Damu are all different, but the journeys of the gods all result in the acquisition and expression of the power which has been achieved in the journey and by the activities involved in its sequences. In the first myth to be examined, the most important myth of Inanna, the OB *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld* (hereafter ID), the stated purpose for her journey is the acquisition of power over the netherworld, and power in the upperworld as well.

INANNA'S DESCENT AND RETURN

Inanna decided to travel to the netherworld. From the 'great heaven' she set her mind to the 'great below'.[4] She abandoned heaven and earth and descended to the netherworld. Dressed in her seven me, her clothes, representing her powers, she set off, giving instructions to her minister Ninshubur on what to do if she had not returned after three days.[5]

Inanna pushed aggressively on the door of the 'palace Ganzir', the entrance to the netherworld, shouting for the doorman, Neti, to open it. She told him that she was travelling east, and then proceeded to lie about her intention of visiting the netherworld. Neti left her waiting and went down to Ereshkigal. Alarmed by Inanna's clothes and her manner of arrival, the netherworld queen issued her

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2 For a list of sources of Sumerian and Akkadian texts, in the original language and in translation, see Appendix II.

3 Although the cult of Damu, the 'ú-sag-cult', appears to have originally been distinct from that of Dumuzi, the two cults and their attached myths were amalgamated, perhaps in late Sumerian times, with Damu and Dumuzi, and other figures such as the goddesses Geshtinanna (Dumuzi's sister) and Ninazimu'a being identified: see, for instance, Claus Wilcke, 'Politische Opposition nach sumerischen Quellen', in *La Voix de l'opposition en Mesopotamie: Colloque organisé par l'Institut des Hautes Études de Belgique, 19 et 20 mars 1973,* Institut des Hautes Études de Belgique, Brussels, 1975, p.61. On the identification, see also Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1976, p.63; and S.N.Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969, p.159, who also points out that he is directly identified with Dumuzi in a number of his liturgies.