

The Ancient Orient

*An Introduction to the Study
of the Ancient Near East*

Wolfram von Soden

Translated by
Donald G. Schley

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Gracewing.

MIDDLE EAST LIBRARY

Originally published as *Einführung in die Altorientalistik*
Copyright © 1985 by Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt

English translation copyright © 1994 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
255 Jefferson Ave. S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
All rights reserved

Published 1994 jointly
in the United States by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
and in the U.K. by Gracewing
2 Southern Avenue, Leominster HR6 0QF

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Soden, Wolfram von, 1908-

[*Einführung in die Altorientalistik*. English]

The ancient Orient: an introduction to the study of the ancient Near East /
Wolfram von Soden; translated by Donald G. Schley.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8028-0142-0 (pbk.)

1. Middle East -- Civilization -- To 622. I. Title.
DS57.S5813 1993

939'.4 -- dc20

93-36268

CIP

Gracewing ISBN 0 85244 252 1

Contents

Translator's Preface	xi
Foreword	xvii
Abbreviations	xix
I. The Term "Ancient Orient" and Its Demarcation	1
II. The Scene	6
III. Peoples and Cultures in the Ancient Orient	12
1. The Ancient Oriental Cultures before 3000: The Sumerians	15
2. The Semites in Western Asia	18
<i>a. Northeast and North Semites</i>	18
<i>b. The Northwest Semites: Canaanites and Arameans</i>	20
<i>c. South Arabians and North Arabians</i>	23
3. Hurrians and Urartians	24
4. Peoples and Cultures in Western Iran	25
<i>a. Elamites, Gutians, and Kassites</i>	25
<i>b. Indo-Aryans, Medes, Cimmerians, and Persians</i>	27
5. Asia Minor: Proto-Hattians, Luwians, and Hittites	28
6. The Coalescence of Peoples	29

intercalary periods for this kind of calendrical adjustment, which were never put into practice. After about 380, there was a nineteen-year period with eight leap years which produced a tolerable approximation of reality. For the purpose of simplifying calculations, astronomers often worked with twelve months of thirty days each. The names of the months from the Neo-Babylonian period were adopted at an early date by the Judeans, and later by the Syrians as well.⁴²

42. Cf. S. H. Langdon, *Babylonian Menologies and the Semitic Calendars* (London, 1935); and H. Hunger, "Kalender," *RLA* V (1977): 297ff., with bibliography.

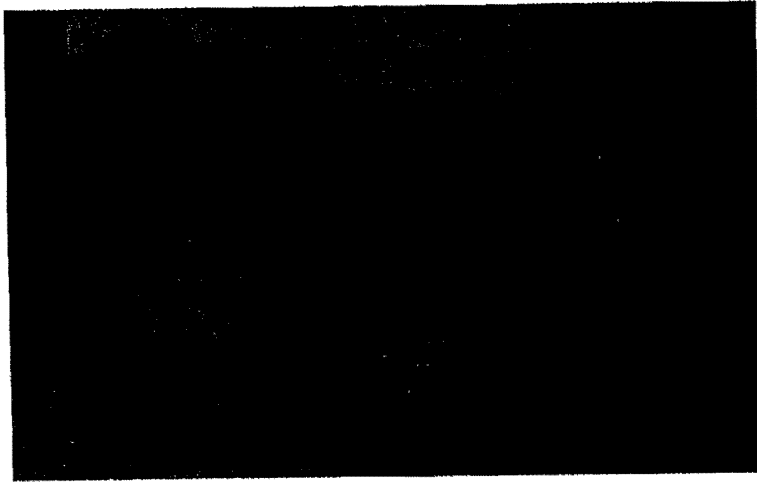
CHAPTER XII

Religion and Magic

1. Basic Problems

While only that very small circle of individuals who could read and write were able to take part in the sciences in the ancient Orient, religion and magic concerned everyone, though not in the same way everywhere. In this context it is not possible to distinguish religion and magic sharply from one another, since, just as in our sources, both permeate everyday life in too many ways. We must therefore reckon with this fact in the following treatment. Because all of our texts derive from professional scribes, many questions regarding the beliefs of the common people must remain unanswered. Still, thousands of private letters from Babylonia and Assyria provide in many respects a welcome supplement to the more formal literature, and certain issues can be deduced from the theophoric names. The abundance of materials here again forces us to turn our attention almost exclusively to the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. Reference to Syria can be made only occasionally, since those sources are more meager and uneven.¹

1. All collective works in the history of religion treat the religions of the ancient Orient, as do all discussions of culture (see works cited in ch. I, n. 2); the most exhaustive of these, though now superseded in many aspects, is M. Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens*, 3 vols. with a portfolio of illustrations (Giessen, 1905-1913). Cf. also G. Furlani, *La religione babilonese e assira*, I-II (Bologna, 1928-1929); C.-F. Jean, *Le milieu biblique*, vol. III: *Les idées religieuses et morales* (Paris, 1936); É. P. Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylone et de l'Assyrie* (Paris, 1949); T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, 1976); C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the*



The main stairway of the ziggurat of Ur, built by Ur-Nammu at the end of the third millennium. (Jack Finegan)

In Babylonia, we must attempt to see the fundamental differences between the religion of Sumerians, which was marked by even earlier religious concepts native to Mesopotamia, and the religion of the Semites. At the same time, in view of the syncretism which set in at a very early date, we must not overrate these differences. In many respects, then, this approach can be only moderately successful. For Assyrian religion, the Hurrians also attained considerable significance. The fact that in many ways religion is reflected differently in the monumental inscriptions than in the artistic depictions poses problems of particular difficulty, especially since in Mesopotamia the artworks are only rarely accompanied by inscriptions which have direct bearing on their contents. Thus, subjectivity is given quite a bit more play in the interpretation of pictorial testimony, for example, regarding myths. The result is that scholars express highly diverse interpretations of the central ques-

Ancient Near East (London, 1948); H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, 1978); N. Schneider and F. M. T. de Liagre Böhl in *Christus und die Religionen der Erde*, I, ed. F. König (Vienna, 1951), 383-498; J. van Dijk, "Sumerische Religion," in *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte* I (Göttingen, 1971), 431-496.

tions of the history of religions (see above, VI.2). Such a brief presentation as this must therefore stick predominantly to the texts.

2. The Gods of the Sumerians

The essence of the Sumerian belief in the gods is very difficult for us to grasp, not least of all because our understanding of Sumerian religious texts still leaves much to be desired. For this reason, more than preliminary pronouncements on religion are, in many areas, impossible. The first thing that strikes one in the study of the texts themselves is the unusually high number of Sumerian gods and goddesses recorded in the god-lists (see above, XI.6), and which run to hundreds of names as early as the middle of the third millennium.² Their numbers grew even further in the Neo-Sumerian period, and the Sumerians themselves gave the certainly very exaggerated round number of 3600. How is it conceivable that people could believe that such a large number of deities was active in the small area of Babylonia, where divinities were always understood as entities of power? Several things are essential here. The sources show that the city gods were thought to have a princely state in which there were functionaries similar to those in the palace of an earthly city prince (*ensi*) — in other words, administrators of all sorts and even divine artisans. Thus, the terrestrial world was carried over to the primarily heavenly world of the gods, and to the gods were then ascribed functions varying in importance according to their respective rank in the world above. On the other hand, the city prince attained a special status as the earthly representative of the city's god (see above, VI.1).³ Finally, all Mesopotamian deities had a human form; animal heads, such as those in Egypt, are found in texts and pictures only among demons.

It is illuminating that, when people had to put their trust in them, the gods could be more than merely the guardians of an order whose particular significance for the Sumerians is manifested in their one-dimensional science of ordering. Of course, the city deities included in the term "the great gods" were not always available without mediation, since they, as we will see later, had other functions, at least in the

2. Cf. A. Deimel, *Schultexte aus Fara* (Leipzig, 1923), 9ff.

3. Despite this fact, the translation which was earlier preferred — "Priesterfürst" ("priest-prince") — for the title *ensi* (one read then *Patesi*) is not accurate.

Neo-Sumerian period. Even the prayers of the city princes were first of all addressed to the tutelary gods of the family, and the subordinate deities functioned in this role for most people. According to the official theology, these lower deities stood in the service of the city gods, where they were no mere abstractions, but rather stood as the primary powers of welfare and, necessarily, as advocates before the great gods. This understanding is expressed most beautifully in the many thousands of cylinder seal carvings from the Neo-Sumerian and Old Babylonian periods. These show how the prayerful petitioner is led before the great gods by the tutelary deity; an inscription with the name of the petitioner is usually attached.⁴ Underlying these scenes of introduction and their accompanying textual pronouncements is the notion that the tutelary deity alone cannot fulfill all the wishes of the petitioner.

The city gods often had simultaneously overlapping functions outside the districts of Babylonia, too. As the god of the heavens, An of Uruk (Unug) was the sky god, and the highest of the deities, followed by Enlil of Nippur (Nibru), the god of the atmosphere; both installed and deposed the kings who reigned over the city princes (see above, VI.1). Enki of Eridu had his abode in the groundwater table, called Apsu (Abzu), which made all life possible. Next to these three leading gods, the mother goddess stood as the guarantor of fertility for both humans and animals. She was worshipped under various names in numerous cities: as Ninḫursag in Kish, as Bau in Lagash, and as Nidaba, the goddess of scribes and grain, in Umma. Among the gods of the celestial bodies, the moon god, Nanna of Ur, was considered the father of the sun god, Utu of Larsam, while the shimmering form of Inanna, at once mother goddess, goddess of love and fertility, and goddess of war, had temples in Unug and Zabalam. As goddess of the herd, her sacred beast was the sheep. Among the other chief gods were the war god, Ningirsu of Girsu, who was worshipped at Nippur as Enlil's son Ninurta of Nibru, Dumuzi of Badtibira (see below, section 5b), and Shara of Umma. Whether some of the chief gods of northern Babylonia are to be regarded as originally Sumerian divinities still needs to be clarified. For the pre-Sumerian period, the numerous small figures of naked women point to an Inanna-type, and the bull refers to the moon god. The horns of the bull

4. We have no comprehensive treatment of this group of cylinder seals. The same motif is found even more frequently on reliefs.

nonetheless became the emblem for all the gods. For the divinization of the king, see above, VI.2.

The gods of the Sumerians attained their power primarily because they had at their disposal certain powers of the natural order. Among these were the divine powers, including those for maintaining and protecting the cosmic and earthly order, which were in part thought of in objective terms but as a rule in terms of the abstract *me*.⁵ Of scarcely less significance is the *nam*, which is generally translated according to the corresponding Akkadian term *šimtu*, "fate, destiny," even though this far more comprehensive concept can hardly be translated, as shown by the compounds *nam-lugal*, "kingdom, monarchy," and *nam-dingir*, "divinity, godliness," and other abstract terms. The gods "cut" (*tar*) the fate or destiny (*nam*) not only for the creation, but also in the cosmos.⁶ A further "numinous term for the order" is *giš-hur*, actually "design, plan," which can also be understood as the "conception(s)" of the gods. Moreover, the basic ordinances for the cultic sphere were also established by the gods. This is shown above all by *garza*, which can also designate a cultic office, *billuda*, a "cultic practice" or "custom," and of less significance, *šu-luḫ*, a "rite of purification." Since these terms are assigned to the gods outright, they may be regarded as distinctive in a particular way for the Sumerian religion.

3. The Gods of the Babylonians and Assyrians

a. Chief Gods of the Ancient Semitic Peoples: Gods of Northern Babylonia in the Sumerian Period

We know nothing of the religion of the Semitic-speaking peoples prior to their immigration into the domains where — with the exception of South Arabia⁷ — they later came into contact with other peoples and over time more or less borrowed from their religious notions. Since our

5. Cf. G. Farber-Flugge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki," unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me* (Rome, 1973), where the other terms for the created order mentioned in the following discussion are also briefly treated.

6. Verbs for "cutting" in connection with treaty, covenant, and oaths, are also used in Hebrew and Greek.

7. Cf. above, III.2; also H. Gese, M. Höfner, and K. Rudolph, *Die Religionen Altisryens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (Stuttgart, 1970).

written sources do not begin until centuries after the presumed time of the Sumerian immigration, these almost always reflect a certain syncretism, which is impossible to analyze with any precision. All sources demonstrate with certainty, however, that the three gods of the main celestial bodies — the sun, moon, and Venus — are Semitic. It is strange to note in this regard that the moon god is always masculine but the sun god is more often feminine, particularly in South Arabia and to some degree in Syria. By contrast, the South Arabian Venus is a male deity ('Aṭtar). In Syria, 'Ashtar stands beside the male 'Ashtar, whom she later supplanted. The star gods were gods of the celestial bodies, but they were not the celestial bodies themselves; thus one can nowhere speak of an astral religion, not even in Babylonia itself.⁸ Much more difficult to answer is the question of whether the storm god, who was venerated everywhere in Western Asia under various names, belonged to the most ancient of the Semitic gods. Apparently, the South Arabians did not know either him, a particularly distinct god of the heavens, or a goddess of the underworld (among their already few goddesses), even though he appears already in the Ebla texts under his ancient Semitic name, Hadad (Hadda). There and at other locales, the grain deity Dagān, the god of pestilence Rashap (later sometimes Resheph), as well as Kamosh (later in Moab, Chemosh) were widely worshipped alongside other deities with non-Semitic names. In comparison with Mesopotamia, the pantheon in northern Syria was small in the third as well as the second millennium, despite its heterogeneous origins. Since the Old Testament later always speaks of the individual gods of the neighboring peoples, we are led to conclude that the Semitic tribes and peoples venerated only a few deities at any given time, but ascribed to them correspondingly more power.⁹ The majority of these deities were masculine, although goddesses were always present as well and had a great deal of importance for belief as well as for the cult.

The sources for the religion of the Akkadians in northern Babylonia first emerge in the period after 2500, when groups of Northeast

8. The term "astral religion," as applied from the time of the "Pan-babylonians" who succeeded Eduard Stucken (1865-1936) down to the present, is used in quite different ways, and this has led to many misunderstandings. The relationship of Babylonian divinities to the stars must be studied anew.

9. Cf. J. J. M. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon* (Baltimore, 1972). The Ebla texts were not known at the time; the readings of the names of some of the chief gods of Ebla (e.g., *NI.DA.BAL* [!]) have still not been explained.

and North Semites had been settled there for centuries. At first, however, these texts yield few results. Then around 2400 the Semitic *ilum* ("God, the god") begins to appear as a nearly exclusive theophoric element in proper names. Only later do we encounter in addition to this the ancient Semitic astral triad: Su'en, later Sin, "Moon"; Shamash, "Sun," with his consort Ayya; and Ishtar (Eshtar), "Venus." There are in addition some deities whose names cannot be explained with certainty, as above all the warlike Irra (Erra). In the inscriptions of the kings of Akkad, these gods often appear with Dagān, Nergal the plague god of Mars, and the war god Zababa (Ninurta) of Kish, as well as the cosmic triad of the Sumerians, Anu(m), Enlil, and Enki (Ea), as well as the mother goddess Ninkarrak. Thus, Enlil remained for the Akkadians the god who installed and deposed kings, and beside him stood the warlike Ishtar. In this way, some of the chief figures of the Sumerian pantheon entered the ranks of the ancient Semitic gods. The later Babylonian pantheon, however, stands in contrast to this. A similar phenomenon is observed in Mesopotamia at Mari. Not only were such other ancient Semitic deities as Abba, Lim, and the mother goddess Annunitum (Mama) worshipped there, in addition to Dagān and the weather god Adad (Addu), but also, as in the Early Dynastic period, some cosmic deities of the Sumerians who may have been regarded as essentially identical with Semitic gods.¹⁰

b. Babylonian Belief in the Gods: Syncretistic Theology

The increasing intermixing of the Akkadians and the immigrating Canaanites with the Sumerians which took place after 2000 even in southern Mesopotamia (see above, III.2a-b) led to a thoroughgoing transformation in the religion. To be sure, the tendency to merge into the Sumerian tradition continued, but too much of Sumer remained foreign, not least of all many of the myths of various origins regarding the divine combat. Thus, people searched for gods who combined care for maintaining the creation with provision for the individual, while at the same time not leaving these characteristics to subordinate tutelary deities. The distant god of the heavens, Anu (An), took on the features of a *deus otiosus* (god without duties). Enlil retained his significance for

10. The third millennium in Mari is very meagerly attested, and we know even less about the other districts north of Babylonia.

the realm of the state. Only Enki remained close to humanity as Ea, the god of wisdom. Besides the ancient mother goddess with her various names, there now emerged the consorts of the high gods as the goddesses of intercession and provision. Among these, Ningal, the consort of Sin (Nanna), was worshipped even in Syria. In Babylonia, Ayya, Tashmētu, and Sarpānītu, the respective consorts of Shamash, Nabû, and Marduk, were probably the deities mostly widely petitioned.

Among those Babylonian deities who simultaneously represented celestial bodies, the sun god Shamash, as god of law and justice, came to be much more widely venerated throughout the land in the Old Babylonian period than the Sumerian Utu had been previously. Together with the weather god Adad, he was the god of sacrificial divination (see above, XI.5). His father, the moon god Sin, receded in comparison, other than in nomenclature. Marduk, the god of the previously insignificant city Babylon, who was also associated with the planet Jupiter, experienced a sudden elevation with the rise of Hammurabi's dynasty, beginning in northern Babylonia and even extending beyond the official cult. Although in contrast with Shamash he was also a god of battle, like Shamash Marduk was disposed to help the individual. The function of the god of white magic was carried over to Marduk from the Sumerian Asalluḫi of Eridu, the son of Enki; thus, Marduk became the son of Ea.¹¹ Nabû of Borsippa, associated with the planet Mercury, was regarded as Marduk's son; in time he came to be primarily the god of scribes and scholars. Alongside Nabû came the plague god Nergal, who could also be accessible to the petitioner.¹² Enlil's son Ninurta, alone among the war gods of the Sumerians as the god of Sirius, remained a vital force apart from theology and cultus, and later attained even greater significance. Ishtar, goddess of the planet Venus, was for the Babylonians a peculiarly ambivalent figure. She was goddess of both fertility and slaughter, a benevolent mother and at the same time the tutelary goddess

11. Cf. W. Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks: Die Stellung Marduks in der babylonischen Religion des zweiten Jahrtausends v. Chr.* AOAT 213 (1982); H. D. Galter, *Der Gott Ea/Enki in der akkadischen Überlieferung* (Graz, 1983); F. Nötscher, *Ellil in Sumer und Akkad* (Hannover, 1927); H. Wöhlstein, *The Sky-God An-Anu* (New York, 1976).

12. F. Pomponio, *Nabû* (Rome, 1978); E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal*. AOAT 11 (1971). Monographs are still lacking on Sin, Shamash, Ishtar, and Ninurta, as well as on the various forms of weather gods. Cf. D. O. Edzard in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, I, ed. H. W. Haussig (Stuttgart, 1961), 19-139; C. Wilcke-U. Seidl, "Inanna/Ištar," *RLA V* (1976): 74ff.

of prostitutes, and not limited to her city of Uruk, which she had taken over from the Sumerian Inanna. Conversely, the maternal personality alone was embodied in Annunītu in the north, in Nanā in Uruk, and in the goddess of healing Gula in Isin. No one expected anything good from Allatu (Ereshkigal), the ruler of the underworld. Several more deities were worshipped only in certain regions, or by members of particular professions.¹³

Most of the many hundreds of subordinate gods of the Sumerians lost their significance in this period, even as tutelary deities, but they were not forgotten by the theologians and at times not even in the cult. We have just seen that nearly all of the gods of the Semitic north had been identified with Sumerian divinities. At first that had happened without system and on an individual basis, as already on occasion among the Sumerians. It has become clear, however, that after the time of Hammurabi the theologians tried to bring the theological tradition into harmony with a starkly altered image of the divine. This was done on a grand scale, using the essential identity of Semitic and Sumerian gods to reduce increasingly more deities to mere hypostases, and thus reducing the total number of gods. The Semites could not imagine such a large number of powerful gods in such a limited area as Mesopotamia, nor could they fully comprehend the idea of the conception of order (i.e., that nature was the result of divine conception) which was determinative for the Sumerians. The syncretistic theology now made it possible to hold onto the tradition, while incorporating into it new concepts. This theology found its comprehensive documentation in the great bicolunar god list (discussed above, XI.3), as well as in the concluding section of the Creation Epic (see below, XIII.3b), which refers only to Marduk and praises him under fifty new and different names. Reflection on the deities, however, did not cease with this list, which retained two hundred gods and even called into question the autonomy of many of the "great" gods. Thus in hymns, gods are made into representatives of particular characteristics of the god who is addressed or even, somewhat tastelessly, into his body parts. Behind this practice stood the widespread assumption that all historical divine names referred only to one god or one goddess, and that prayers were largely interchangeable. In the first millennium, however, people quite

13. Among these deities are Tishpak of Eshnunna, Ishtaran/Satran of Der, and the god of judges, Madānu.

often renounced names altogether and spoke only of "the god" or "the goddess," who saw and was able to see everything. Still, a denial of the existence of many gods was only very sporadically connected to this type of speech.¹⁴ Therefore, it is better not to speak of monotheistic tendencies in Babylonia; rather, one should speak of monotheistic tendencies, which amount to the doctrine of only a single divine nature represented by god and goddess.¹⁵

The Babylonians also adopted the notion of religious tolerance from the Sumerians, even with respect to the gods of neighboring peoples, which often were subsequently identified with their own. Some gods of the Kassites (see above, III.4a), such as the divine couple Shuqamuna and Shimalia, were called on frequently. Only Ashur, the god of the hated Assyrians, was bluntly rejected.

Although in the later period there were only isolated cases of city gods that were worshipped only in their own cities, the chief gods did retain a certain priority in their cities, and this fact finds particular expression in the nomenclature. Since Babylon remained the capital with brief interruptions even after the age of Hammurabi, Marduk was recognized as the king of the gods with the title Bel, "Lord." This was done in agreement with the Creation Epic, which ascribes to him two faces, as depicted in some images. But the cult of Nabû also was particularly widespread (see above), as is shown by the personal names. Attempts by individual kings to favor particular cults scarcely ever met with any success. That of the last king, Nabonidus, who tried to give priority to the cult of the moon god Sin, met with a harsh rejection and consequently led to his overthrow (see above, V.10). The Achae-menaeans made no attempts at converting the Babylonians. The Seleucids, however, demanded the identification of the Babylonian and Greek gods, for example, Marduk with Zeus. For the relationship of the gods to humans, see below, section 4.

14. In the eighth century an Assyrian wrote, "Trust in Nabû; trust not in another god!" Cf. Pomponio, 69.

15. Cf. K. L. Tallquist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta*. *Studia orientalia* 7 (Helsinki, 1938, repr. 1974), for the extensive interchangeability of the divine attributes; for the theology of syncretization, cf. W. von Soden, "Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft," *Die Welt als Geschichte* 2 (1936): 57ff.

c. Belief in the Gods and Political Religion in Assyria

The Assyrians worshipped primarily the same gods as the Babylonians, but did not always connect the same ideas with them. Other than a few royal inscriptions, our sources for the Old Assyrian period are scarcely more than the letters and documents from the trade colonies in Asia Minor.¹⁶ These show us Ashur, the god of the city Ashur, as the leading god in other areas besides nomenclature. He is the god of the kings; one swears by him, and one prays to him even in personal matters. Beside Ashur stands Ishtar of Ashur, who likewise is invoked frequently. Anu is paired with Adad in Assyria, perhaps under foreign influence. Many other deities are named as well, among them Ea, Su'en, and Shamash, but the texts give little information on these. Occasionally one finds references to indigenous cults in Asia Minor.

The temporary subjugation of Assyria to the Hurrians and to Mitanni also led to many changes in the area of religion. The most important concerns the character of Ashur, who then became primarily the god of the state. As such, he promoted the expansion of Assyria, though he also remained a god for the individual. That changed after about 900, because Ashur had then become solely the imperial god, urging his kings to ever-wider expansion until the great empire of the Sargonids had been created. The subjugated were required to venerate him, somewhat in the way all Roman provinces were later required to respect the cult of the emperor. The subjugated provinces were not required to worship Ashur, however, and as a rule remained free to serve their own gods. The Assyrians themselves prayed mostly to the Babylonian deities, whose cult had gained increasing acceptance after about 1400. For political reasons there was for a long time considerable prejudice against Marduk, until sometime after 800 the sick in particular came to invoke him. The Assyrian kings allowed the legitimacy of their policies to be sanctioned by Shamash, while Ninurta, who had a great temple in Calah, became along with Nergal the god of war and of the hunt.¹⁷ Nusku, the god of light, was a frequent object of petition as well.

16. Cf. H. Hirsch, *Untersuchungen zur altassyrischen Religion*, 2nd ed. Beihefte zur *Archiv für Orientforschung* 13/14 (Graz, 1972); K. L. Tallquist, *Der assyrische Gott* (Helsinki, 1932).

17. In the first millennium, the battle reports of Assyrian kings often refer to a great number of gods, not only Ashur, Shamash, and the war gods.

Next to Ishtar, Nabû played an indispensable, central role in both the official and private cults in the first millennium. The Hurrian ideas of god obviously had a powerful influence on the Assyrian religion, even though the names of Hurrian gods are not often mentioned. Thus, Shaushka lived on in the Assyrian Ishtar, and the Hurrian high god Teshup continued in Adad. Yet from the texts we learn hardly anything of the gods of the hundreds of thousands of deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, apart from the nomenclature.¹⁸

4. God and Mankind: Sin and Ethics, Theodicy, Life after Death

In every religion, people expect help from the deity if they are unable to help themselves. Conversely, they are persuaded that the deity imposes demands on them and threatens penalties if they do not fulfill these. On the one hand, service to the gods by means of all kinds of cultic practices is demanded, and these will be treated below. At the same time, a type of behavior is demanded which serves the maintenance of creation, and here it is particularly a question of the relationship of person to person. Between these different demands there are, of course, serious shifts of emphasis, even in the religions of the ancient Orient.

The cult is frequently a central topic for the sources of Sumerian religion, but human guilt and its consequences are found much less. The most important concept which is pertinent to this discussion is *nam-tag*, "encroachment" (into the divine order) or "trespass" (of the same). One scribe saw King Lugalzagesi's destruction of Lagash (see above, VI.1) as just such a trespass, and was of the opinion that his goddess, Nidaba, should let him bear his sin.¹⁹ Individuals too could make themselves guilty of a *nam-tag* in manifold ways,²⁰ though at least

18. The royal inscriptions mention foreign gods only sporadically, e.g., those of the South Arabians or Urartians; treaties of state also required an oath by the gods of the other partner.

19. Cf. E. Sollberger-J.-R. Kupper, *Inscriptions royales sumériennes et akkadiennes* (Paris, 1971), 82, VII. According to an earlier translation, this sin was laid upon the goddess herself.

20. The delimitation of the various Sumerian words which contrast "sin" and "misdeed" has still not been clarified. Nor was there in all probability any special word for the penalty of sin.

the prevailing view was that guilt could play no determinative role in human fate. In the songs of lament over public catastrophes (see below, XIII.5b) the guilt of the concerned party hardly plays a role. One reason for this may be that too petty a significance was ascribed to human action to allow this to bring any essential influence to bear on the decisions of the great gods. Furthermore, it is particularly significant that the Sumerian spells against sicknesses and other forms of suffering do not say that the gods had given the person over to evil spirits on account of his or her sins. That pleas for forgiveness are lacking in these laments is conclusive, and one proceeded against demons with merely magical means (see below, section 6).

In the mythic poetry of the Sumerians, the gods not infrequently run up against their own established ordinances; in some cases offenses are punished by the assembly of the gods. Not much is different in the Babylonian myths: struggles between the gods are not disavowed in principle, but a settlement at the conclusion is the normal result; only some of the primeval gods, who took their stand outside the order, are ever handed over to death (see below, XIII.3c). Besides the depiction of the gods in the myths, however, another view gained increasing credence among the Babylonians after the time of Hammurabi. According to this view, there was no longer any room for clashes among the gods. This idea first comes clearly into view toward the end of the second millennium as a consequence of the conviction that, in the interests of maintaining the creation, the gods placed increasingly higher ethical demands on humans, whose disregard for these demands qualified as sin. In Babylonia and Assyria, however, there was no unified term for sin, but rather a number of words for sins of different weight, among which *arnu/annu* and *šertu* simultaneously designate the penalty for the sin. Even the venial sins (*egitu*), however, remained sins in the eyes of the gods and, as all sins, required "redemption," or forgiveness on the basis of divine mercy. That a human being, despite every precaution — and that is essential — cannot find the right way through his or her own strength, and that the deity is free both to punish and forgive is one of the most significant perceptions of the Babylonians.²¹

21. Cf. A. van Selms, *De babylonische termini voor zonde* (Wageningen, 1933); H. Vorländer, *Mein Gott: Die Vorstellungen vom persönlichen Gott im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*. AOAT 23 (1975); R. Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* (Stuttgart, 1978).

What constituted sin was generally determined at first and even later casuistically. Thereby, sin for a long time concerned only the proper bearing toward the gods and the basic rules of human morality, the keeping of which was certainly demanded as early as the Sumerians. Toward the end of the second millennium, the casuistry was sharply refined, as we learn from the oath series *Šurpu*, "burning" (see below, section 6, and p. 198, n. 42). This series is directed against the "ban" (*māmītu*) which separates one from the deity. In Tablets II and III are listed two hundred behaviors and omissions considered as sins; these include speaking differently than one thinks, engendering discord in the family, neglecting a naked person, killing animals unnecessarily, and many other things. Whoever judges himself by these confession-like enumerations and the many omens (see above, XI.5) cannot help but recognize that he daily makes himself guilty. One can only rightly conclude from this that the recognition of the sinfulness of all people grew out of this system. "Who has not sinned, who has not transgressed?" asks one penitent. Even unconscious and unrecognized sins, as well as those of one's ancestors, could weigh the individual down. If the gods would not forgive the penitent, that person was beyond help.

The gods did not always forgive, but punished also, in order to show that they were serious about their demands. The normal belief, like that in Israel, was that a proportional relationship existed between the suffering of a person and the weight of the sin; thus, the person who strove to maintain his or her integrity had to fare better than the evildoer. At the same time, one had to recognize that this notion did not always correspond to reality, that is, that the wicked often fared better than the righteous. The religions that hold to a belief in life after death reckon in such cases with a just settlement after death, on the basis of a judgment of the dead, as for example in Egypt. The dreariness of the underworld in which the Babylonians believed, however, allowed little hope for a better fate after death for those who had to suffer on earth. This was especially true since the oft-mentioned judges of the underworld apparently could only penalize the wicked with additional pain. By way of comparison, only the author of the Sumerian myth "Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the Underworld" (which is appended as Tablet XII of the Babylonian translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh; see below, XIII.3e) presents a more agreeable picture for some groups of dead, for instance, for the fathers of numerous children or those who

have fallen on the field of battle. Yet he can promise no liberation from the underworld. An even worse lot than the underworld befell the unburiel: they flew about as dead spirits and caused spiritual torment among the living.

Under these circumstances, one had to come to doubt the justice of the gods in the case of one who suffered without having committed grievous sin. This became even more true after about 1100, when for many Babylonians the solution provided by a true polytheism was no longer viable, namely that the sufferer had offended other gods by his appeal and because of their vexation had brought harm on himself. In the poem "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," the author goes beyond the injustice of the gods and raises the possibility that humans often cannot know what the deity actually requires of them; it might be that one is sometimes made ill precisely by that which one, in ignorance of the true will of the deity, holds to be particularly good. Such considerations, however, provide no actual help for those who suffer the most. Thus the question of theodicy remained for Babylonian religion ultimately as unresolved as it did for Job in the Bible. The only thing that helps is to submit oneself to the will of the deity, as it manifests itself in one's fate as a sufferer, and to petition for deliverance from suffering, even when these pleas are so seldom answered. A dialogue from the time around 800 (see below, XIII.4c) presents us with two friends. One of these defends the traditional view and the other calls it into question with complaints against the deity, but finally gives up and resigns himself to his fate.²²

The poems just mentioned were copied even in Assyria and in the later period in Babylonia, and thus are more than the expressions of solitary outsiders. As far as we know, no one ever got beyond these poems in considering the problem of the individual before God.

22. In addition to the works cited in n. 21 above, W. von Soden, "Das Fragen nach der Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Orient," *MDOG* 96 (1965): 41ff. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960), contains these texts.

5. Cults and Offerings: Priests, Temple Servants, Prophets

a. Overview: Sources

So extensive are the written sources for the temple cult that they still have scarcely been surveyed, yet they give insufficient information for many areas. Documents of all sorts, including letters after 2000, preserve a great deal of material concerning the variety and number of priests, prophets, and other members of the temple, and this material still has not been exhausted. Further very important sources are the dedicatory inscriptions of the kings and many genres of religious literature. Cultic rituals, on the other hand, are still very rare in the Old Babylonian period and are not extant in large numbers until the first millennium; the same is true of Assyria. To these sources must be added many works of sculpture, great and small, particularly from the third millennium, which present scenes of sacrifice, along with the results of archaeological excavations of all sorts of sanctuaries. The remains of sacrificial animals and grain offerings are likewise found quite frequently in excavations, but these have not yet been comprehensively edited. Only a few references to this type of evidence can be made here.²³

We are familiar with a great many details of the official cultus, set primarily in the great temples, but we know little of the basic ideas which were determinative for the cultic activities. One thing significant is that the deity had its second abode in the form of a statue in the temple or, in small sanctuaries, in the form of his symbol. Only a few were permitted to enter the inner sanctum as the holy of holies. The sacrifices served probably to provide food for the gods, who according to the myths ate just like humans. At all times a distinction was made between the normal daily or otherwise regular offerings and those instituted for particular occasions such as the great feasts, emergencies, or in celebration of joyful events. For such there was a rather abundant terminology. It is notable that animal sacrifices were brought on occasion as holocausts only in Assyria in the first millennium; otherwise, animal sacrifices were offered only for slaughter. Besides incense, oil and butter were the primary substances burned in the cult. Much specula-

23. Cf. G. Furlani, *Il sacrificio nelle religioni dei Semiti di Babilonia e Assiria* (Rome, 1932); F. Blome, *Die Opfermaterie in Babylonien und Israel* (Rome, 1934).

tion is found in the later cultic commentaries over the meaning of particular practices; but one may not conclude too much from these, not even for their time. Even on the various categories of priests and other temple personnel we are only inadequately informed.

b. The Cults in the Sumerian Period: *The Sacred Marriage*

From the fourth millennium, before the Sumerians' entry into the land, we know of nothing but smaller temples which offered only limited space for cultic activities, and these were only slightly accessible because they were situated on steep terraces. As early as the time of the invention of writing around 3000, high terraces with steeply scarped sides were erected for some temples. In addition, however, there stood in Uruk a great, single-story temple of immense proportions (up to 80 × 50 m.), decorated with mosaics. Such temples, along with other buildings, comprised much greater complexes. Here rituals may have taken place with great masses of people participating. We can infer from many illustrations that processions were held even on boats, and these were most likely the predecessors of the later New Year festival. Following this golden age, the temple installations became much more modest again, and occasionally even rather poor, a situation which certainly necessitated less extravagant cults. We can further draw many details from the documents, among them quite comprehensive lists of sacrifices. The carvings of the so-called drinking scenes repeatedly portray cultic meals, certainly with the frequent participation of the city prince, and often even with his wife. In many sacrificial rites, a priest had to come naked before the deity, perhaps to demonstrate thereby his complete purity.²⁴

Although all kinds of temple paraphernalia are left now, as, for example, incense stands, images of gods have only survived in isolated cases where they were not made of some valuable material. One custom was limited to the Early Dynastic period and is only rarely observed in the south. This was the practice whereby numerous men and women, and by

24. Cf. G. Selz, *Die Bankettszene . . . von der frühdynastischen bis zur Akkad-Zeit*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1983); A. Moortgat, *Frühe Bildkunst in Sumer* (Leipzig, 1935), pl. XI. For the temples, cf. E. Heinrich-U. Seidl, *Die Tempel und Heiligtümer im alten Mesopotamien*.

no means only the nobility, produced small stone figures of themselves in a praying position to be set on small benches along the walls of the elongated inner sanctum, so that these might always stand, or in some cases kneel, vicariously before the deity. Other miniatures show that there were cultic wrestling matches by which the otherwise naked wrestlers tried to bring one another to a fall by pulling by jerks on their belts.²⁵

There were numerous temple feasts as well as those which were observed monthly with particular sacrifices, such as the *èš-èš-day* (Akk. *eššèšum*). There were also yearly festivals at different times to which exceedingly great offerings were brought. Gudea of Lagash presents for us in minute detail the feast of a temple consecration. On this occasion, work was halted for several days and the privileges of the higher orders, such as the right of meting out punishments of workers were suspended (for the festal days). Thus all became equal before the divinity; they celebrated happily and let no strife break out. Music was a necessity on such occasions.²⁶ The opposite of such celebrations were the great temple laments occasioned by catastrophes, during which very long musical compositions were presented (see below, XIII.5b).

Something quite unique was the festival of the Sacred Marriage, which in all probability was celebrated in only some of the cities; this has already been touched upon in connection with the divinization of the king (see above, VI.2). The god Dumuzi, or Ama-ušumgal-anna, was able to escape the fate of remaining in the underworld only if his sister Belili declared herself ready to substitute for him there half the year. Contrary to repeated assertions, there was in fact a mourning ceremony with extensive singing for Dumuzi on the day when the demons took him down into the underworld in place of his wife Inanna (see below, XIII.3c). There was, however, no joyous feast on the occasion of his annual return, not even in the later Babylonian period when the Dumuzi laments continued to be celebrated, even though they no longer actually fit into the

25. Cf. J. Renger-U. Seidl, "Kultbild," *RLA VI* (1981): 307ff. Cf. the works cited in ch. XIV, n. 1, on the art of the ancient Orient, for various sacrificial scenes from the third millennium and the praying statues; for cultic wrestling matches, cf., e.g., E. Strommenger-M. Hirmer, *Fünf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien*, pl. 46, 48.

26. Cf. A. Falkenstein in Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich, 1953), 137ff.

27. Cf. A. Moortgat, *Tammuz: Der Unsterblichkeitsglaube in der alterorientalischen Bildkunst* (Berlin, 1949); T. Jacobsen, *Towards the Image of Tammuz*; S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969).

later cult.²⁷ This cultic celebration was concerned with the maintenance and restoration of the fertility of everyday life.

c. Ceremonial Worship in Babylonia

An evaluation of the essential features of the transitional Old Babylonian period is still not possible. The primary reasons for this are that (1) fragments of cultic rituals are as yet known only from Mari, and (2) the many reports in the Mari letters themselves have yet to be edited. Of interest is the growing importance of the symbols (*šurinnu*) of the gods, for example, the significance of the spade as the later symbol of Marduk in lesser cultic activities. The symbols, among them astral symbols, occur on more recent carvings in place of the deities.²⁸

The most important festival of several days' duration was the New Year's festival (*akītu*). In many cities and from early on this had been originally celebrated in the autumn, and later came to be observed in spring. Later copies preserve in detail rituals, primarily from Babylon and Uruk.²⁹ In the course of the *akītu*, the image of Marduk was brought in great procession, part of the way aboard a ship, into the ceremonial house for the New Year's festival outside the city wall. This action prevented the honor of the deity from being injured during the necessary annual purification of the temple. This purification was tied to rites of atonement in Babylon, which the king, as the representative of his land, had to take upon himself. At this time he received a powerful slap to his face which was recognized as expiatory only if it brought tears (presumably from the pain). Besides prayers and cultic songs, the Creation Epic was recited in honor of Marduk (see below, XIII.3b, c). There was also a procession of visitation which brought Nabû of Borsippa to his father in Babylon and back. The festival proceeded quite differently in Uruk (for Ashur, see p. 195, n. 34). Cultic commentaries provide strange interpretations for many particulars which in part have influenced even modern scholars, with the result that they have not properly

28. Cf. U. Seidl, "Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 4 (1968): 7-220.

29. Cf. F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens* (Paris, 1921), and further ritual fragments in newer text editions; S. A. Pallis, *The Babylonian akītu Festival* (Copenhagen, 1926).

appreciated the purificatory and expiatory character of the festival, in which large masses of people sometimes took part.

Cultic ceremonies were carried out primarily on the ground floor of temples, in the first millennium massive structures with many rooms in the great cities. In the same sacral precinct (*temenos*), or nearby, lay the ziqqurat — the high, terraced edifice of the city god, whose much smaller temple was elevated atop several massive steps. The greatest ziqqurat was that built for Marduk of Babylon, which was 91.5 m. in breadth, length, and height. No temples are preserved, although the description of that in Babylon mentions a great bed and cells for some other gods. Precisely which ceremonies could be carried out exclusively in the high temple is still not clear; but the highest platform of the ziqqurat was certainly not generally accessible.³⁰

Rites in which the priest of lament (*kaltu*; see below, section 5e) was central were borrowed from the Sumerian period. Of these, the rituals which are preserved are primarily from Uruk, and prescribe predominantly Sumerian songs. The many private ceremonies for the purpose of healing sickness and deliverance from other evils will be treated below (see pp. 199ff.), although these were by no means determined primarily by magic. Burial ceremonies apparently had no great significance. There are only a very few texts of such rites, and the items sealed in the graves were as a rule modest (see below, section 5d, on the substitute offering). One text makes a very unusual pronouncement concerning the generosity of the deity toward someone who had regularly offered and prayed: "You give him a small grain, then your profit is a talent." One talent contained approximately 648,000 "seeds," each one weighing $\frac{1}{22}$ g.³¹

d. Ceremonial Worship in Assyria: Substitutive Offerings and the Ceremony of the Substitute King

From the earliest period, a tradition of temple building existed in Assyria in which the division of rooms diverged from the Babylonian pattern

30. Cf. H. J. Lenzen, *Die Entwicklung der Zikurrat von ihren Anfängen bis zur Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur* (Leipzig, 1942); F. Wetzel-F. H. Weissbach, *Das Hauptheiligtum des Marduk in Babylon, Esagila und Etemenanki nach dem Ausgrabungsbefund, nach den keilschriftlichen Quellen* (Leipzig, 1938); Heinrich-Seidl.

31. Cf. W. von Soden, "Wie grosszügig kann ein babylonischer Gott schenken?" *ZA* 71 (1981): 107-8.

in many particulars. This divergence in part reflects different ceremonies. In Ashur there was, besides the main temple of Ashur with his ziqqurat, a double temple for Sin and Shamash as well, along with two smaller ziqqurats for Anu and Adad, an arrangement which completely departs from the usual practice. The written sources from the second millennium, however, do not contain much pertinent information, although they are abundant for the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Unfortunately, we have only an insufficient understanding of the important terminology from this period. Many deities often received sacrifice in the larger temples, although some of these even had their own temples. Contracts often required that the party breaking the contract lay an offering of penance on the knees of the deity; some contracts go so far as to demand the burning of one's own child before the god. At the same time, the child sacrifices attested for Syria-Palestine were not customary in Mesopotamia. We do not know whether such child sacrifices actually were presented.³²

In Assyria, outside of the temple ceremonies, substitution offerings, usually of lambs, kids, or suckling pigs, were probably presented more frequently than in Babylonia. These offerings were supposed to move the gods of the underworld to renounce their claims on the sick. Many rituals for substitutive sacrifices were composed bilingually or even in Sumerian alone. Related to the substitutive offering was a ceremony which, to our knowledge, was only rarely performed. This was the practice of installing a substitute king (Akk. *šar pūḫi*), normally for one hundred days; this substitute king was supposed to draw onto himself all of the particularly evil omens, along with all of their consequences, which were threatened in the omen texts. A chronicle reports on one particular case early in the Old Babylonian period. According to this account, Erra-imitti of Isin had a certain Enlil-bani installed as the substitute king; subsequently, however, Erra-imitti was scalded with hot broth and died, so that Enlil-bani now could become his successor. Nonetheless, the aim of this rite, even according to the testimony of a partially preserved ritual, could only be achieved if the substitute king freed the actual king from the burden of the omens through his own natural or otherwise induced death. Our most important sources for

32. Since child sacrifices were offered in Syro-Phoenicia under special circumstances, the Assyrians could have borrowed the ideas for such sacrifices from the West, since they are not otherwise attested in any texts.

this ceremony are the letters from the twelve regnal years of the great king Esarhaddon of Assyria (681-669), who held an especial belief in omens because of his sickness. Thus, he had a substitute king installed three times, each time having himself entitled "Mr. Farmer." One of the three substitutes died in a timely fashion; the two others had to be killed, and were then honored by a state burial. It is very strange that after 700 people were still (or again) of the opinion that one could divert the wrath of the gods onto any person whatsoever, just as if the gods would not see through the substitution.

In this matter, the ceremony presented a disguised human sacrifice; there may have been some parallels to this practice in ceremonies in ancient Asia Minor. The ritual of the substitute king affords particularly impressive evidence for the inner contradictions of the later ancient Oriental religions.³³

e. Priests and Cultic Personnel: Cultic Prophecy

The languages of the ancient Orient had an extremely rich vocabulary for priests and cultic personnel. However, in view of the scant informative value of a great majority of the textual attestations of cultic functionaries, our understanding of this terminology remains inadequate. Modern presentations often designate as priests even employees of the temple who only carried out auxiliary functions; included in this group were those who were allowed to enter the temple, to whom certain privileges were due in return for their various services (on the relationship of trade to such positions, see above, VI.4d). The most generic word for priest, used in Assyria as a royal title, was Sumerian *sanga*, or Akkadian *šangû*. The priests who comprised "colleges" in the great temples, and who also functioned as temple administrators, often included in their number overseers and chief priests; there is as yet no incontrovertible testimony for the position of a high priest. In Old Assyrian documents we find instead of *šangû* the *kumrum*. The purification rites which were so important in the Babylonian temples were carried out by special

33. The ritual of the substitute king is discussed, with extensive bibliography, by H. Kummel, *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König* (Wiesbaden, 1967), 169ff. Cf. also W. von Soden, *Religiose Unsicherheit, Säkularisierungstendenzen und Aberglaube zur Zeit der Sargoniden*, *Analecta Biblica* 12 (1959): 356ff.

priests such as the *išippu*, the *gudapsû*, and others. For offerings which did not require the shedding of blood, the "anointed" (*pašišu*) was frequently responsible. The *en*-priests and *en*-priestesses held an especially high rank down into the Old Babylonian period, and they played a leading role primarily in the ceremony of the Sacred Marriage (see above, section 5b). The *gala*-priests (> Akk. *kalû*) were particularly responsible for playing the cultic songs (see below, section 7) during the temple laments (see above, section 5b) and other ceremonies. The singer-priests (*zammeru*) held similar functions in the temples of Assyria, while the ever necessary musicians (*nāru*, *nārtu*) probably were not priests at all.³⁴

In the temple of Shamash in Sippar, and less often in other temples, numerous women served in functions that were only partially priestly. Because they were normally childless, these women were called *nadītum* ("the fallow-lying").³⁵ Aside from these, there were female cultic personnel, primarily in the temples of Ishtar, such as the one at Uruk. There, cultic prostitution and the employment of male homosexuals (Gk. *kinaidos*, Lat. *cinaedus*) played a considerable role, and admittedly one which was not always free of controversy.³⁶ Some of these were involved in rituals which employed obscene expressions. Prostitution was probably used in the fertility ceremonies.

The readers of liver offerings (see above, XI.5), the interpreters of dreams, as well as the so-called incanters (see below, XII.6), probably did not belong to the actual temple personnel. In the first millennium, dream interpreters could support themselves on comprehensive collections of dream omens (see above, XI.5; cf. also the biblical Daniel, whose stories presuppose just such a background).

Cultic prophecy such as the Old Testament attests for Syria-

34. Cf. B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1981), with bibliography and several texts; G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Assen, 1959); S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars*. AOAT 5/1-2 (1970-1982).

35. Cf. R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar, passim*. The *nadītum* had a special place in the rights of inheritance.

36. No comprehensive study is yet available. Inscriptions of the kings Merodach-baladan II and Nabonidus of Babylonia, as well as the Erra myth (see below, XIII.3c), contain references to a type of revolution in Uruk around 765, during the reign of the king Eriba-marduk. This revolution was not caused by social conditions alone, but rather was directed against the cultic practices of the temple of Eanna and the cult prostitutes there; it had only temporary success.

Palestine did not exist in Babylonia. There, as in Assyria and Asia Minor, the gods manifested their will to people through many kinds of portents. Nonetheless, we know two significant exceptions. In the first case, the Old Babylonian correspondence archive of Mari attests a type of cultic prophecy for Mesopotamia and parts of northern Syria. The prophet and prophetess, designated either as ecstasies (*maḥḥûm, maḥḥûtum*) or as respondents (*âpilum, âpiltum*), often did not belong to the temple personnel of the gods Adad and Dagan, but could instead be laypersons who primarily directed messages or exhortations, mostly concerning the cult or politics, to the king. Persons who were not previously known were tested by magical means regarding their credibility, but it was left up to the king whether he wanted to draw conclusions from the prophetic words. Resonances with biblical prophecy can occasionally be recognized, though in contrast to Israel ethical demands were scarcely uttered in the form of threatening speeches. One may suppose that in the cultic prophecy which the Old Testament condemns, extremely ancient Canaanite traditions lived on.³⁷

Cultic prophecy in Assyria after 700 was of a completely different type: here there were male "callers" (*raggimu*) and still more female "callers" (*raggimtu*) in the service of Mullissu of Ashur and Ishtar of Arbela; most of the sayings of the latter which were held to be significant were recorded in tablet collections. We have a partial knowledge of some of these from the time of Esarhaddon, often in colorful language. The sparse witnesses are insufficient for a proper description of the later prophets, whose predecessors are still unknown. It appears, however, that after 750 a prophetic movement that first became evident in Israel — cf. the prophet Amos of Judah! — temporarily swept great areas of Western Asia.³⁸

Certain so-called prophecies which stem from the first millennium and draw abundantly from the omen texts to comprise oracles of both

37. Since many pertinent Mari letters remain unpublished, no comprehensive study of cultic prophecy in Mesopotamia has yet been published for the period of the Mari kingdom. Cf. the preliminary study by F. Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel* (Herzberg, 1968); W. J. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica* 50 (1969): 15ff.; E. Noort, *Untersuchungen zum Götterbescheid in Mari*. AOAT 202 (1977); J.-M. Durand, *Les textes prophétiques*. Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1. Archives royales de Mari 261 (1988), 377-442.

38. The oracles of salvation, often preserved only in fragmentary form, and evidence of letters for the male and female "callers," have never been collected and comprehensively treated. Cf. attempts at translation by R. D. Biggs in *ANET*, 604ff.

judgment and salvation (for instance, for Babylon or Uruk) are only stylized as prophecy. Insofar as these contain concrete information, they are for the most part rightly classified as "prophecies after events," though in some cases they do inform us of particular problems.³⁹

f. Purification in the Cult and in Magic

Purification rites played a central role among all the rites in the ancient Orient. Their purpose was to dispose first of all of the manifold external pollutions, and in addition to these the inner impurities as well. These rites were just as necessary in the temple cultus as in private ceremonies and in the palace, but were especially critical in magic. The primary means of purification was water, using flowing waters wherever possible, and then other liquids and oil. Moreover, many kinds of plants and mineral substances were thought to bring purity. Often these had to be soaked in liquids and were applied externally or, in the case of the sick, internally. The rituals quite frequently use words meaning to purify (Akk. *ullulu; tēliltu*, "purification"), wash (*mesû; mis qātē*, "to wash the hands"), and bathe (*ramāku; rimku*, "a complete bath"). Many rituals of purification are collected in the tablet series *bīt rimki* ("bathing house") and, for those cases that demand a ritual exclusion, *bīt mēseri*, "house of exclusion."⁴⁰ Privacy very often is required, and in most cases very precise instructions are given, in order to ensure the complete purification of the "impure" who have been exposed to the demons.

The daily purification rites and the annual purification at the New Year festival (see above, section 5c) took place in the temples. The *išib* > *išippu*-priest is often designated as responsible for these purifications. The consecration of temples, the dedication of cultic paraphernalia for sacral use, and the erection of statues of the deities required special rites of purification. The latter required the "mouthwashing" (*ka-luḥ-ù-da, mis pi*) frequently demanded elsewhere and, in later rituals, the addi-

39. Cf. R. Borger, "Gott Marduk und Gott-König Šulgi als Propheten: Zwei prophetische Texte," *Bibliotheca orientalis* 28 (1971): 3ff. P. Höffken, "Heilzeitherrschererwartung im babylonischen Raum," *Die Welt des Orients* 9 (1977): 57ff.

40. For both series there are only partial editions, which in the meantime have been partially superseded by new fragments which have come to light. Cf. J. Laessle, *Studies on the Assyrian Ritual and Series bīt rimki* (Copenhagen, 1955). R. Borger is planning a complete edition, beginning with *bīt mēseri*.

tional rite of the "opening of the mouth" (*pīt pī*), without which the idol is only dead matter and, for example, "cannot smell." The "opening of the mouth" was also necessary after repairs to the image.⁴¹ Many aspects of the purification ceremonies, which played a major role in Assyria as well, are still in need of special investigation. The purification of persons who have sinned is a dominant theme of many prayers.

6. Magic, Demons, Evil Powers, Sorcery

There are two major forms of magic: black magic, which brings harm to people, and white magic, which seeks to turn away the harm caused by demons, malevolent powers, and humans. Black magic was practiced in many forms in the ancient Orient. Nevertheless, instructions for its practice were never written down (although the opposite is sometimes asserted), because a written record of the demons and persons involved could be used against the very one who had concocted the evil spell. Therefore, the massive amount of magical literature preserved in cuneiform texts addresses only white magic. Nevertheless, black magical activities are often described with great precision in the introduction to the white magical incantations. Thus we know rather precisely what forms of harmful sorcery the Sumerians and Babylonians believed themselves threatened by on a daily basis.⁴²

The languages of the ancient Orient know no collective term for "demon"; they employ either the word for "god" or designations of distinct groups of demons. The Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians used some words for demons individually, or in some cases for good genies who held stations comparable to an angel.⁴³ Thus, besides the evil

41. Cf. E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier*, I (Berlin, 1931), 100ff., with bibliography.

42. Cf., e.g., B. W. Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi* (Wiesbaden, 1977); also, the ritual tablets on the incantation series *Šurpu* — "Burning" — against spells (see above, p. 186, and E. Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* [Graz, 1958, repr. 1970]) and *Maqlû* (see below, n. 45), as well as many rituals cited in the texts in H. Hunger and E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk*. Magic is extensively treated in books on cultural history (see above, ch. I, n. 2) and religions (see above, n. 1). Magical texts have also been found in Ugarit.

43. Cf. R. C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia*, 2 vols. (New York, 1976).

udug demons, the Sumerians also knew a good *udug* (Akk. *utukku*), while in Akkadian *šēdu* could be both a protective spirit and a demon, and a *rābišu* could be a spy for both good and evil. Otherwise, the demons of the Sumerians, among whom *dimme* and the storm demon *lil* could be masculine and feminine, display little of their own profile; the majority of them, including the dead spirit (*gidim* > *eṭemmu*; see above, section 4), could be lumped together as the "evil seven." There were even special incantations against the "storm maiden" (*kisikil-lilla*; Akk. [*w*]ardat *lil*) and against *dimme*. As Lamashtu, the child-murdering demoness of the cradle fever, *dimme* became among the Babylonians and Assyrians the most colorful figure of the demons. Many amulets show her as a mixed-form creature with a lioness's head and hanging breasts. *Dimme* was combatted primarily with preventive rites and sympathetic magic.⁴⁴ It is already reported in an Old Assyrian incantation that she was the daughter of Anu, the god of the heavens. Because of her evil behavior, Anu threw her out of heaven and down to the earth. Of all demons it is said that neither doors nor geographical barriers can prevent their harmful activities, which spare not even the animals. Some, such as "those who decide fate" — the *nam-tar/namtaru* — are simultaneously demons of the underworld who attack even the dead. The Sumerians did not see the attacks of the demons as the penalty for sin. Among the Babylonians, however, one finds the idea that the gods have indeed given people over to the demons on account of their sins (see above, section 4). Thus, the Babylonians required prayers with pleas for the forgiveness of sins, as well as the magical rites which had largely been adopted from the Sumerians, for defense against demons and the nullification of the evil that they worked. Finally, the "spell" (see above, section 4) often becomes the personification of demons, along with many sicknesses.

In combatting the demons, the Sumerians refused to trust those magical rites carried out by humans. For the depiction of the evil activities of the demons, many incantations present a dialogue between the god Enki and his son Asalluḫi, who corresponds to Ea and Marduk in Akkadian texts. This dialogue follows an essentially stock format, in which the son requests help from the father against the demons, but receives the answer that the divine son can do the same as the father,

44. Cf. W. Farber, "Lamashtu," *RLA* VI (1983): 439ff.; also S. Lackenbacher, "Note sur l'ardat *lil*," *RA* 65 (1971): 119ff., with supplements by von Weiher, in Hunger-von Weiher, no. 7.

Ea (Enki). Individual instructions then follow the dialogue; these are hardly specialized and end with such established incantation formulas as "by heaven let it be sworn, by earth let it be sworn."⁴⁵

In addition to the invisible demons in the air were those people who, by means of black magical practices, sought to bring harm to their neighbors. The Sumerians called them *uš₁₁-zu*, "connoisseurs of slander" = Akk. *kaššāpu*, "warlocks," and *kaššaptu*, "witches"; before about 1000 only the latter are attested. The incantations and the prayers similarly employed were composed for the most part in Babylonian and are found mostly in the series *Maqlû*, "burning." Of course, it may not be extrapolated from the title of this series that witches and warlocks would have been burned; but besides the magical destruction of witch images, only burning belonged to the rites for warding off their spells. Only a fragment of a single letter indicates that certain women were accused of witchcraft, and we hear nothing of witch trials.⁴⁶

A priest, designated *lú-mumun* or *lú-maš-maš* by the Sumerians, (*w*)*āšipu(m)* or *mašmaššu* by the Babylonians, was responsible for reciting the Sumerian and Akkadian incantations and for carrying out the attendant rites. Since this same priest often recited prayers (see below), the translation "incantation priest" for this word is occasionally disputed today and replaced by "ritual technician."⁴⁷ Many rites, in fact, were not magically defined and consisted only of a sacrifice; in the case of the poor, a handful of meal sufficed. At any rate, one must keep in mind that not all rites fell to the designated priest, especially not the actual temple rites (for the prayers of the genre "lifting up the hands," used to designate incantations, see below, XIII.5c). No appropriate word exists which would properly characterize the activities of these men in the service of the individual. Many incanters were also physicians (see above, XI.8) and also prescribed medications. We learn important details about them, along with the names of known *āšipu*-priests, from the letters.⁴⁸

45. Cf. A. Falkenstein, *Die Haupttypen der sumerischen Beschwörung literarisch untersucht* (Leipzig, 1931); the bibliography now needs to be supplemented extensively. Editions of the most important bilingual incantation series are in preparation.

46. Cf. G. Meier, ed., *Die assyrische Beschwörungssammlung Maqlû*. *AfO Beiheft* 2 (Berlin, 1937); in addition, much supplementary material exists today; W. G. Lambert, "An Incantation of the *Maqlû* Type," *AfO* 18 (1958): 288ff.

47. Cf. W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"* (Rome, 1976), 59ff.

48. Cf. Parpola, *passim*.

Detailed studies are still lacking for the magical substances these men employed, such as plants, minerals, parts of animals, and liquids, as well as their preparation, since too much about the terminology is still unclear; important individual observations can be found in the secondary literature.⁴⁹

Many rituals had to do with the protection of those who suffer, and not with their healing, and among these the rites to assist birth are especially important. A mythical story, according to which the moon god Sin had stood by one of his sacral cows while she was giving birth, is frequently inserted into the rituals; therefore a woman might request his aid during a nocturnal birth.⁵⁰

7. Death and Burial

No one can outrun Death, for Death has a great lead on people: even the heroes of the primeval age had to experience this (see below, XIII.5d). When Death meets the individual, Fate makes the decision. All pray to the gods for a long life and that they may not thus have to die too early on account of their sins. To be sure, Death does not entirely extinguish the individual human: one continued to lead a shadow existence in the underworld.⁵¹ As a mortal could only live on through his or her children, this was constantly requested in prayer. A few, particularly kings, could also live on through the notoriety of their deeds. The word for the dead, Akk. *mītu*, could also be used for the sick who had been consecrated to death. One of the two words for body, *pagru*, designated the human corpse and the animal carcass.

49. Cf. Farber, *Beschwörungrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi*; and D. Goltz, *Studien zur altorientalischen und griechischen Heilkunde* (Wiesbaden, 1974); also R. C. Thompson, *A Dictionary of Assyrian Botany; A Dictionary of Assyrian Chemistry and Geology*.

50. A critical, comprehensive edition of these rituals and of the myth of the cow, which is preserved in several Sumerian and Akkadian recensions, is not yet available; cf. J. van Dijk, "Incantations accompagnant la naissance de l'homme," *Or* 44 (1975): 52ff. [Sumerian], with occasional bibliographic citations; W. G. Lambert, "A Middle Assyrian Medical Text," *Iraq* 31 (1969): 28ff. [Akkadian].

51. See above, section 4, with reference to the somewhat better fate of those who have fallen on the field of battle; see further the collection of lectures, *Death in Mesopotamia*, ed. B. Alster. *Mesopotamia* 8 (Copenhagen, 1980), which also discusses mortuary offerings. The killing of gods is spoken of in certain myths (see below, XIII.3b).

Since the unburied person had to float through the air as a dead spirit (see above, section 4), everything had to be done to lay the dead to rest (very often with his seal). The children and other relatives bore the primary obligation for this, and for bringing mortuary offerings (*ki-sè-ga/kispu*) for a period of time. Adopted children were bound by contract to this same service, and to mourning the dead.⁵² As has been mentioned already (see above, section 5c), the earthen graves were almost always simple, and the generally few votive offerings were supposed to help the dead into the underworld. Individual details of burial customs varied according to land and period, and one frequently finds double chamber graves. Stone sarcophagi are only rarely attested in Babylonia (see above, VI.2, for the "royal cemetery" of Ur); in Assyria these were somewhat more common, though primarily for the kings. Sarcophagi with sculpted reliefs in all probability appeared for the first time in Anatolia and Syria after the Hittite period.⁵³ Precious votive gifts laid in the graves, sometimes of gold, are attested for the third millennium in Babylonia (Ur and Kish), as well as in Asia Minor; in some cases these have remained intact, though most have been lost to grave robbers. The genre of the dirge is best known to us through the lament of Gilgamesh for his friend Enkidu, and professional singers of laments, both male and female, were often hired. On grave inscriptions, see below, p. 207, n. 3.

52. Cf. J. Bottéro, "Les morts et l'au-delà dans les rituels en accadien contre l'action des 'revenants,'" *ZA* 73 (1983): 153ff. There are no certain witnesses from Mesopotamia or Babylonia-Assyria for the practice of cremation, which was customary among the Hittites. Cf. E. Strommenger, B. Hrouda, and W. Orthmann, "Grab," "Grabbeigabe," "Grabgefäß," *RLA* III (1971): 581ff.

53. Monumental structures over graves comparable to the pyramids of Egypt are not attested even for kings. At the beginning of the second millennium, from Shulgi of Ur until before the time of Hammurabi, numerous kings were venerated as gods (see above, VI.2); sometimes these kings were even interred in the sanctuaries. The focus here is not on cults of the dead, but much is still disputed; cf. P. R. S. Moorey, "Where Did They Bury the Kings of the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur?" *Iraq* 46 (1984): 1ff.

CHAPTER XIII

Literature

1. Overview: Tablet Series; Prose and Poetry

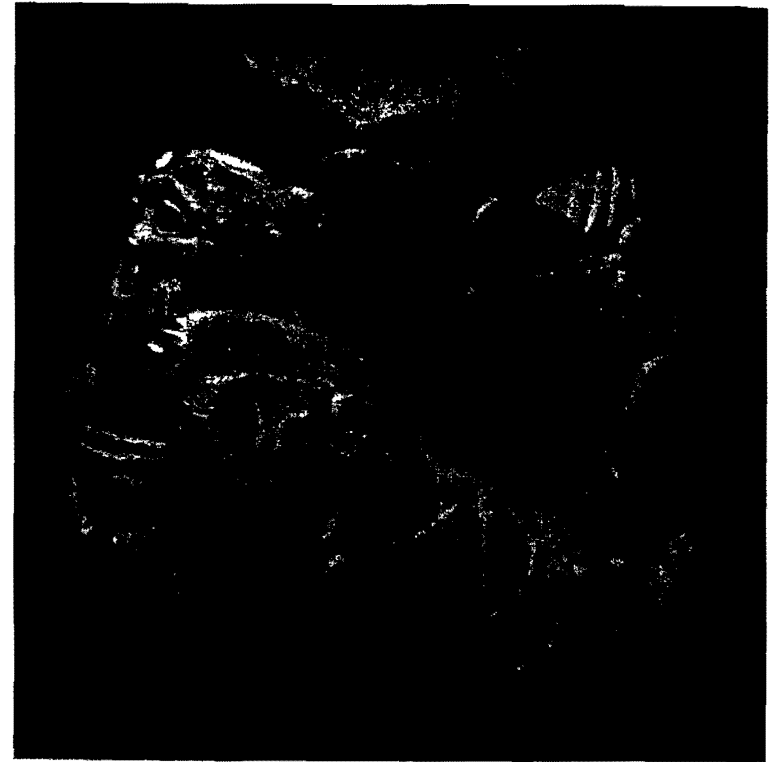
Literature is a narrower term than written material, and in the field of cuneiform therefore does not include the several hundred thousand letters and documents of all types. Within the area of literature in Babylonia and Assyria, the "scientific" writings, in the widest sense of the term, present the most comprehensive sector; this type of literature was discussed in depth in chapters XI and XII. Individual verses from poetic compositions are found primarily in commentaries, where they are quite often quoted and briefly explained (see above, XI.3). Prayers and incantations are often recorded in their entirety. More frequently, however, the beginning line is cited and must represent the missing title of a work.

Extensive poems, especially many myths and epics which could not be recorded on a single multi-column tablet, were spread over as many as twelve tablets and thus, at least formally, comprised series similar to the larger scientific works. The division into tablets was usually determined in advance. Since the end of a tablet always came at a break in the contents, only in exceptional cases did the partial tablets encompass the same amount of material. Shorter compositions, such as hymns and prayers, were not collected in series with a fixed number of tablets, but were only compiled on larger tablets from case to case. For the voluminous royal inscriptions, see below, section 2.

Literary works other than the royal inscriptions were composed predominantly in a stereotypical language in which the ends of lines

and verses usually coincided. Even today, we are in no position to distinguish with certainty between poetic and prose compositions, or to recognize in any reliable way prose sections in verse compositions. The attempt to analyze poetic rhythm in Sumerian poetic compositions is only in its inception, and we cannot tell whether this will ever meet with any success. We can do somewhat better with the Akkadian, even if the dominant assumption until now — that in Babylonian as in Hebrew poetry, it was always only a question of the number of accented syllables, since there was no basic principle governing the number of unaccented syllables between them — has not always proven to be true. Therefore, in order to recognize an actual rhythm we must first of all come to know the pronunciation and accentuation of individual words in the vernacular much more precisely than is now possible for us regarding the ancient Orient. Even with very careful study of the manner in which words and groups of words were written, we are often unable to get beyond working hypotheses which enable us to understand much, though not all, of the material. In all languages, even if in quite different degrees, words are shortened so that they can fit into the poetic rhythm. This is done either by omitting vowels or by adding emphasis through a clearer accentuation of open syllables with short vowels. Neither technique is always evident in written texts. On methodological grounds we do well if we reckon as little as possible with altered word forms and shifts in accents in the verses. At the same time, we cannot always determine how often we may do that, so that considerable room is left to our discretion. Thus many are of the opinion that attempts to recognize the poetic rhythm have too little chance of success to be significant. It is my view, however, that those chances are not so negligible and that the study of poetic form can contribute much to our understanding of the nuances of many expressions. Even in other fields of knowledge there is no way around assumptions which are not borne out later, and the correction of initial errors still yields much essential knowledge.

In a great portion of the Babylonian poems of the second millennium one can establish no quantitative meter by counting syllables over alternating verse lengths. According to our terminology, the iambic (˘-), trochaic (-˘), and amphibrachic (˘-) metrical feet alternate with one another in quite variant ways. The triptych predominates in narrative, while verses composed only in diptych lend particular emphasis to pronouncements. Two verses generally form a double-verse on the basis of what is usually an antithetical parallelism or, more rarely, a tauto-



Bearded man, possibly the Sumerian mythic hero Gilgamesh (3rd millennium), wrestling with two bulls. Limestone libation vase from Uruk. (*Trustees of the British Museum*)

logical parallelism. Without exception, the rhythmic and syntactical units are concealed by a trochaic conclusion. The strophes comprise four to twelve verses and only rarely more, or by counterstrophes only two. The verse structure of much later poetic compositions, such as the great Gilgamesh Epic and a great number of prayers, sharply departs from the older form, often in the preference for longer verses. In contrast to earlier works, there now appear to be as many as three unaccented syllables — or even none at all — between two accents. In addition, we must reckon with the possibility that, just as in many of our own songs,

the strength of the accents varied, especially in the quite popular musical delivery of poetry, and that the accentuation was often quite different from its merely spoken recital.¹

2. Royal Inscriptions

The inscriptions of kings and, less frequently, other functionaries can only be regarded as literature if they offer more than the very brief enumeration of building projects or campaign reports. The great mass of these are shorter or longer building inscriptions which sometimes also record dedications. Such inscriptions are introduced either through the designation of the god or gods for whom the building was built, and include hymnic attributes. They can also open with the self-introduction of the ruler, with brief or more extensive titles and the subsequent mention of the deities. Occasionally, an invocation of the god stands at the beginning. In the conclusion, blessings are quite often invoked for those who restore the edifice, and curses are called down upon those who neglect it. In more lengthy building inscriptions, the description of the building process itself as a literary form can go beyond the common format of the building report. Generally people were satisfied with an elevated prose using a somewhat freer word order, and in every case rhythmically metrical language can be found here and there. The inscriptions of the Chaldean kings offer particularly detailed building descriptions, in several cases with historical retrospectives. These inscriptions often replace the usual blessing and curse formulas with prayers to the god to whom the structure is commended.

The second major category of royal inscriptions, the reports of

1. Cf. W. von Soden, "Untersuchungen zur babylonischen Metrik, Teil I," *ZA* 71 (1981): 161ff., with references to earlier works by H. Zimmern and others; also "Teil II," *ZA* 74 (1985): 213ff. For bibliography, cf. the works cited in ch. I, n. 2; and ch. XII, n. 1, which treat the history of culture and religion; cf. also, e.g., J. Krecher, E. Reiner, "Sumerische . . . bzw. Die Akkadische Literatur," in *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft: Altorientalische Literaturen*, ed. W. Röllig (Wiesbaden, 1978), 101-210 (with bibliography); R. Labat, et al., *Les religions du Proche-Orient, textes et traditions sacrées* (Paris, 1970). *ANET*, 3rd ed., is the most comprehensive work to date. Literary texts are only rarely dated. On the basis of the writing (as long as not dealing with later transcriptions), language, and various other internal indicators, approximate datings are nonetheless frequently possible, though these are seldom exact.

wars and conquests, is found in Babylonia in only a minority of inscriptions. In the Sumerian period, for example, these come almost exclusively in the late Early Dynastic period, and particularly fully in the vulture stela of Eannatum of Lagash. Eighty to one hundred years later, Uruinimgina uses this medium to delineate his manifold social reforms instead. Conversely, the campaign reports in the Sumerian and, more frequently, in the Akkadian inscriptions of the great kings of Akkad from Sargon I to Naram-Sin are again extensive. In the Old Babylonian period only a few kings, among them those of Mari, give brief campaign reports. Hammurabi says in the poetic introduction to his law stela only what he later accomplished for the cities he had conquered; the curse formulas at the conclusion are unusually comprehensive. After 1500, we find campaign reports from only a few Babylonian kings, who describe particular actions. Normally, one was satisfied with very brief references to victories over enemies, but without supplying any names: the actions of the gods, and of the king on behalf of the gods, were supposed to be given the primary emphasis.² A unique text is the grave inscription which Nabonidus dedicated in 548 to his mother, Hadda-hoppe, who died at the age of 103. Here the mother herself speaks at length.³

From a literary standpoint, the Sumerian sacral and building inscriptions on the statues of the ruler Gudea of Lagash (see above, V.4) present an exceptional case. In these Gudea speaks of himself as "he," as was customary in Lagash even earlier, and he has adopted many expressions from religious texts. The great building hymn, recorded on two or three multi-column clay cylinders, is unique. It includes many theological reflections as well as a detailed account of the dedication festival following completion of construction of the temple. Little here has been borrowed from the usual building reports.⁴

2. Cf. D. O. Edzard and J. Renger, "Königsinschriften," *RLA* VI (1980): 59ff.; A. Schott, *Die Vergleiche in den akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1926); P. R. Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (626-539 a. Chr.), *I. AOAT* 4/1 (1973), 1-125; "Die literarische Gestalt der 'neubabylonischen' Königsinschriften."

3. Cf. C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *Anatolian Studies* 8 (1958): 35-92. His mother lauds her own piety before the moon god Sin; afterward Nabonidus depicts the funerary rites. The small number of grave inscriptions which are otherwise extant is treated by J. Bottéro, "Les inscriptions cunéiformes funéraires," in *La mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes*, ed. G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant (Cambridge, 1982), 373ff.

4. For the building hymn, cf. A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich, 1953); no more recent translation of the statuary

In Assyria, moreover, there are building inscriptions in which political themes are completely overlooked or resonate only on the periphery. The primary inscriptions of the conquering kings increasingly enlarged and elaborated the depiction of battles and conquests after about 1300, so that the building report often appears as no more than an appendix to the campaign reports. By the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the building report was often omitted completely, and several kings even tell of their hunting expeditions. The long inscriptions were most often written on great stone tablets or clay prisms, which could hold up to six, eight, or ten columns and as many as 1,300 lines. If we overlook some kings between 950 and 725 who mainly preferred a very dry style for their reports, the style of these inscriptions was highly polished and in some battle reports could even be gripping. Despite the many conventional formulations, various kings, particularly the Sargonids, revealed elements of a personal style (e.g., sometimes impressive portrayals of nature or technical details by Sennacherib). Frequently the campaigns were not ordered chronologically, but rather according to other criteria, such as geographical considerations or others less easily discernible. In special cases, extremely detailed initial reports of particular campaigns were composed for and dedicated to the god Ashur. These, too, were literarily demanding presentations.⁵ Occasionally the governors of larger provinces had inscriptions composed in the style of the royal inscriptions.

The royal inscriptions in other lands of the ancient Orient are to be distinguished from those of Assyria and Babylonia not only by their language, but in many respects by their structure and style as well. That is as true of the Hittite inscriptions as it is of those from Urartu, for the Elamite as well as for the often trilingual inscriptions of the Achaemenaeans, and for the Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions.⁶

inscriptions is available. For other Sumerian inscriptions, cf. E. Sollberger-J.-R. Kupper, *Inscriptions royales sumériennes et akkadiennes*, with bibliography.

5. Cf. R. Borger and W. Schramm, *Einleitung in die assyrischen Königsinschriften*, pts. 1-2 (Leiden, 1961-1973); Schott; A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden, 1972-; two volumes to date, still lacking the Sargonids).

6. No literary treatment of these groups of inscriptions is available yet.

3. Myths and Epics

a. Some General Questions: Historical Epics

Myths of the gods, which narrate stories of the gods and from which people could extract answers to important questions with respect to their own times, are often much older than the written versions of the myths. However, it is only rarely possible to draw more than speculative conclusions about the preliterate myths from the poetic accounts. Occasionally, remarkably original forms of the myths are briefly narrated in the context of other texts; but the bulk of poetic myths are reflective myths, which transformed the ancient mythic traditions according to certain basic themes and even enriched the earlier myths with new episodes. Most of the creation myths belong to this category. These are concerned not only with the creation of the world, life, and important implements, but also with the ordering of the world following often arduous struggles against the powers of a primeval chaos. Besides these myths there are also somewhat comprehensive poetic myths, which are tied to earlier traditions only in small part or not at all. These can be called "constructed myths," since the entire treatment has been constructed only loosely on the basis of earlier mythic poetry, and has been fleshed out using contemporary mythological schemata. In some cases impressive mythic poems could emerge through this process. It is not accidental, then, that the name of the author often appears in such poetic compositions, whereas the earlier poetic myths considered the author to be unimportant to the essential message and thus were unconcerned to name an author. In fact, anonymity is typical for the greatest portion of literature throughout ancient Mesopotamia.

In addition to those myths in which only gods and demons take part, there are those in which semi-divine heroes, or even humans, play important roles. In such myths, historical reminiscences continue to exist, at least to some degree. Not until after about 1400 did historical events — those of the distant past as well as those only a few years past — become the objects of epics with expressly political intent in Assyria and Babylonia. Small fragments are generally all that remain of these.⁷ We possess larger portions from a poem which concerns the events in the last years of the Kassite dynasties and which from a Babylonian

7. Cf. A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto, 1975).

perspective depicts and laments the horror ascribed to the Elamites.⁸ By contrast, an Assyrian poet of the thirteenth century sings in eight to nine hundred long verses of the great success of Tukulti-Ninurta I in his struggles against Babylonia. He wrings out victory with the help of the gods, who have been enraged by the crimes of the Babylonians. As in the great majority of the royal inscriptions from Assyria, the language is a dialect of Babylonian colored by Assyrian.⁹

b. Myths of Creation and the Ordering of the World: The Deluge

As far as we know, the Sumerians never treated the theme of the creation of the world in a great mythic poem. We do know their ideas from the introductions to dialogues concerning disputes in rank (see below, section 4b). According to these, the separation of heaven and earth took place at the very beginning. The further course of events involved differentiations. Thus people, who had originally lived as animals, became a special type of creature. Because there were the sick, the crippled, and the helpless elderly, one myth traces these back to a dispute over a contention between Enki and the mother goddess *Ninmah*.¹⁰

There are various ideas of creation and theology among Babylonian myths. The Old Babylonian myth of *Atrahasis*, which is associated with the name of *Nur-Ayya* as the author or scribe, offers the most carefully thought-out presentation. By the later period this myth had been transformed several times and even came to presuppose another myth of theology.¹¹ The myth of *Atrahasis* begins with the

8. Cf. A. Jeremias, "Die sogenannten Kedorlaomer-Texte," *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen-Ägyptischen Gesellschaft* 21 (1917): 69ff. (somewhat antiquated).

9. An edition of these has been announced by P. Machinist. For earlier partial editions, cf. W. G. Lambert, "Three Unpublished Fragments of the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic," *AfO* 18 (1957): 38ff.

10. Cf. C. A. Benito, "*Enki and Ninmah*," and "*Enki and the World Order*" (diss., Philadelphia, 1969).

11. Cf. W. G. Lambert, *Atra-ḥasis, the Babylonian Story of the Flood, with the Sumerian Flood Story by M. Civil* (Oxford, 1969); W. von Soden, "Die erste Tafel des altbabylonischen Atrahasis-Mythus, Haupttext und Parallelversionen," *ZA* 68 (1978): 50ff.; *idem*, "Konflikte und Ihre Bewältigung in babylonischen Schöpfungs- und Fluterzählungen: Mit Teil-Übersetzung des Atrahasis-Mythos," *MDOG* 111 (1979): 1ff.

words, "When the gods were [simultaneously] humans," in other words, when the types "god" and "human" had not yet been differentiated. At that time, the weaker group of gods, the *Igigi*, had to perform by themselves all of the works of irrigation and drainage which were necessary for life in Mesopotamia. They finally became tired of the work, went on strike, and threatened the ruling *Anunnaki*. Immediately before a struggle could break out, a solution was reached: it was agreed that humans should be created to do this work. Enki and the mother goddess then worked together to create the first human from a mixture of clay and the blood of a god, "who possessed the sense to plan." Rites of birth were then established. Twelve hundred years later, however, the humans had become too numerous and restless, and they had even acquired for themselves forbidden wisdom. Therefore, the gods decided to decimate them by pestilence and plagues. Enki (*Ea*) then advised the humans to withhold prayers and sacrifices from most of the gods, while turning only to one god in particular, so that he would hold the plagues in check. The god did this, but after twelve hundred years more the same thing recurred, and again a third time, with the same result.

At the summons of *Enlil*, the gods then came to the decision to exterminate humanity again, this time through the Deluge. The Sumerians already knew the myth of the Deluge, though the sole literary form of this of which we have even limited knowledge first emerged only in the Old Babylonian period, and was probably influenced by a Babylonian poem. The story in the *Atrahasis* myth agrees in the order of events, at some places even in wording, with the story of the Flood inserted into the *Gilgamesh Epic* some five hundred years later. According to both compositions, the god Enki (*Ea*) betrays the plan of the gods to a reed hut, in which *Atrahasis* (called *Utnapishti* in the *Gilgamesh Epic*) is sitting. As soon as this is done, the idea comes to this man to build a cube-shaped ark for his family and all species of animals, but he is not allowed to share the reason for his actions with his fellow humans. Then the masses of water break in upon the land from above and beneath; all life drowns, and only the ark is borne up on the waters, and finally lands on Mt. *Nisir* after the waters have receded. The gods are confounded by what they have caused, but they come to the sacrifice that *Atrahasis* offers. *Enlil*, who has caused the debacle, is at first wroth that some of the humans have been saved, but then desists and transfers *Atrahasis* (*Utnapishti*) and his wife to an island far to the west, where they enjoy life without death. The children of these two become the

progenitors of the new humanity, which will never again be given over to an extermination such as the Deluge. Hereafter, only the guilty shall be punished. The differentiation between gods and humans, with its fearful consequences, will now be superseded by a new, well-thought-out solution that is fair for all.¹²

The creation epic *Enuma Elish* ("When above") first appeared in the fourteenth century, and was designed to establish Marduk as king of the gods. A very brief theology stands at the beginning of this account. Tiamat, the goddess of the seawaters, is the first to rise from the primeval chaos with her husband Apsu, the god of the groundwater. Thereupon follow further generations of gods, just as in other ancient myths of theology. Anu, the god of the heavens, appears as the great-grandson of Tiamat and Apsu, and as the ancestor of other gods. After Anu comes Nudimmud (Ea) with his consort Damkina. Awakened by the younger gods, the old Apsu wants to kill them, but is himself killed by Nudimmud (Ea), who uses magic and erects his own palace upon the groundwaters. There the divine marvel-child Marduk is born, and by his riotousness he arouses the old Tiamat as well against the young gods. Tiamat then commissions her "paramour" Kingu to raise an army of all kinds of monsters against the gods. The young gods then turn to some older gods with a plea for help, but when these refuse, they turn to the young Marduk, who agrees, on the condition that they make him king of the gods. This happens and Marduk, using special weapons, kills the dragonlike Tiamat and takes Kingu prisoner. Then Marduk creates the heavens and the earth from the two halves of Tiamat's body and, following this, stars, plants, and other living things. Last of all, Marduk even creates humans from the blood of the rebel god Kingu and, as everyone knows, forces them to work for all time. After founding Babylon and its temple Esagila, the gods hold a victory celebration for themselves and exclaim in laudatory fashion the fifty names of Marduk; the epic gives an explanation for each of these which partially rests on an etymological wordplay. The great struggle between the gods is mitigated here: only three gods are killed, but after their deaths they are integrated into the new order of the world in various ways. This epic in seven

12. Since the child-murdering demon Pashittu (Lamashtu) is given her place in the order, some hold that the struggle against the possibility of the overpopulation of Babylonia is an essential motif of the poem; however, the idea of overpopulation is found nowhere else in this period.

tablets¹³ became the cult legend recited every year at the New Year festival in Babylon (see above, XII.5c). The Assyrians under Sennacherib substituted Ashur for Marduk in the epic. Berossus later propagated a reshaped version of the epic in his Greek *Babyloniaka* (about 300).¹⁴ Direct influences of the Babylonian creation epic on the biblical account of creation cannot be discerned.

c. Clashes and Struggles between Gods

A few references must suffice for myths in this category, which deal with struggles against powers which are at enmity with the created order. Among these, the Sumerians and Babylonians counted the tales of the mythic eagle Anzu. This figure once stole from the gods the tablets of destiny, which are indispensable for their rule, and was then met in combat by the battle gods Zababa or Ninurta, where Anzu was killed.¹⁵ Not adopted by the Babylonians were certain myths in which the great gods appear in somewhat too negative a role. To these belong the myth of "Enlil and Ninlil." According to this story, the young Enlil seeks out Ninlil as she bathes, lies with her, and begets the moon god Su'en. Because Enlil has now become "unclean," though not for moral reasons, the great gods banish him from Nippur. He nonetheless lies with Ninlil three more times in various disguises and thus begets more gods. The accompanying liturgy simultaneously pronounces Enlil as lord.¹⁶

According to the myth "Inanna and Enki," Inanna robs the

13. There is no edition of the epic based on all extant textual witnesses; the translation of E. A. Speiser and A. K. Grayson in *ANET*, however, takes almost all of them into account (pp. 60-72, 501-3). It is also possible that Tablet VII did not belong to the original stock of the epic.

14. Cf. P. Schnabel, *Berosos und die babylonisch-hellenistische Literatur* (Leipzig, 1923); S. M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossos* (Malibu, 1978), including a translation.

15. Cf. B. Hruška, *Der Mythenadler Anzu in Literatur und Vorstellung des alten Mesopotamien* (Budapest, 1975); W. W. Hallo and W. L. Moran, "The First Tablet of the SB-Recension of the Anzu-Myth," *JCS* 31 (1979): 65ff. The name of the demon was earlier read as Zū.

16. Cf. H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil, ein sumerischer Mythos aus Nippur* (Rome, 1978); S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (New York, 1961), 43-47. The relation of Enlil to Ninlil is treated by another, no doubt later, myth in a completely different fashion and not so offensively.

drunken Enki of the strength of his *me* (see above, XII.2) and then flees to Uruk (Unug). Enki sends demons after her to bring back the *me*, but without success. Finally, he himself comes to Uruk and gets back the *me*, thanks to the mediating action of Enlil.¹⁷ Inanna also seeks to seize another's property in the myth "Inanna's Descent into the Underworld," which was translated into Akkadian in abbreviated form. As she passes through each of the seven successive gates of the underworld, the goddess must one by one lay aside all of her divine vestments and garments until she comes to stand, naked and defenseless, before her sister Ereshkigal, the ruler of the underworld, who imprisons Inanna in her realm. Since all fertility ceases on earth as a consequence, Inanna's lady-in-waiting Ninshubur, after numerous vain attempts, finally succeeds in getting Inanna to leave the underworld on the condition that someone else takes her place there. This substitute turns out to be Dumuzi (see above, XII.5b).¹⁸

A later Babylonian myth is found in two versions which diverge from one another. This myth is meant to explain why the god of the planet Mars, Nergal or Erra, at one and the same time is god of the heavens and of the underworld. According to the earlier version, Ereshkigal, the ruler of the underworld, demanded that the heavenly assembly of the gods send Nergal down to her realm, on account of his improper treatment of her messenger. Have entered the underworld, Nergal then overpowers Ereshkigal and thus, as her husband, becomes king of the underworld; at the same time he retains his place in heaven.¹⁹

One myth concerning an epic struggle of a particular sort is *Lugal u[d] melam-bi nergal* ("The King, the Radiance, whose Gaze is Princely"). This myth begins by hymnically presenting Ninurta, the god of Sirius, and his dangerous enemy, the great demon Asag, who has engendered a huge number of different stones. Asag subjugates ever more lands to himself, so that Ninurta becomes furious and, against the

17. Cf. D. Wolkstein and S. N. Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York, 1983), 11-27; G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki"* (Rome, 1973).

18. For the Sumerian version, cf. S. N. Kramer, *JCS* 5 (1951): 1ff., and *ANET*, 52-57. The Akkadian version is extant in two recensions, and was probably composed by Sin-leqe-unnini, the author of the Gilgamesh Epic; cf. R. Borger, *Babylonisch-Assyrische Lesestücke*, 2nd ed. (Rome, 1979), 95ff., with bibliography. For the translation, see E. A. Speiser, *ANET*, 106-9; Wolkstein-Kramer, 51-89.

19. Cf. E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal*. AOAT 11 (1971): 48ff.; H. Hunger-E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk*, no. 1.

warning of his divine weapon Shar-ur, attacks. Against Asag's colossal power, however, he can do nothing and is defeated. Despite renewed warnings from Shar-ur, Ninurta attacks again and likewise fails, but is saved by Shar-ur. Shar-ur warns Ninurta a third time, but this time Ninurta defeats the demon, rests, and then celebrates his victory. Now transpires the great judgment on the stones, the offspring of Asag: those who fought on the side of Asag are condemned to lowly service, for example as grinding stones. The others (either thirty or thirty-two out of forty-nine) receive the right to be made into statues and other valuable objects. The god then returns to Nippur. Blessings for the king (originally Gudea of Lagash?), along with doxologies, stand at the end of the 729 verses.²⁰ Another myth sings primarily of Ninurta's return to Nippur following a great victory.²¹

d. Heroic Sumerian Myths:

Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh

The heroic myths of Sumer are woven primarily around the early dynastic kings of Uruk, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh (earlier Bilgamesh), who were later divinized. The poetic myths about Enmerkar and his son Lugalbanda focus on conflicts between the kings of Uruk and of central Iran and the city Aratta. In the Enmerkar myth, Inanna comes to the aid of her king against Aratta when she brings the enemy land into dire straits by causing a drought. The Anzu bird, here portrayed as a good demon, plays a considerable role in both of the Lugalbanda poems. Parts of these epics were provided even later with inter-linear translations into Akkadian.²²

Gilgamesh stands at the focal point of five Sumerian poems. One of these, "Gilgamesh and Agga of Kish," is apparently based on historical events: Agga had besieged Uruk and had gained recognition for his

20. Cf. J. van Dijk, *Lugal ud me-lám-bi nir-gál: Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création*, I-II (Leiden, 1983); part III is forthcoming.

21. Cf. J. S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: an-gim dim-ma*. AnOr 52 (1978).

22. Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (Philadelphia, 1952); C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos* (Wiesbaden, 1969); the second Lugalbanda poem has still not been completely edited.

sovereignty without a battle.²³ The other poems are concerned with the search for eternal life and fame through deeds; in these one finds, besides Gilgamesh, his retainer Enkidu. "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living" portrays the campaign of the heroes with fifty men against Ħuwawa (elsewhere Ħumbaba), the demonic guard of the cedar forest. In spite of Ħuwawa's pleas for mercy, he is killed with the help of the sun god Utu. "Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven" is poorly preserved, but no doubt had an end similar to the same episode in the Babylonian epic. "Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Underworld" narrates how Gilgamesh lost certain important objects, and then had Enkidu retrieve them from the underworld. However, since Enkidu despised the taboos of the underworld despite repeated warnings, he was not allowed to return. This poem was added to the Babylonian epic in translation. The Babylonian epic, however, did not adopt the badly preserved myth, "The Death of Gilgamesh," according to which the hero was accepted after his death as one of the gods of the underworld.²⁴

e. Babylonian Myths of Those Who Searched for Eternal Life: Gilgamesh, Etana, Adapa

The sagas about Gilgamesh still had not been compiled into a single Akkadian poem during the Old Babylonian period; yet the extant epics from that time, although they are only preserved incompletely, do show a completely new impress in comparison with the earlier form. After 1400, there were in Syria-Palestine and Asia Minor Babylonian, Hittite, and Hurrian versions of the Gilgamesh poem. On the basis of the meager remains of these versions we can conclude that they represent very free imitations of the original Babylonian forms.²⁵ Then around

23. Cf. W. H. P. Römer, *Das sumerische Kurzepos "Gilgames und Akka."* AOAT 209/1 (1980).

24. Cf. A. Falkenstein, "Gilgames A," *RLA* III (1969): 357ff. A. Shaffer is preparing a comprehensive edition of the Sumerian Gilgamesh poem; part is included in Shaffer, *Sumerian Sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgamesh* (diss., Philadelphia, 1963). Cf. partial translations by S. N. Kramer, *ANET*, 50-52; for the pertinent literature until 1974, see *HKL* III: 60-61.

25. Cf. F. M. T. de Liagre Böhl and H. Otten, "Gilgames B.C.," *RLA* III (1968): 364ff. A Hurrian-Hittite bilingual text was recently found at Hattusas. Cf. H. A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths* (Atlanta, 1990).

1100, a person listed as Sin-leqe-unnini of Uruk composed the twelve-tablet epic of about three thousand verses as the most fully developed form of the material. Nevertheless, the scribes of the first millennium did not hand on this text without alteration in every detail.²⁶

The epic begins by praising the 9.5 km. city wall of Uruk, for whose construction Gilgamesh had imposed upon the inhabitants a heavy burden of forced labor. In order to hold this hero in check, the gods created as his counterpart the wild man Enkidu, who grew up among the wild animals but was led to Uruk by a cult prostitute, where he immediately confronted Gilgamesh. The struggle between these two ended with Gilgamesh and Enkidu declaring their mutual friendship and together planning and undertaking the battle against Ħuwawa (Ħumbaba) in the cedar forest (see above). After a long, difficult trek, and with the help of Shamash, they were victorious. Upon their return, Ishtar offered Gilgamesh her love, which he bluntly rejected with reference to her behavior toward earlier lovers. Ishtar then pleaded with her father Anu that she might have the Bull of Heaven in order to avenge herself. The Bull plunged many men in Uruk into deep pits with his snorting, but was then killed by the two friends. During the victory celebration Enkidu insulted the goddess so grievously that the gods ordered his death. The premonition of death, final illness, and the actual death of Enkidu are narrated along with the insertion of many dreams, which are presented in detail along with their interpretations, just as in the expedition against Ħumbaba. Likewise, there is the dreadful pain of Gilgamesh, who is unable to save his friend.

Now Gilgamesh himself experiences the anxiety of death and sets out to the far west, to learn from Utnapishti, the hero of the Deluge (see above, section 3b), how he might escape death. The journey, which ran underground in some stretches, led him to the kindly pair of scorpion people, the ale-wife Siduri and the ferryman Urshanabi. They are

26. A translation of the barely preserved parts of the later epic and the most important Old Babylonian poems, with bibliographical information, introduction, and summary of the contents of the Sumerian poem, is given by A. Schott and W. von Soden, "Das Gilgamesch-Epos," *Reclams UB* 7235 (Stuttgart, 1982). Current editions of the twelve-tablet epic need supplementation and incorrectly arrange many of the fragments of the poorly preserved Tablets III-V and VII (most recently, R. C. Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* [Oxford, 1930]). Cf. also E. A. Speiser and A. K. Grayson in *ANET*, 72-99, 503-7; H. Schmökel, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos* (Stuttgart, 1966); K. Oberhuber, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos* (Darmstadt, 1977), a collection of essays in the series *Wege der Forschung*; J. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia, 1982).

good to Gilgamesh, and Urshanabi brings him across the waters of death despite the ban. These meetings are portrayed in detail, with much repetition. Utnapishti relates to Gilgamesh the story of the Deluge, after which the gods gave him the gift of life without death. When Gilgamesh fails a test of sleep, Utnapishti advises him to retrieve the herbs of life from the bottom of the sea. Gilgamesh does that and starts back, but along the way he carelessly allows a serpent to steal the herbs of life, whereupon the serpent immediately sheds his skin. At this point, all becomes futile; Gilgamesh resignedly returns to Uruk, and on his arrival proudly shows the city walls to Urshanabi, who must ferry him back to mortal humanity in accordance with the ban. The epic adds as the twelfth and final tablet the translation of the Sumerian poem of "Enkidu and the Underworld," which gives a completely different portrayal of the death of Enkidu from that in Tablet VII.²⁷

The Gilgamesh Epic has become one of the great works of world literature by virtue of its unique style of composition, by which the greater human concerns (e.g., the friendship between males) are given repeated expression. Members of lowly professions, moreover, such as prostitutes and ale-wives, appear as representatives of a special degree of humanity. Over long stretches of the epic, the time-bound elements recede almost entirely from view.

A myth about Etana also deals with the search for life, though it is only preserved in incomplete form in some Old Babylonian and later versions. Etana, the first king after the Flood whom the gods set on the throne of Kish, was without a son. At this point, a fablelike story of an eagle and a serpent is inserted. These two become friends and swear themselves to mutual help. Both have young and always care for the offspring of the other. But one day, the eagle takes advantage of the serpent's absence to devour that creature's young, despite the warning by its own offspring about the vengeance of Shamash. The serpent complains to Shamash about its misfortune and is advised to hide itself in a great carcass in the mountains in order to punish the eagle when it comes to devour. What transpires is this: the serpent rips the eagle's wing off and hurls the bird into a pit, where it begins to starve. The eagle then cries out daily to Shamash, pleading for forgiveness and

27. The reason for this, besides the attainment of a total number of twelve, was no doubt that with Tablet XII the inescapability of the fate of death is brought to the fore once more and a connection with human guilt is established.

deliverance. Shamash then commands Etana to go and pull the eagle out and nurse it back to health. Etana does this and then asks Shamash to show him the "plant of birth" (so that Etana may have a son). In spite of Etana's prayers, the eagle cannot fulfill his plea but is prepared to carry the king up to heaven on his back, so that he can receive eternal life there. They fly up to the second heaven, but Etana then becomes dizzy, and both crash. This myth proves impressively the ethos of prayer as a determinative power for humans and animals.²⁸

The myth of Adapa of Eridu shows humorous features. Adapa breaks a wing of the southern storm, who had spoiled his fishing; he is therefore cited for punishment before the god Anu. Ea then advises Adapa not to accept any offer of Anu. Anu, however, who not always lacks in understanding for people, experiences compassion for the poor sinner, and instead of the food of death, offers him the food of life. Adapa, however, rejects this and so forfeits for himself life without death.²⁹

f. Constructed Myths

Constructed myths (see above, section 3a) are known primarily from the eighth and seventh centuries. Among these, the myth of the god of pestilence, Erra, assumes a special rank. Composed by Kabt-ilani-Marduk between the end of 765 and the beginning of 763, as is evident from some historical references, these five tablets were claimed by the author to have been revealed by verbal inspiration in a single night. They were copied in Assyria, although the slant is clearly pro-Babylonian.³⁰ According to the plot, which was freely invented by the poet, Erra, along with the warring demons created for him by Anu and designated "the seven," is aroused after a long period of rest by his vizier, Ishum. The demons call him to take renewed action against humanity, which has again become restless, and to decimate them and their livestock. Since Marduk is the king of the gods for Babylonia, Erra must first of all move Marduk to relinquish to him his dominion for a time.

28. Cf. J. V. Kinnier-Wilson, *The Legend of Etana* (Warminster, 1985); E. A. Speiser and A. K. Grayson, *ANET*, 114-18, 517.

29. Cf. S. A. Picchioni, *Il poemetto di Adapa* (Budapest, 1981); E. A. Speiser, *ANET*, 101-3. The beginning and end of the poem, which was first attested in the Amarna period, are missing.

30. Cf. L. Cagni, *The Poem of Erra* (Malibu, 1977).

As it appears — the text is broken at this point — Marduk withdraws to be with Ea in his groundwater palace; Erra can now instruct other gods (such as Shamash, Sin, and Adad) to withhold their gifts from people as well. Among the humans, “every man is against his brother,” even in the family, and many are lost to drought and the heavy fighting. In Tablet IV, Ishtum shows Erra in detail all that has transpired, and thereby moves him to restraint; in the future, such catastrophes should befall only the enemies of Babylon, such as Assyria and Elam. Marduk’s return is never mentioned; the last that is reported of him is his lament over the fate of his city, Babylon. The poem is obviously rich in contemporary features that we can only partly understand, although it contains many literary reminiscences as well. Much in the long discourses of the gods remains obscure to us. The pompous style, which so sharply deviates from the earlier epics, shows that this myth was not composed for presentation at a temple festival.

The political slant of some myths from Assyria is even more obviously massive. On account of his unpopular war of extermination against Babylon, Sennacherib commissioned some theologians with the task of producing a myth which would have as its focal point a divine legal proceeding against Marduk, who would be found guilty. This myth would then be the subject of a cultic presentation. All that survives of this work is fragments of a commentary, and these appear to have interpreted the individual actions for use in the rituals of the New Year festival. The text, composed in Assyrian, has incorrectly been taken as evidence of an actual passion myth.³¹ Assyrian commentaries interpret still other, often absurd mythic constructions from that country.

Under Sennacherib’s successor, the nationalist party in Assyria concerned itself with the struggle against pro-Babylonian groups at the royal court, and with drawing crown prince Ashurbanipal over to their side. To this end, they employed a constructed myth of the vision of the underworld by a crown prince under the pseudonym of Kummā. The first part, unfortunately, is only poorly preserved. Later Kummā sees in a dream the gods and demons of the underworld from theological tradition, and is led before the god Nergal. The model behavior of

31. Cf. W. von Soden, “Gibt es ein Zeugnis dafür, dass die Babylonier an die Wiederauferstehung Marduks geglaubt haben?” *ZA* 51 (1955): 130ff.; supplement, *ZA* 52 (1957): 224ff. Conversely, but in my view incorrect, L. Cagni, “Misteri a Babilonia? Esempi della tematica del ‘dio in vicenda’ nell’antica Mesopotamia,” in *La Soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’impero romano*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden, 1982), 565ff.

Sennacherib is displayed to him, and Kummā is given a harsh warning and sent back to earth.³² This myth also shows that belief in the gods was often degraded into a purely political measure.

4. Wisdom Literature and Humorous Poetry

a. *The Literary Term “Wisdom”*

In direct dependence upon the Hebrew word *ḥokmā*, “wisdom,” theologians have coined the term “Wisdom Literature” as a collective designation for works with predominantly moralistic and didactic purposes, ranging from collections of proverbs and religious stories to the animal fables and dialogues of Babylonia. In many of these texts, humor also comes to the fore as more than simply a brief, relaxing element. Texts of this sort were not compiled into larger works.³³

b. *Composition and Collections of Sayings*

For the most part, sayings and jokes are passed on orally everywhere. Many are tied to a particular period and thus are quickly forgotten; others, however, express something that is universally human, and these are often passed from people to people. In Babylonia, the Sumerians were the first to compile larger collections of sayings, which are preserved mostly in transcriptions of the Old Babylonian period. Many of these sayings are difficult to understand, and their interpretation is therefore disputed. Included among the sayings are animal fables. The themes are manifold and various: they comprise the personal, as well as the social and the religio-cultic realms. More than a few sayings and jokes are richly elaborated and are in all likelihood only the products of scribal schools.³⁴

The Babylonians adopted only a portion of the Sumerian collec-

32. Cf. W. von Soden, “Die Unterweltsvision eines assyrischen Kronprinzen,” *ZA* 43 (1936): 1-31; E. A. Speiser, *ANET*, 109-110.

33. Cf. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Today, several of the texts can be restored better.

34. Cf. E. I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 1959); for additional collections of Sumerian sayings, see R. Borger, *HKL* I: 163; II: 88-89.

tions and passed them on in Akkadian translation. Larger collections of purely Akkadian proverbs are unknown. It is said of an informant: "A scorpion stung a human, what profit did he get from it? An informant brought someone to his death; what advantage did he get?" In a smaller collection of humorous short stories from Assyria, one finds similarities with Arabic short stories. These are often quite well formulated. They frequently contain only a few lines and include many brief fables, as well as human anecdotes which warn against perverse behavior. Sayings are occasionally quoted in letters, and in a few cases there are references to riddles, though we have no collection of riddles.³⁵

c. Dialogic Controversies and Animal Fables

The dialogic controversy between two partners was one of the most polished genres of Sumerian literature. In it, the respective parties stress the merits of their own arguments while denigrating those of the other. Since the partners cannot agree, a god is called upon, or in some cases a king, who should conclusively establish who has the advantage. It does not seem to happen that both partners are recognized simultaneously to be right to the same degree. The dialogue partners can be gods or humans, as for example the shepherd represented by Dumuzi and a farmer, or the (scribe)-father and his son, and even the annual seasons summer and winter, the sheep and the barley, the sickle and the plow, and many others. In every case the controversy must concern the order of the world and also be relevant to humanity: that is, it must present more than a trivial issue. Most of the mythic introductions which precede these dialogues point to the same thing; they draw one's attention back to the creation of the world. Occasionally the behavior of one of the partners resolves the controversy, as for example in the dispute between the heron and the turtle, when the turtle devours the heron's nest of eggs; unfortunately, the conclusion to this dialogue has not been preserved. In a departure from the pattern of the fables, the animals in the dialogues of controversy do not represent people.³⁶

35. Cf. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 150ff., with texts of quite distinct types.

36. Cf., e.g., G. B. Gragg, "The Fable of the Heron and the Turtle," *AfO* 24 (1973): 51ff.; J. A. van Dijk, *La sagesse sumero-accadienne* (Leiden, 1953); cf. also *HKL* III: 84.

As already mentioned, the concisely formulated animal fables constitute a portion of the aphoristic literature in which the behavior of animals occupies a very wide space. The few comprehensive compositions in the Akkadian language occur only in the tradition of the dialogues of controversy, as, for example, the dispute between the ox and the horse. Occasionally there are several disputants, such as a fox, wolf, hound, and lion. Plants such as the Euphrates poplar, the dogwood, the tamarisk, and the date palm also serve as important dialogue partners for humans, along with emmer and wheat. In later texts, the dialogues of controversy are more animated and less bound by pattern.³⁷

Another form of dialogue is represented by the dialogue between two friends concerning divine justice, which was briefly discussed above (see above, XII.4). This richly elaborated form allows no deity to mediate this ample display of speeches and counter-speeches, showing liberal application of theological erudition.³⁸ In a thematically related dispute from the Old Babylonian period, the case was different: there the deity himself spoke at the end, promised the sufferer his help, and exhorted him: "Anoint him whose skin is parched; feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty!"³⁹

Finally, the dialogue form is satirized in a later conversation between a lord and his slave, in which the lord always says what he wants to do and the slave responds by praising him. The lord then states the opposite, and again receives praise, this time with supporting argumentation. When the lord finally says that he wants to kill the slave, the slave responds quick-wittedly: "My lord will survive me by no more than three days!"⁴⁰

d. Humorous Stories

The few stories of this type which we know from the Sumerians belong for the most part to the composition *É-dub-ba* (House of Tablets), which has not yet been published in its entirety. This composition concerns

37. Cf. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*.

38. Cf. *ibid.*, 63ff.; R. D. Biggs, *ANET*, 601-4.

39. Cf. J. Nougayrol, "Une version ancienne du 'Juste Souffrant,'" *Revue biblique* 59 (1952): 239ff.; W. von Soden, "Das Fragen nach der Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Orient," *MDOG* 96 (1965): 41ff.

40. Cf. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 143ff.

the school of that time. One fragment depicts the daily life of a pupil, both at school and at home, in the form of a conversation, then briefly describes a dismal day in his life during the course of which he is beaten seven times for various reasons. Consequently, the father invites the teacher home for supper and gives him a gift in the bargain; afterwards, the black sheep of the family becomes a model pupil.⁴¹ Some texts which deal with the methods of summoning and examining have come down to us in bilingual form. These instruct not aridly, but often humorously in the form of discourse and counterdiscourse by teacher and pupil. Another passage presents us with a father's conversation with his son, in which the father repeatedly holds up the son's refractory behavior and his slovenliness, at the same time holding up his own claim to have always been especially careful.⁴²

A Babylonian story which is completely unique for its time, about 1100, deals with the case of the impoverished Gimil-Ninurta, who out of desperation gives his only possession, a goat, to the mayor of Nippur in the hope of receiving a commensurate gift in return. The mayor, however, contemptuously dismisses the man after giving him a mug of beer. As Gimil-Ninurta is leaving, he tells the gatekeeper that he will avenge himself three times, and requests as the first item an elegant chariot from the king. With this, he drives forth as the commissioner of the king, demands a private audience with the mayor, and then beats him thoroughly "from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet." Afterward he takes from the mayor the amount in gold for the rental of the chariot. Gimil-Ninurta next disguises himself as a doctor seeking to treat the ill-handled mayor, then beats the offender as before. The mayor and his retainers then take up the pursuit of his tormentor, but he is trapped by Gimil-Ninurta under a bridge and beaten a third time. The text concludes with the words: "The mayor could only crawl back into the city [again]." Many would certainly have had similar fancies regarding the powerful in that age, and just as today they would have smirked over this story.⁴³

41. Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Schooldays: A Sumerian Composition Relating to the Education of a Scribe* (Philadelphia, 1949).

42. Cf. A. W. Sjöberg, "Der Examenstext A," *ZA* 64 (1975): 137ff.; "Der Vater und sein missratener Sohn," *JCS* 25 (1973): 105-169.

43. Cf. O. R. Gurney, "The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur," *Anatolian Studies* 6 (1956): 145ff.; "The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur and Its Folktales Parallels," *Anatolian Studies* 22 (1972): 149ff.

5. Hymns, Prayers, Laments, and Incantations

a. Difficulties in Differentiating Genres

Sharp boundaries can rarely be drawn between the various genres of prayer literature, since so many of the prayers can be classified under a particular genre only with great difficulty. Moreover, careful investigations exist for only a part of the known collections of texts as well as their genres. There are also transitional forms between prayers and incantations. Therefore, the following delineations of the most important genres can have only a provisional character.

b. Sumerian Hymns of Gods and Kings, Laments, Prayers, and Letters to the Gods

As far as our present knowledge goes, the oldest Sumerian hymns are the temple hymns which are attested as early as the middle of the third millennium, focusing on the great temples; a tablet collection which was copied quite often after 2000 contains 545 lines and comprises forty-two of these hymns.⁴⁴ Many, often very long hymns to the gods are known after the Ur III period. These describe the descent, the great power, and the place of the deity in the pantheon, as well as his or her significance for humanity; they often end with intercessions for the king. Narrative pieces are often inserted. The hymns to kings, who are in most cases divinized (see above, VI.2), are almost entirely written as self-laudatory compositions in the first person singular; the same is true of many hymns written primarily to goddesses. The dominant themes in these are the origin and legitimation of the king, his favor with the gods and his care for their temples, and his care for the poor, the orphans, and the widows, as well as for justice. Along with these one finds the king's physical strength, his exploits in war, and his accomplishments for the economy of the land. This singular genre of hymns ceased after 1650 with the Babylonian kings Hammurabi and Samsu-iluna, who no longer had themselves divinized. The Babylonians translated no royal

44. Cf. R. D. Biggs, *Inscriptions from Tell Abû-Salâbikh* (Chicago, 1974), 45ff.; A. W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann, and G. R. Gragg, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns and the Keš Temple* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1969).

hymns and passed none on. In addition, some myths contained hymnic prologues.⁴⁵

The Sumerians had no specific literary genre of prayer. Very short prayers are found at the end of several ancient Sumerian commemorative inscriptions. Longer prayers have been inserted into the great building hymn of Gudea of Lagash (see above, section 2), as well as a number of myths, a long didactic poem, and as intercessory prayers at the ends of hymns; these follow no established structural schema. The letters to the gods comprise a strange substitute for prayers; in these the petitioner brings his desire before the god in the form of a letter of request. The drafting of such letters was practiced in the schools.⁴⁶

The late Sumerian literature developed new genres after 1500, such as the summary prayers on cylinder seals of the Kassite period and some prayers, generally passed on in bilingual form, which were used in certain rites. The "laments to comfort the heart" are modeled on the Babylonian prayers in particular; these laments are different from all earlier prayers and contain confessions of sin and petitions for redemption from one's sins.⁴⁷

The last genre to be mentioned is that of the Sumerian songs of lament. The quite comprehensive and tiresomely monotonous laments over political catastrophes, such as the destructions of Akkad and Ur, are included. To these must be added primarily ritual laments in the "woman's dialect" Emesal from a later period — including the *er-šemma*-songs, performed in concert with the *balang*-harp, and laments for the god in the distant underworld, above all, Dumuzi (see above, XII.5b). These were recited down into the Seleucid period. The same elements, with the variation of a member, are very frequently repeated in the litanies of lament in a refrainlike fashion, though they are preserved on tablets only in abbreviated form. Finally, there are some

45. Cf. J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (Ramat-Gan, 1981); W. H. P. Römer, *Sumerische Königshymnen der Isin-Zeit* (Leiden, 1965); C. Wilcke, "Hymne A," *RLA IV* (1975): 539ff., with bibliography; see also R. Borger, *HKL III*: 67ff.

46. Cf. R. Borger, "Gottesbrief," *RLA III* (1971): 575-76, which also deals with Babylonian letters to the gods; W. W. Hallo, *Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition*. American Oriental Series 53 (1968): 71ff.

47. Cf. S. Langdon, *Babylonian Penitential Psalms* (Paris, 1927); for a comprehensive edition of the "laments to console the heart" (Sum. *ér-ša-ḫun-gá*), see S. M. Maul, *Herzberuhigungsklagen: Die sumerisch-akkadischen Ersäungungs-Gebete* (Wiesbaden, 1988). See below, n. 50.

personal laments, such as "A Man and His God," in which the motifs of Job resonate.⁴⁸

c. Babylonian Hymns and Prayers

Hymns to the gods are preserved for us as early as the Old Babylonian period. Strangely, these are overwhelmingly addressed to goddesses; they repeatedly end in intercession for the king and reveal quite a diversity of forms, along with an unevenness of scope. Myths are imbedded in some of these hymns. The song of Agushaya is a hymn to Ishtar which depicts Ishtar's unruliness. Ea creates Šaltum, the goddess of discord, to oppose her, and then Šaltum goes against Ishtar in battle. Not until the creation of Agushaya can there be peace again.⁴⁹ Only fragments remain of other hymns of this type, as is true also of a myth of Ishtar in the first person singular. A very long hymn concerning Ishtar of Nippur probably goes back to the Old Babylonian period. The language of the later hymns, which often comprise two hundred verses and more, is more artistic than that of the Old Babylonian hymns. Some of these are also hymns of repentance. The literary merit and content of the pronouncements found in the great hymn to the sun god Shamash stand out markedly; at the same time, a hymn to Gula in the first person singular which is just as long, is quite meager in content. Finally, some royal prayers from Assyria are to be reckoned among the hymns, and there is a note of self-criticism in these.⁵⁰

Stylistically related to the hymns in many respects are the limited

48. Cf. J. Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (Wiesbaden, 1966); S. N. Kramer, "Man and his God: A Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 3 (1955): 170ff.; *idem*, "Klagelied," *RLA VI* (1980): 1ff.

49. Cf. most recently, B. Groneberg, "Philologische Bearbeitung des Agushaya-Hymnus," *RA* 75 (1981): 107ff.

50. Cf. W. von Soden, "Hymne B," *RLA IV* (1975): 544ff., with a listing of all known hymns up to that time. The great hymn to Shamash has frequently been translated; cf., e.g., Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 121ff., with editing. A representative selection of Sumerian and Akkadian hymns and prayers has been translated by Falkenstein and von Soden, with introduction; a new two-volume edition is in preparation. An even more extensive selection of Akkadian hymns and prayers is found in M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Paris, 1976). Cf. also W. G. Lambert, "The Hymn to the Queen of Nippur," in *Zikir Sumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus*, ed. G. Van Driel, et al. (Leiden, 1982), 173ff.

number of psalms of lament and repentance. Among these is one from Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria during the last years of his reign, when the revolts against him were by no means able to break his sense of self-righteousness. The only great hymn of repentance to Ishtar from the Old Babylonian period is unfortunately very badly preserved. The hemerologies often demand the recitation of prayers of repentance of the *šigû*-genre for certain days in which calamity threatens. As in a great prayer to Nabû, the priest sometimes speaks for the penitent and asks for forgiveness.⁵¹

A further group of prayers which is richly represented are the prayers of oracular sacrifice of the genre *ikribu*; these usually include a formulaic conclusion. Finely formulated references to the previous life of the sacrificial animal in its pasture, as well as descriptions of the deep stillness of the night, are found in prayers of this genre from as early as the Old Babylonian period. Petitions for redemption from sin seldom occur in these hymns. Moreover, many personal names are very short prayers of petition or thanksgiving in sentence form; the contents of these vary greatly. We have referred to royal prayers in many inscriptions above (see above, section 2).⁵²

The so-called individual prayers of lament comprise by far the largest group of prayers. These prayers are often called prayers of incantation because their superscriptions occasionally contain magical formulas and are frequently imbedded in rituals. These begin with shorter or longer sections praising the deity; then follows the lament with the self-introduction, the plea for release from suffering, reconciliation with the guardian deity, and forgiveness for sins. A generally formulaic promise of thanks forms the conclusion. Some of these prayers are among the most beautiful pieces of prayer literature because of the earnestness of their confession of sin. A prayer begins with the petitioner's complaint that he has not yet been heard; not the slightest echo of magic can be found here. The situation is different with so-called "special prayers" of this genre, which deal with completely distinct forms of suffering and sickness. These often present mixtures of prayer and incantation and are imbedded in extensive

51. Cf. W. von Soden, "Der grosse Hymnus an Nabû," *ZA* 61 (1971): 44ff.; "Zwei Königsgebete an Ištar aus Assyrien," *AfO* 25 (1977): 37ff.

52. Cf. W. von Soden, "Gebet II," *RLA* III (1959-1964): 160ff. For translations, see the works cited above, n. 50.

magical rituals which have to be carried out by the incantation priest (see above, XII.6). This priest directs himself primarily to Shamash, Marduk, and Ea, individually or all together. The so-called "cultic medium" prayers apply to the substances which are used in the rituals.⁵³ There are many echoes of the individual prayers of lament in the biblical psalms, but the constraints of the genre left the Babylonian poet much less freedom to formulate these.

The psalm of lament "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" (see above, XII.4) holds a special place in the religious literature of the ancient Orient. In this composition of 480 verses, a very long lament is put in the mouth of a high official of the period around 1100, who laments his many illnesses and his loss of social status, which have brought him to the brink of death. In a scene that is presented only slightly more briefly than his suffering, Marduk finally announces the man's deliverance through a messenger in a dream. The praise of Marduk by all who experienced these events provides the final note. Just as in the book of Job, the quantity of suffering heaped on the individual surpasses all that he considers imaginable. The meaning is this: regardless of what form one's suffering may take, everyone should find himself in the poem and find hope in a similarly miraculous solution.⁵⁴

d. Sumerian and Babylonian Incantations

The incantation literature is quite extensive among the Sumerians as well as the Babylonians. Sumerian incantations have survived in monolingual form mostly in Old Babylonian transcriptions and were later handed on accompanied by Akkadian translations. In many cases, of course, even the Sumerian text is post-Sumerian. The texts of Sumerian demonic exorcisms have been discussed above. In some of them, which were later compiled in the great series *Evil udug/utukku's* and *Bad asag/*

53. Cf. primarily W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"* (Rome, 1976), with complete discussion of the problems and many textual editions, as well as the works cited above, n. 50; W. G. Kunstmann, *Die babylonische Gebetsbeschwörung* (Leipzig, 1932).

54. The latest edition is by Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 31ff., 343ff. (Tablet IV must be partially rearranged). D. J. Wiseman, "A New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," *Anatolian Studies* 30 (1980): 101ff., which deals with Tablet I, is a good supplement.

asakku's, the activities of the demons are portrayed in lively fashion, and we often find long successions of similar pronouncements. Depending on one's purpose, various types of incantations with particular emphases can be distinguished.⁵⁵

The post-Sumerian incantations, which were no doubt translated from the Akkadian with some frequency, were not compiled into their own larger tablet series. They have not yet been studied from a literary standpoint. Among these are the incantations directed against spells (see above, XII.4). By contrast, we still have no evidence for Sumerian incantations against witches.

The number of Akkadian incantations of different sorts is very large, and these were generally compiled, in part with the associated rituals, only in smaller series, as for example those against the Lamashtu, against spells, and against witches (see above, XII.6). Many of these are found scattered among the collections of medical prescriptions, as well as among rituals against suffering of all kinds. They have not yet been the subject of a literary investigation. Until now, only a few have been found from the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods.

Finally, there are the so-called Abracadabra texts. These are found on small tablets of the Old Babylonian period, and later occur as parts of other incantations. Mostly they consist of what are for us — and no doubt were for most Babylonians as well — senseless combinations of syllables. It has been observed, however, that at least some of them were derived from other languages (e.g., from Old Elamite) and subsequently became incomprehensible through the deterioration of texts.⁵⁶

6. Scientific Literature

The works which can claim to be "scientific," in both the widest sense of the word and their structure, have been treated above in chapter XI and in those parts of chapter XII which have to do with the teachings about the gods and the syncretistic doctrine of identification. Estab-

55. Cf. A. Falkenstein, *Die Haupttypen der sumerischen Beschwörung* (Leipzig, 1931). New editions of both of the series named here are in preparation.

56. Cf. J. van Dijk, "Fremdsprachliche Beschwörungen in den südmesopotamischen literarischen Überlieferungen," *Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient* 1 (1982): 97ff.

lished supplements for school are found in the series, House of Tablets (*Ē-dub-ba*; see above, section 4d). One finds in this series, for instance, tables of special dialects and technical languages and types of information which are important to us. The writers of scientific works were rarely concerned with a polished literary form, since they were largely bound by a rigid schema.⁵⁷

57. A Phoenician historical work on the Phoenicians and their religion ascribed to Sanchuniathon has been preserved only in Greek excerpts and paraphrases, primarily by Philo of Byblos.