

W. G. LAMBERT

# Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology

Edited by  
A. R. GEORGE and  
T. M. OSHIMA

*Orientalische Religionen  
in der Antike*

15

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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15





W.G. Lambert

# Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology

Selected Essays

Edited by  
A.R. George and T.M. Oshima

Mohr Siebeck

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

The late W. G. Lambert (1926–2011) was one of the foremost Assyriologists of the latter part of the twentieth century. His principle legacy is a large number of superb critical editions of Babylonian literary compositions. Many of the texts he edited were on religious and mythological subjects. He will always be recalled as the editor of the Babylonian Job (*Ludlul bel nemeqi*, also known as the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer), the Babylonian Flood Story (*Atra-hasis*) and the Babylonian Creation Epic (*Enuma elish*). Decades of deep engagement with these and other ancient Mesopotamian texts gave direction to much of his research and led him to acquire a deep knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian religion and mythology. The present book collects twenty-three essays on these topics that he published between the years 1958 and 2004. These endure not only as the legacy of one of the greatest authorities on ancient Mesopotamian religion and mythology, but also because they all still make statements of considerable validity and importance. Many remain milestones in the fields of Mesopotamian religion and mythology.

The idea of collecting Lambert's essays in a volume of the series *Oriental Religions in Antiquity* was first mooted when he was still alive. Two years after his death the idea was revived and we received an invitation to edit the volume from Professor Angelika Berlejung on behalf of the series' editors. George was responsible for the choice and organization of the essays, and wrote the Introduction. Oshima managed the scanning process, copy-edited the results and compiled the list of abbreviations, bibliography and indexes. All the essays have been reset for this volume and lightly edited to achieve a consistent house style. Small corrections have been made to some. Matters of substance have been corrected where Lambert indicated such by handwritten annotations in his own copies of the essays; published *errata et corrigenda* have been incorporated; and obvious typographical errors have been put right. References to unpublished tablets and forthcoming works have been adjusted where these last are now published. Other references have been added to indicate more modern editions of cited texts, but we have not sought to make these exhaustive.

We should like to thank the series' editors for their invitation to participate, Mr Felix Hagemeyer for assisting Oshima, and Dr Henning Ziebritzki at Mohr Siebeck for his help and advice in many matters. We record our gratitude to those who hold rights of reproduction over the essays, especially those many who were generous enough to make no charge for giving the necessary permissions.



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## List of Abbreviations

- Aa* Lexical series á A = *nâqu*. See CIVIL, *MSL* 14
- AAA* *University of Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology Issued by the Institute of Archaeology*
- AASOR The Annual of the American School of Oriental Research: AASOR XXXI = GOETZE, *The Laws of Eshnunna*
- ABRT* CRAIG, *Assyrian and Babylonian Religious Texts: Prayers, Oracles, Hymns &c.*
- AJK* *Archiv für Keilschriftforschung*
- AJO* *Archiv für Orientforschung*
- AIPHOS Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves
- ANET* PRITCHARD, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*
- AnOr Analecta Orientalia, Commentationes Scientificalae de Rebus Orientis Antiquae
- AnSt* *Anatolian Studies*
- AO Tablets in the collections of the Musée du Louvre
- AoF* *Altorientalische Forschungen*
- AOS American Oriental Series
- AOTAT* GRESSMANN, *Altorientalische Texte zum Alten Testament*
- ARET Archivi reali di Ebla, Testi: ARET 1 = ARCHI, *Testi amministrativi*; ARET 2 = EDZARD, *Verwaltungstexte*; ARET 3 = ARCHI and BIGA, *Testi amministrativi*; ARET 4 = BIGA and MILANO, *Testi amministrativi*; ARET 5 = EDZARD, *Hymnen, Beschwörungen und Verwandtes*
- ARM Archives royales de Mari: ARM 3 = KUPPER, *Correspondance de Kibri-Dagan*; ARM 8 = BOYER, *Textes juridiques*; ARM 10 = DOSSIN, *Correspondance féminine*; ARM 13 = DOSSIN, et al., *Textes divers*; ARM 16/1 = BIROT, KUPPER, and ROUAULT, *Répertoire analytique*: ARM 21 = DURAND, *Textes administratifs des salles 134 et 160 du palais de Mari*: ARM 23 = BARDET et al., *Archives administratives de Mari I*
- BA* *Beiträge zur Assyriologie und semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*
- BaF Baghdader Forschungen
- BAL* BORGER, *Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke*
- BASOR* *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
- BBR* ZIMMERN, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion*
- BBSI* KING, *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial-Tablets in the British Museum*
- BE The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania: BE 1 = HILPRECHT, *Old Babylonian Inscriptions Chiefly from Nippur*: BE 14 = CLAY, *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur*
- BIN Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies, Yale University: BIN 8 = HACKMAN, *Sumerian and Akkadian Administrative Texts*
- BiOr* *Bibliotheca Orientalis*
- BMS* KING, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery*
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
- BWL* LAMBERT, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*
- CAD* *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
- CBS Tablets in the collections of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
- CRRA Compte rendu, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
- CT* *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets, &c., in the British Museum*

- CUSAS Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology: CUSAS 17 = GEORGE ed., *Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions and Related Texts in the Schøyen Collection*
- DP ALLOTTE, *Documents présargoniques*
- Ea Lexical series ea A = *nāqu*. See CIVIL, *MSL* 14
- ED Early Dynastic
- FAS Freiburger altorientalische Studien
- HSS Harvard Semitic Studies: HSS 10 = MEEK, *Excavations at Nuzi* vol. 3; HSS 37 = ABUSCH et al. eds., *Lingering over Words*
- Idu Lexical series Á = *idu*
- IEJ *Israel Exploration Journal*
- Igituh Lexical series Igituh = *tāmartu*. Igituh short version pub. LANDSBERGER and GURNEY *AfO* 18, pp. 81ff.
- JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JCS *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JESHO *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
- JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*
- K Tablets in the Koujunjik collection of the British Museum
- KAH SCHROEDER, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur historischen Inhalts*
- KAR EBELING, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*
- KAV SCHROEDER, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts*
- KTU DIETRICH, LORETZ, and SANMARTÍN, *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*
- Lugale Sumerian Myth *Lugal-e*
- MAD Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary: MAD 2<sup>2</sup> = GELB, *Old Akkadian Writing and Grammar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; MAD 3 = idem, *Glossary of Old Akkadian*; MAD 5 = idem, *Sargonic Texts in the Ashmolean Museum*
- Malku Synonym list *malku* = *šarru*
- MAM Mission archéologique de Mari: PARROT, MAM 2/3 = *Le palais*; MAM 3 = idem, *Les temples d'Ishtar et de Ninni-Zaza*; MAM 4 = idem, *Le «Trésor» d'Ur*
- MAOG *Mitteilungen der altorientalischen Gesellschaft*
- MARI *Mari, Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires*
- MDP Mémoires de la délégation en Perse: MDP 2 = SCHEIL, *Textes élamites-sémitiques* 1; MDP 14 = idem, *Textes élamites-sémitiques* 5
- MEE Materiali Epigrafici di Ebla: MEE 2 = PETTINATO, *Testi amministrativi della biblioteca L. 2769*; MEE 4 = idem, *Testi lessicali bilingui della biblioteca L. 2769*
- MRS Mission de Ras Shamra
- MSL *Materialien zum Sumerischen Lexikon/Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon: MSL* 3, see HALLOCK et al.; *MSL* 4, see LANDSBERGER et al.; *MSL* 10, see LANDSBERGER; *MSL* 12 and *MSL* 14, see CIVIL; *MSL* 16, see FINKEL.
- MVAG *Mitteilungen der vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft*
- N.A.B.U *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*
- OB Old Babylonian
- OIP Oriental Institute Publications: OIP 2 = LUCKENBILL, *The Annals of Sennacherib*; OIP 99 = BIGGS, *Inscriptions from Tell Abū Šalābīkh*
- OrAnt *Oriens Antiquus*
- OrNS *Orientalia Nova Series*
- PAPS *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
- PBS Publications of the Babylonian Section, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania: PBS I/2 = LUTZ, *Selected Sumerian and Babylonian Texts*; PBS IV/1 = POEBEL, *Historical Texts*
- PRAK DE GENOUILLAC, *Premières recherches archéologiques à Kich: Mission d'Henri de Genouillac 1911-1912*
- PRU *Le palais royal d'Ugarit*
- PSBA *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*

- R* RAWLINSON, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia: IIR* = RAWLINSON and NORRIS, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 2; *IVR*<sup>2</sup> = RAWLINSON and PINCHES, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; *VR* = RAWLINSON and PINCHES, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. 5.
- RA* *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
- RB* *Revue biblique*
- RG* *Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes: RG I* = EDZARD, FARBER and SOLLBERGER, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der prä-sargonischen und sargonischen Zeit*; *RG II* = EDZARD and FARBER, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der 3. Dynastie von Ur*; *RG III* = GRONEBERG, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der altbabylonischen Zeit*
- RHA* *Revue Hittite et Asiatique*
- RIMA* The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods: *RIMA 1* = GRAYSON, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennium BC*
- RIMB* The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods: *RIMB 2* = FRAME, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination*
- RIME* The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods: *RIME 1* = FRAYNE, *Presargonic Period*; *RIME 2* = idem, *Sargonid and Gutian Periods*; *RIME 3/1* = EDZARD, *Gudea and His Dynasty*; *RIME 3/2* = FRAYNE, *Ur III Period*; *RIME 4* = idem, *Old Babylonian Period*
- RINAP* The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period: *RINAP 4* = LEICHTY, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*
- RTC* THUREAU-DANGIN, *Recueil de tablettes chaldéennes*
- S*<sup>a</sup> Lexical series Syllabary A = HALLOCK, *MSL 3*, pp. 3–45
- SAA* State Archives of Assyria
- SAALT* State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts
- SBH* REISNER, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit*
- ŠL* DEIMEL, *Šumerisches Lexikon*
- SLB* *Studia ad tabulas cuneiformas collectas ab F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl pertinentia*
- SLT* CHIERA, *Sumerian Lexical Texts from the Temple School of Nippur*
- SLTN* KRAMER, *Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur in the Museum of the Ancient Orient at Istanbul*
- StOr* *Studia Orientalia*
- SVAT* EBELING, *Stiftungen und Vorschriften für assyrische Tempel*
- TCL* Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales, *Textes Cunéiformes*
- TCS* *Texts from Cuneiform Sources: TCS 3* = SJÖBERG and BERGMANN, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*
- TIM* *Texts in the Iraq Museum: TIM IX* = VAN DIJK, *Texts in the Iraq Museum*, vol. 9
- UET* *Ur Excavations Texts: UET 5* = FIGULLA and MARTIN, *Letters and Documents of the Old-Babylonian Period*; *UET 8/2* = SOLLBERGER, *Royal Inscriptions Pt. 2*
- UF* *Ugarit Forschungen*
- UnDiv* GOEDICKE and ROBERTS eds., *Unity and Diversity*
- UVB* *Vorläufiger Bericht über die von dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut und der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft aus Mitteln der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft unternommenen Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*
- VAB* *Vorderasiatische Bibliothek: VAB 1* = THUREAU-DANGIN, *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften*; *VAB 4* = LANGDON, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften*; *VAB 7* = STRECK, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergang Niniveh's*
- VŠ* *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der königlichen Museen zu Berlin*
- YBT* See *YOS*
- YOS* *Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts: YOS 1* = CLAY, *Miscellaneous Inscriptions in the Yale Babylonian Collection*; *YOS 4* = KEISER, *Selected Temple Documents of the Ur Dynasty*; *YOS 9* = STEPHENS, *Votive and Historical Texts from Babylonia and Assyria*; *YOS 11* = VAN DIJK, GOETZE, and HUSSEY, *Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals*

- WVDOG Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft  
ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie*  
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

# Introduction

By A.R. George

In approaching ancient religion and mythology, W. G. Lambert espoused no theory; in fact, he deliberately ignored it. For him this was a badge of honour, for he owned up to it several times in print. He recognised only one methodology: to start with the text in front of him. The confrontation of the text, his intellect and his knowledge was the process that produced understanding. His approach privileged the primary sources over any previous scholarly commentary. He acknowledged the foundational statements of the pioneering generation, commenting in 1983 of books written by Jastrow in 1898 and Dhorme in 1910, “the older writers on religion are often of great value still” (p. 82 n. 7). But much secondary literature and analytical discussion were deemed superseded and did not enter the discussion.

This method, which one obituary described as Lambert’s “own brand of Assyriology”, was fully formed from very early in his research career. Already in 1960, in the introduction to his first book, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, he repudiated what he called the “strait jacket of twentieth-century thinking” and sought only to understand ancient sources on their own terms and in their ancient intellectual context: “only by immersing oneself in the literature is it possible to feel the spirit which moves the writer”. Accordingly, this selection of essays does not reveal the evolution of a mind in response to the intellectual currents of the late twentieth century. It records instead how a unique intellect deployed exceptional skills in the reading and interpretation of ancient sources and wrote up the results with unmatched clarity and economy of expression.

Lambert belonged to probably the last generation of European scholars who came to Assyriology through Bible studies. He had a very formative Christadelphian upbringing, in which, as he later wrote, “an interest in antiquity and the Bible went hand in hand”,<sup>1</sup> and remained a very active member of Christadelphian ecclesia all his life. Unsurprisingly, the Old Testament was a frame of reference that frequently arose in his response to ancient Mesopotamian texts and ideas. Many of the essays collected here make comparisons with the religious thought and mythology embedded in the Bible. Often these are negative. Lambert devoted all his intellectual energy to study of the Babylonians but this did not grant them exemption from his disapproval. He placed their religious thought in a historical narrative of human progress and, unsurprisingly for a committed Christadelphian, found it wanting.

The essays collected in this book are arranged not in order of date of publication but thematically. The anthology begins with two pieces that are written for a readership

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<sup>1</sup> Autobiographical memoir reproduced in Irving Finkel and Alasdair Livingstone’s obituary, “Professor Wilfred George Lambert (February 26, 1926–November 9, 2011)”, *Archiv für Orientforschung* 52 (2011), pp. 397–401.

whose interests extend beyond Assyriology. They give important historical, cultural and geographical context, as well as introducing two essential components of religion and mythology: the moral life and gods. The core of the book is eighteen essays, six each on the pantheon, on mythology, and on religion. The selection is rounded off by three essays that study ancient Mesopotamian religion and mythology in relation to the Hebrew Bible.

The first essay in the anthology is “Morals in ancient Mesopotamia” (1958). Lambert wrote this piece while he was completing *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. The generic term “wisdom literature” brings together those Babylonian literary compositions that, in Lambert’s own definition, “correspond in subject-matter with the Hebrew Wisdom books.”<sup>2</sup> What they held in common was not style, language or subject matter, but a concern with ethical and moral problems, and with how people might respond to the problems inherent in the human condition. The essay concentrates on the former, studying “moral exhortations” such as the Sumerian *Instructions of Shuruppak* and the Babylonian *Counsels of Wisdom*; law codes which exemplify moral behaviour; and proverbs and sayings as sources of popular wisdom. It sets them in a framework of political, ethnic and social history. Lambert makes a synchronic sociological distinction between ideal moral standards proclaimed by intellectuals and the morality of the common people, but also a diachronic ethnic distinction between the Sumerians and Babylonians that might be more nuanced were it expressed today. He makes a case for a “moral degeneration” in Babylonia as a consequence of the increased currency of the idea that suffering and misfortune were not the “haphazard work of evil demons”, as formerly understood, but a consequence of sin, identified or not. For Lambert the outcome was that “Babylonian thinkers found themselves compelled to deny any intuitive knowledge of good and evil”. He holds this in implicit contrast to what he identifies earlier in the essay as the “keener moral sense of the Hebrews”.

The second essay, on “Ancient Mesopotamian Gods” (1990), is placed up front because it presents the basic facts about the Babylonians’ gods and pantheon, set in useful contextualizing remarks on Babylonian ecology and economy. It summarizes Lambert’s ideas on the history of the pantheon, which had crystallized during the 1970s, when his research was mainly focused on the reconstruction of the Sumero-Babylonian god-lists and their explication. The essay also explores the nature of divinity in ancient Mesopotamia, which extended beyond the greater and lesser gods of the pantheon to features of the built and natural environment, such as temple fittings, and rivers and hills.

The organization and history of the Babylonians’ pantheon are more fully studied in an earlier essay, on “The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon” (1975). One of the themes is the historical tendency of Babylonian theologians to move through syncretism and equation towards monotheism. Ultimately Lambert judges this a failure, both because the process never led to absolute monotheism (demons remaining outside) and because the project to exalt the god Marduk of Babylon over all other gods was not supported in all quarters.

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<sup>2</sup> *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford 1960, p. 2.

The phenomenon of monotheism is a case where Lambert could have engaged with a vast non-Assyriological literature but chose not to. He notes that it is a compromised concept, “since many Christian churches have strongly professed monotheism while believing in a supernatural personal devil” (p. 47), and “belief in a devil or demons has not been held to invalidate claims to monotheism on the part of major world religions of the Christian era” (p. 32). The cult of Marduk, the god most promoted by Babylonian theologians as the sole divine power in the universe, nevertheless allowed him a wife, Zarpanitu, and son, Nabû. A matching trinity, headed by Assur, was advocated by intellectuals in Assyria. Other scholars, notably Simo Parpola and the Helsinki school that he founded, have seen these theological developments as ancestral to the Christian monotheistic dogma of a trinity that is three divine personalities in one. This mystery is rejected by Christadelphians, for whom Jesus Christ is not God the Son but the Son of God. Perhaps for this reason Lambert did not make the same observation.

The rise of feminism in the 1970s led to greater attention to gender and women in the academy, and the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* of 1986 duly concentrated on the topic *Woman in the Ancient Near East*. Lambert’s contribution, the fourth essay in this volume, was a response to an argument advanced ten years earlier by Samuel Noah Kramer. Kramer observed that in the third millennium BC some women and goddesses of Sumer could exercise greater power and influence than their Babylonian successors of later eras, and maintained that sexual discrimination was to blame. Lambert’s careful analysis of the evidence for the status of “Goddesses in the Pantheon” (1987) attributed the decline in importance of the goddesses of Sumer not to increasing discrimination but to a combination of the economic decline of their cult centres and a tendency to syncretize them all as manifestations of the second-ranking Ishtar. He does not argue, however, that Babylonian women were free from sexist oppression. Soon afterwards, in 1990, the Babylonians’ view of woman as the inferior sex was succinctly put in a newly discovered line of the poem *Enuma elish*. This poem forms the centre piece of Lambert’s posthumous book *Babylonian Creation Myths* (2013). The line of interest occurs when two young gods in turn, each having failed abjectly to subdue their ancestor, the goddess Tiamat, nevertheless reassure their leader (II 92 // 116): “no matter how great a woman’s strength, it is no match for a man”.

Two other collective studies of the gods of Mesopotamia consider regional or local pantheons that differ from the Sumero-Babylonian pattern. In “The Mesopotamian Background of the Hurrian Pantheon” (1978) Lambert responds to a study of the Hurrian pantheon by E. Laroche. Hurrian was a language spoken in north Mesopotamia and adjacent regions in the first part of the second millennium BC. Its mythology was particularly influential among the Hittites of Anatolia. Lambert’s essay compares the organization of Laroche’s pantheon, as known from Syria and Anatolia, with the Babylonian pantheon of the same period. He notes a contrast in the composition of the top rank: a single god in the Hurrian pantheon, but a group of three or four deities in Babylonia. Lambert finds other evidence for the single-god model in north Mesopotamia (Dagan) and Assyria (Assur), and, less securely, in mid-third-millennium Sumer (Enlil), and suggests that it is older and more widespread than was previously thought.

The gods of an early second-millennium city in north-west Mesopotamia are considered in “The Pantheon of Mari” (1985). Here Lambert uses accounts from the admin-

istration of temple cults to gauge the extent and membership of a local pantheon, and then makes a case-study of the god Itur-Mer and certain other deities associated with Mari, using evidence from all periods. Itur-Mer, a local form of the north Mesopotamian storm-god Wer, was the chief deity of Mari and the surrounding district, but subordinate in the regional pantheon headed by Dagan.

Two further essays make studies of individual deities. “The God Assur” (1983) develops Benno Landsberger’s idea, that Assur was the deified city of the same name, and suggests that he was originally the *numen loci* of the crag on which the settlement was located. “Ishtar of Nineveh” (2004) explores the goddess Ishtar in Assyria, and adds to the dossier of evidence in characteristic fashion, by presenting a previously unpublished text on the topic.

Two complementary and partly overlapping essays introduce the section on mythology. Both are much informed by the research Lambert had conducted in writing *Babylonian Creation Myths*, which was already in first draft in the early 1970s. In “Der Mythos im alten Mesopotamien” (1974) Lambert considers the development of Mesopotamian mythology over time and then examines the mythology of origins. Some of the same ground is covered in “The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon” (1975), where he uses the mythology of origins and the ancestral deities to explore the ancient Mesopotamians’ various ideas on cosmogony and on the geography of the completed universe.<sup>3</sup> The question, “What was there first?”, was answered variously, according to different traditions: earth, water or time. Both essays make unfavourable comparisons with the ideas of pre-Socratic philosophers, on the one hand, and with Hebrew monotheism on the other. For Lambert religious thinking is a search after truth, and what he identified as the Babylonians’ errors in this field “served as a background against which others later drew closer to the truth”.

A category of god that does not coincide with more modern ideas is the “dead” god. Gods are, almost by definition, immortal. In the ancient Near East the notion of “dying and rising” gods was well entrenched, especially in the cults of Dumuzi, Tammuz and other deities of season. In Mesopotamian mythology the category of “dead” gods is well populated. Apart from Dumuzi, the category contains various ancestral deities who were slain by younger gods in myths of succession, and also gods who were sacrificed in order to create mankind. These dead gods dwelt in the Netherworld, alongside the shades of dead humans. In addition to explaining the mythology of death and dead gods, Lambert’s article on “The Theology of Death” (1980) makes a diachronic study of the divine rulers of the Netherworld and their court over time.

Two essays anticipate the content and argument of *Babylonian Creation Myths*. “Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation” (1986) studies the motif of monster-slaying in ancient Mesopotamian mythology. It shows how a mythological role originally played by Ninurta is central to the revisionist mythology of *Enuma elish*, whose composer deliberately adapted literary traditions about Ninurta to make the god Marduk the hero of all myth. In *Enuma elish* Marduk not only slays the monsters, but

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<sup>3</sup> The topic of cosmic geography was later more fully explored by one of Lambert’s research students: W. HOROWITZ, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, (Mesopotamian Civilizations 8), Winona Lake 1998, 2011.

also creates mankind. Study of the history of Mesopotamian ideas about the creation of mankind had already led Lambert to play a leading role in editing and publishing the classic Old Babylonian poem on this topic, *Atra-hasis*.<sup>4</sup> The creation mythology of *Atra-hasis* recurs in a Sumerian mythological narrative called *Enki and Ninmah*, as Lambert demonstrates in “The Relationship of Sumerian and Babylonian Myth as Seen in Accounts of Creation” (1992). The passage of *Enki and Ninmah* edited and explained in this essay, in a masterly exposition of philological method, offers a foretaste of the edition of the whole poem in *Babylonian Creation Myths*. The title of the essay is chosen in response to a commonly held view, that literary production in Sumerian and in Akkadian reflected the cultures of two different peoples. The historical development in which Akkadian replaced Sumerian as the vernacular language of southern Mesopotamia was long seen as the displacement of one people by another, an enduring legacy of Breasted’s *Ancient Times* (1916), and elsewhere Lambert is fond of contrasting Sumerians and Semites. It is now apparent that the linguistic and cultural history of ancient Mesopotamia cannot be interpreted simply in ethnic terms. Lambert’s conclusion, that myths elaborated in Sumerian and Akkadian narratives are “manifestations of a single culture”, is an early recognition of cultural continuity in early Mesopotamia.

Because the poem *Enuma elish* was recited to Marduk during the preparations for the New Year rituals at Babylon, it was often cited by T. H. Gaster and other adherents of the Myth and Ritual school to show how a myth might be used in a ritual. In “Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians” (1968), Lambert brings evidence to refute any notion that *Enuma elish* was composed especially for the ritual, and sees its use in the cult as secondary. He then examines the use of myth in exorcism, for which there is much evidence in the form of explanatory texts which make equations between materials used in rituals of exorcism and mythological characters. These texts show the work of an ancient school of Myth and Ritual, but again the conclusion does not favour an integration of the two, finding that the mythology and the magic are related “in a highly artificial manner”. The explanatory texts have subsequently been studied in more detail,<sup>5</sup> but the use of myth in Sumero-Babylonian magic incantations, to provide an aetiology of evil, needs further investigation.

It is well known that *Enuma elish* is, as it were, a manifesto of a religious reform that sought to exalt Marduk, the god of Babylon, over all others. In researching the poem’s date for *Babylonian Creation Myths* Lambert early came to the view that the consensus of scholarly opinion was wrong: it was not a product of the Old Babylonian period, when Marduk was not yet king of the gods, but of a time when Marduk’s statue was retrieved from exile in Elam and reinstalled in Babylon amid great religious fervour. He sets out his argument in the essay on “The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I: A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamian Religion” (1964), which was immediately influential and is still one of his most cited papers. It is also an early example of one of his typical methods: to append to his essays an edition of a hitherto un-

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<sup>4</sup> W.G. LAMBERT and A.R. MILLARD, *Atra-ḥasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford 1969.

<sup>5</sup> By one of Lambert’s research students: A. LIVINGSTONE, *Mystical and Mythological Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, Oxford 1986.

published or badly edited cuneiform text that added substantially to the evidence and justified the authority of his argument.

The same method is deployed in the following essay, on “Syncretism and Religious Controversy in Babylonia” (1997). This is a very brief introduction to a very large topic, and reprises a theme already explored in “The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon”. The essay is perhaps only a vehicle for making available the appended cuneiform text, but it gets to the heart of the issue with typical economy and clarity. Babylonian theologians thought syncretistically, leading in the most extreme form to the equation of all gods with Marduk, “so that something approaching monotheism resulted”. Standing in the way of this progress were the highly conservative temple cults, which had a vested interest in retaining the individual identities of the different deities. The text itself is a combination of ritual address and theological exegesis.

Lambert was fond of pointing out that the ancient Mesopotamians “made their gods in their own image”, so reversing the biblical idea, though he knew well enough the Babylonian antecedent of that idea, expressed in *Enki and Ninmah* when the god Enki creates man only by first “reflecting upon his own blood and body”. Babylonian gods resided like kings in palaces (“temples”), presided over a court of family, courtiers and servants, and needed food, drink and clothing. Lambert’s essay on “Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia” (1993) carefully distinguishes the Babylonians’ practice of feeding the gods from the sacramental sacrifice of the Old Testament, studies the Babylonian terms for cultic offerings, and cites the textual evidence (mainly *Atra-hasis* and *Enuma elish*) in support of the practice: according to mythology, the human race was created expressly to provide the gods with food, drink and clothing, and for no other purpose.

Babylonian temple ritual is also the topic of the next essay, on “The Cult of Ishtar of Babylon” (1975). This short paper focuses on the public rituals that were enacted in Babylon in celebration of the goddess Ishtar’s relationship with the city god, Marduk, and his wife, Zarpanitu. Nothing at all was known of these rituals until Lambert discovered fragments of them, and published them in two philological studies in 1959 and 1976. The ritual *agenda* were accompanied by distinctive, but exceedingly difficult, *dicenda*, which Lambert characterized as “Divine Love Lyrics”, a title that has stuck. The lyrics, full of amorousness, jealousy and crude language, reveal Marduk, Ishtar and Zarpanitu enmeshed in a divine ménage-à-trois. The essay republished here asks the question, “How was the ritual performed?” It remains unanswerable.

An ancient Mesopotamian ritual of very different sort was that prescribed for the asking of oracular questions in the commonest form of divination, extispicy. Extispicy was a technique of communicating with the gods, in which a highly trained diviner would ask a question on the subject of his client’s future well-being or prospects of success in business, war and other aspects of life where divine guidance was considered necessary. In the ritual the diviner prepared himself and a lamb, asked the question, slaughtered the lamb, disembowelled it and sought an answer to his question in the configuration of the carcass and internal organs, especially the liver and lungs. Lambert’s essay on “The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners” (1998) is a study of the lore attached to the figure of the diviner. This lore includes the diviners’ myth of character, for the craft was held to be god-given, and the requirement of physical perfection,

similar to that prescribed for priests in other religions (Lambert compares Leviticus and ancient Egypt but does not mention the Pope). Though the Babylonian diviner was not a priest, he mediated between the worlds of gods and men, so purity and absence of defect were necessary in order not to compromise the quality of the message. Most of the lore is contained in a fascinating Babylonian text edited at the end of the article.

The last essay in the section on religion is a philological paper delivered to a conference on figurative language, “Devotion: The Languages of Religion and Love” (1987).<sup>6</sup> It explores the use of shared imagery in religious and love poetry. The most productive semantic fields centre on fruits, gardens and ploughing, and draw comparisons with the Hebrew Bible, especially the Song of Songs. Lambert observes a lack of self-abasement in Babylonian love poetry and contrasts the European tradition. Recently published Old Babylonian love poetry goes some way to making good the lack.<sup>7</sup>

The final section turns to the Bible. We have chosen not to include Lambert’s early essay on “A new look at the Babylonian background of Genesis”, which has already been twice reprinted.<sup>8</sup> Instead we conclude with three other essays in which he set out to study ancient Mesopotamian and Old Testament mythology and theology in comparative perspective. In “Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context” (1988), Lambert prefaces a history of ancient Near Eastern myth and surveys of early Levantine (Syro-Palestinian) mythology, as known from Ebla and Ugarit, and cultural history, to four case studies that illustrate how Ugaritic mythology can be illuminated from Mesopotamian sources, and how the mythology of Mesopotamia and Ugarit can help elucidate survivals of myth in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup> The short essay on “Destiny and Divine Intervention in Babylon and Israel” (1972) finds that both civilizations shared a “Deuteronomic view of divine intervention in human affairs”, but contrasts the Hebrews’ belief in a national destiny directed progressively by their god with the Babylonians’ idea that human history was the struggle to maintain or reinstate a fixed and unchanging divinely ordained order.

The last essay in this anthology is the text of a paper given to a non-academic audience in Toronto in 1982 and published as “The Flood in Sumerian, Babylonian and Biblical Sources” (1983). From the style it is clear that the essay is a transcript of a recorded lecture given, as was Lambert’s usual practice, *extempore*. Had he written it up himself, the vocabulary would have been more select and the style more formal, but the contents would have been the same. It is republished here not just because the volume would otherwise lack any study of the Flood myth, to which Lambert made a signal contribution, but also to celebrate in these spoken words the unusual clarity and sim-

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<sup>6</sup> Corrected in the light of Lambert’s notes in *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 1989, p. 14 no. 17.

<sup>7</sup> A.R. GEORGE, *Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection*, Bethesda 2009, no. 9 “I Shall Be a Slave to You”.

<sup>8</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 16 (1965), pp. 285–300; reprinted with postscript in H.-P. MÜLLER ed., *Babylonien und Israel: historische, religiöse und sprachliche Beziehungen*, Darmstadt 1991, pp. 94–113; with further postscript in R.S. HESS and D.T. TSUMURA eds., “I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood”: *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4), Winona Lake 1994, pp. 96–113.

<sup>9</sup> We have omitted the article’s technical appendices from the present reprinting.

plicity with which an extraordinary scholar was able to communicate, directly and compellingly, the results of his unmatched scholarship and learning.

## I: Introductory Considerations



## Morals in Ancient Mesopotamia\*

This is a vast and intricate topic.<sup>1</sup> Vast, because it covers the period 3000–300 BC; intricate, because anything more than an objective cataloguing of phenomena implies an understanding of the ancient Mesopotamian view of life, as well as a knowledge of social and political history. Despite the vastness of the period it is possible to speak of ancient Mesopotamian civilization. From 3000 BC onwards a continuity of culture can be traced in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Changes of course occurred long before 300 BC, but there is no difficulty in seeing the connections of the few temple schools of Babylonian learning which survived Alexander's time, like isolated peaks in a flood of alien culture, with the temples of nearly 3,000 years earlier.

The founders of Mesopotamian culture were the Sumerians, a people of uncertain origin, who came either by sea up the Persian Gulf, or overland through Persia, to their settling place on the fertile alluvium at the mouths of the twin rivers. By 3000 BC they had already built up an extraordinarily fine and well-integrated civilization. Its further development can best be described in terms of the immigrations of other peoples into this area, though it must not be forgotten that internal growth was as great a factor in this evolution as external influence. Two outside areas provided Mesopotamia with fresh waves of population. The Euphrates valley was a route taken by successive groups of Semites, debouching, according to a generally held view, from the Arabian and Syrian deserts. The mountains to the north were an area from which hardy and often barbarous tribes coming from the Caucasus region were wont to spread out over the prosperous plains of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

The first substantial thrust into Sumerian territory was Semitic, and by c. 2300 BC the Old Akkadians, who had presumably come along the Euphrates route, were powerful enough to seize the hegemony of Sumer, and to proceed to establish an empire stretching to the Mediterranean. The venture was ill-fated, and the brief Old Akkadian period ended in chaos, as mountainous tribes, the Guti, descended on the fertile land

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\* First published in *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux* 15 (1958), pp. 184–96.

<sup>1</sup> There is very little written on this subject directly, but mention may be made of W. VON SODEN, *ZDMG* 89, pp. 143–69; H. FRANKFORT and others, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (also published as *Before Philosophy*), chs. V–VII by T. JACOBSEN; and S.N. KRAMER, Sumerian Theology and Ethics in the *Harvard Theological Review* 49, pp. 45–62. For the convenience of those who do not read the ancient languages the references to ancient works are to translations wherever possible, and especially to *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*<sup>1,2</sup>, ed. J.B. PRITCHARD (*ANET*), and *Altorientalische Texte zum alten Testament*<sup>2</sup>, ed. H. GRESSMANN (*AOTAT*<sup>2</sup>). [In the original, an asterisk (\*) following a citation referred the reader to Lambert's then forthcoming *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960). These have been replaced by *BWL* and page number.]

and for a time were undisputed masters. They were never accepted, however, by the inhabitants, and soon they were driven out (c. 2000 BC), so that no cultural legacy of their stay need be looked for. A revival of Sumerian power followed under the Third Dynasty of Ur, though Semitic influence was now strong. This dynasty fell to a fresh wave of Semitic migrants, the Amorites, who proceeded to take over and settle many Sumerian cities. Out of several Amorite dynasties which sprang up, that of Babylon outlived and suppressed the rest, and under Hammurabi (c. 1700 BC) reached a climax of political and cultural glory. In time Babylon fell to the barbarous Cassites from the mountains (c. 1500 BC). Unlike the Guti, the Cassites had come to stay, and their dynasty of some four centuries enabled them to become completely assimilated to the native culture, which was itself undergoing a profound change during these times. Generally the country seemed in a stagnant phase, for the new masters brought little if anything in the matter of cultural attainments, unless the domesticated horse can be put in this category. Spiritually, however, a ferment was taking place among the priests and scholars. When the Cassite dynasty fell c. 1150 BC the centre of the world had gravitated from southern to northern Mesopotamia. Contemporary with the Cassites a new power had arisen in the area from the Kurdistan highlands across the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates to the Mediterranean. The bulk of the new immigrants were Hurrians, the Horites of the Old Testament, but the ruling aristocracy were the Indo-European Mitanni, famed for their horse-rearing. This power lasted only some two and a half centuries, and it fell in part to the rising power of Assyria on the upper Tigris, and in part to the Hittite kingdom in Asia Minor. This rise of Assyria was accompanied by a continued state of decline for Babylon, as its power was weakened from about 1000 BC by a fresh wave of Semitic migration. The Aramaeans were moving down the Euphrates and by 700 BC they constituted the bulk of the population of southern Mesopotamia. By this time the military might of Assyria had waned, and for a brief spell (c. 600–550) the old glories of Babylon were revived by such kings as Nebuchadnezzar, though in fact the kingdom was as much Aramaean as it had been Amorite previously. The Persians put an end to the resuscitated Babylon, and gradually Babylonian civilization gave way to an Aramaean world with first Persian, then Greek, and finally Roman masters. It is little short of a miracle that a handful of priestly families in Babylon itself kept the old traditions alive until the first century AD.<sup>2</sup>

From this survey of history certain peoples can be singled out for attention. The greatest cultural originality lay with the Sumerians. Of the Semitic groups, first the Old Akkadians and then the Amorites played a great part in moulding the phases of Mesopotamian culture. It is not always easy to say just what each group contributed, but certainly contributions of no small consequence were transmitted as these two groups were absorbed into the older culture. In each case the amalgamation was exceedingly fertile. The Assyrians can lay no such claim to originality. In most cultural matters they were borrowers and, like the Romans from the Greeks, tended to obscure any original features in their civilization with importations from Babylonia. Their pattern of life was

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account of this history see in German A. MOORTGAT in A. SCHARFF and A. MOORTGAT, *Ägypten und Vorderasien im Altertum*; and H. SCHMÖKEL, *Geschichte des alten Vorderasien*. In English a less full treatment is given in the relevant chapters of J. FINEGAN, *Light from the Ancient Past*.

certainly different, but that is largely accounted for by the needs of a state which grew up and thrived on militarism, and by the influence of the Hurro-Mitannian civilization. The contribution of the Aramaeans was not very great. A more or less fixed pattern of thought had been worked out before they arrived. They must have altered profoundly the tone of everyday life, but their influence was least on the priestly scholars. Since they were constantly being increased by further immigration they eventually imposed their own civilization on their hosts, but in the process they absorbed some of the more popular elements of Babylonian culture and passed them on to the Near Eastern world.

This last matter raises a very important point. Morals in any age can be divided into two categories: the standards actually practised among the mass of the population, and the ideals proclaimed by thinkers or prophets. The degree of divergence between these two standards differs from age to age, and even within one period urban and rural communities, for example, may not be uniform. In the ancient world the only works written about morals are the compositions or compilations of scholars. The descriptive anthropologist did not exist. It will be understood that popular moral standards can only be found by a careful scrutiny of all the evidence which may reflect them. The written ethical texts themselves fall into two main groups: direct moral exhortations, and hymns which contain sections devoted to this matter. In Sumerian the former category is represented by one named work, the *Instructions of Shuruppak*. Shuruppak was the father of Ziusudra, the Sumerian Noah. As in Genesis, the Sumerian flood was an evidence of the gods' displeasure with mankind, and admonitions are therefore given in connection with it. Noah transmitted to the human race a group of commandments,<sup>3</sup> and Ziusudra, his counterpart, received a corpus of moral teaching from his father. Only a small portion of this text is yet published.<sup>4</sup> A fragment of a Babylonian translation is also known, preserved on an Assyrian tablet of about 1100 BC,<sup>5</sup> which is an indication of the popularity of the work. Parts of other similar Sumerian works are also known, and they are for the moment the best representatives of this genre of Sumerian literature.<sup>6</sup> In Babylonian there is also a collection of similar material, more prolix in style, and usually termed *Counsels of Wisdom* by modern scholars.<sup>7</sup> An independent paragraph of another Babylonian work of the same kind has also survived.<sup>8</sup> The second category of ethical texts, hymns, is best known from hymns to gods or goddesses of justice. Those to the sun-god, the Sumerian Utu or Babylonian Shamash, usually allude, at least in a general way, to his concern for justice, and a few enter into lengthy exhortations. Perhaps the best example is a long hymn to Shamash of 200 lines of Bab-

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 9: 1–17. The divine ordinances were developed so that in Rabbinic literature they are a series of laws binding on the whole human race (see E. SCHÜRER, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (English translation), II/2, p. 318).

<sup>4</sup> See S.N. KRAMER, *From the Tablets of Sumer*, p. 290. [See now B. ALSTER, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, Bethesda 2005, pp. 31–220.]

<sup>5</sup> KAR 27 apud H. ZIMMERN, *ZA* 30, pp. 185–87; and W.F. ALBRIGHT, *JAOS* 38, pp. 60–65. [*BWL*, pp. 92–95.]

<sup>6</sup> J.J.A. VAN DIJK, *La sagesse suméro-accadienne*, pp. 100ff.

<sup>7</sup> *AOTAT*<sup>2</sup>, pp. 291–93; *ANET*, pp. 426–27. [*BWL*, pp. 96–107.]

<sup>8</sup> MACMILLAN, *BA* 5, pp. 562–64; 624–25. [*BWL*, pp. 107–109.]