

Reviews

W.G. Lambert, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, edited by A.R. George and T.M. Oshima, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike* 15, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2016, pp xvi + 279, ISBN978-3-16-153674-8; ISSN 1869-0513, €99.

Reviewed by Alan Millard

During the second half of the 20th century W.G. Lambert (1926-2011) made outstanding contributions to understanding ancient Babylonian thought through his unrivalled knowledge of published texts and his assiduous editions of others stored in museums and private collections. His *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) introduced his scholarship to the world, with his insistence on interpreting the texts in the light of their ancient contexts rather than through modern theories. That is evident throughout the twenty-three essays collected here, from 'Morals in Mesopotamia' (11-27; 1958) to 'Ishtar of Nineveh' (86-91; 2004). The majority discuss texts he himself edited, or re-edited. Six of the papers were read at gatherings of Assyriologists and many of the others expect a similarly expert readership. When Babylonian texts are presented, many philological notes and footnotes accompany them, so some sections may be opaque to the lay reader. Nevertheless, Lambert's perceptive explanations unlock arcane compositions, such as 'The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners' (183-99; 1998) which includes comparisons with biblical texts, here Levitical qualifications for priests.

A.R. George contributes an Introduction (1-8) with an appreciation of his teacher and an explanation of the essays he and his colleague have selected.

In 'The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon' (39-48; 1975) Lambert observed the Sumerian pattern of a patron god for each city, with a family and courtiers, like a human king. In some cases, notably that of Marduk, one god took on the identity of another, consequent upon political changes. For the 3,000 years of cuneiform writing, scribes were compiling lists of deities, ranking them in order of importance. One list from about 1,200 B.C. equates various lesser gods with one major one; 'cannibalism' Lambert termed it. The supreme example of that is a Late Babylonian tablet, its last lines missing, identifying several gods, major ones among them, with Marduk in the style 'Shamash (is) Marduk of justice' (47, 47). A few other texts hint at the same concept. However, as Marduk was king of the gods, the list may not indicate identity so much as representation. Each one served Marduk in his particular role, so this may not have 'every claim to represent Marduk as a monotheistic god', as Lambert argued, but simply demonstrate his supremacy over all of them. One god replacing another is the topic of 'Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian

Epic of Creation' (143-47; 1986) in which Lambert adduced several lines of evidence to show the composer of the Epic adapted traditions about Ninurta killing a monster to fit Marduk. Mesopotamian mythology told of relationships between deities who embodied natural phenomena, with major centres creating their own myths and lists of gods, differences sometimes being kept in one poem. Lambert closed his essay on 'The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon' (108-21) by declaring 'in a sense, the Babylonian cosmological ideas were a dead end' (119), lacking scientific purpose, leaving the Greeks to make an abstract cosmology and the Hebrew a monotheistic one.

'Devotion: the Languages of Religion and Love' (200-212; 1987) explores the ways relationships between gods and goddesses, men and women were described figuratively. The most fertile sources for expressing physical and emotional feelings in Sumerian and Babylonian were found in the vocabulary of gardening and fruit, as they were in Hebrew and Arabic. It is noted that attitudes of submission by worshippers to their gods are not paralleled by lovers' submissive attitudes toward the beloved.

The three closing essays address a wider audience. 'Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context' (215-28; 1988) contains critical remarks about past and current approaches to the subject, decrying comparisons between, e.g. Homer and the Bible, while opining that 'the basic material was spread everywhere from the Aegean to India before our written evidence begins' (218). A summary of sources for West Semitic religion from the Ebla to Ugarit follows, with attention to Genesis 1: 1, where the lack of creation of the earth may reflect a common tradition that all 'derived from earth,' and to Genesis 1: 9-12 where God moved the waters to one place similar to myths of gods controlling threatening waters, and to exaltation of Babylonian and Ugaritic gods to kingship, while Israel's God's was unique.

The 1967 book by Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods* (Lund: Gleerup), provoked Lambert to write 'Destiny and Divine Intervention in Babylonia and Israel' (229-34; 1972). He disputed Albrektson's perception of parallels between Hebrew and Babylonian beliefs in the involvement of gods in human affairs. In Babylonian theory the gods rewarded the obedient and punished the contrary, as in Hebrew, and they might intervene in history. Yet for the Babylonians history had no goal, all was set from the first: 'History on this view is like the vibrations of a taut string when plucked - in due course the string ceases to vibrate and returns to the state it was in at the beginning' (233), whereas Hebrew writers believed in a divine plan which prophets expected to reach its goal.

'The Flood in Sumerian, Babylonian and Biblical Sources' (235-44; 1983) summarizes flood narratives from Genesis and Classical sources, then, at greater length, the Babylonian ones, exploring various aspects to conclude that there was a disastrous flood at an early time, eventually recorded in Sumerian and Babylonian texts to which, somehow, the Genesis account is connected.

Other essays in this collection are: ‘Ancient Mesopotamian Gods: Superstition, Philosophy, Theology’ (28-36), ‘Goddesses in the Pantheon: A Reflection of Women in Society?’ (49-55; 1987), ‘The Mesopotamian Background of the Hurrian Pantheon’ (56-61; 1978), ‘The Pantheon of Mari’ (62-80; 1985), ‘The God Assur’ (81-85; 1983), ‘Der Mythos in Alten Mesopotamian, seen Werden und Vergehen’ (95-107; 1974), ‘The Theology of Death’ (122-33; 1980), ‘The Relationship of Sumerian and Babylonian Myth as Seen in Accounts of Creation’ (134-47; 1992), ‘Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians’ (148-54; 1968), ‘The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I: A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamia Religion’ (157-63; 1964), ‘Syncretism and Religious Controversy in Babylonia’ (166-70; 1997), ‘Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods of Ancient Mesopotamia’ (171-79; 1993), ‘The Cult of Ishtar of Babylon’ (180-82; 1975).

The Editors deserve gratitude for making these significant essays easily available and for their care in bringing footnote references up-to-date, among them several that now direct readers to Lambert’s long heralded but posthumously published magisterial *Babylonian Creation Myths* (2013). No serious student of Mesopotamian religion can afford to ignore this collection of Lambert’s essays.

Alan Millard
Emeritus Rankin Professor of Hebrew & Ancient Semitic Languages,
University of Liverpool

Lambert, W.G. 1960 *Babylonian wisdom literature*,
Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lambert, W.G. 2013 *Babylonian creation myths*,
Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

James Clackson, *Language and Society in the Greek and Roman Worlds (Key Themes in Ancient History)*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp xiv + 204, Hardback, US\$80.00 ISBN 9780521192354; paperback, US\$29.99 ISBN 9780521140669.

Reviewed by A.J. White

Clackson’s book is a clever, simple and accessible study with a primary focus on Greek and Latin, as well as on the Indo-European languages from which they are derived. Drawing upon many different aspects, including the social, cultural, philological, and historical uses of language, Clackson relates them directly to his knowledge of linguistics. One distinctive feature of this book is his practice of stating both sides of an issue: he outlines the salient points or arguments first but does not fail to mention the difficulties arising in the sources or the reliability of the information. This is especially true when speaking of ancient languages, when not all sources – or even the languages themselves – are completely understood. This book is part of a series which aims to

provide readers with a clear overview of various historical topics. Clackson succinctly achieves this goal and this book fits neatly with the others in the series, such as Gillian Clark’s *Christianity and Roman Society* (2005) and Paul Cartledge’s *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (2009).

Chapter One (1-32) provides a broad introduction and discusses Mediterranean languages in order to map the languages being used in ancient times. Additionally, it indicates Clackson’s scope and aim (his primary focus being Greek and Latin from 800BC to AD400). He looks at several issues including dialectal differences (though very broadly) as well as language change. He demonstrates the variety and complexity of languages and language families that are in use in the ancient Mediterranean, which aids in the understanding of language change. Clackson discusses bilingualism and how bilingual societies can have an impact upon a language. Chapter Two (33-62) then explores this further in his discussion of languages (including Old Persian as well as Greek and Latin) in their political and administrative uses and how languages can develop from a need to express different concepts or vocabulary in a political or administrative context. Within this chapter he analyses the ‘standardization,’ that is, the ‘standardizing,’ *written* form of languages including Latin and Greek; and next he gives consideration to the different dialects of Greek. This section could easily have been expanded and more information on Atticism in the early imperial period would have been helpful; however, it would have been difficult to include all the necessary information in a book designed to be part of a series in which succinctness is a primary feature. Accordingly, Clackson has done well in summarizing the main points.

Chapter Three (63-95) addresses again the concept of bilingualism in the ancient world as well as how a language can contribute to the formation of a person’s identity. The author looks into several aspects of language and how language may sometimes (but not always) relate to one’s ethnic or national identity. The author draws upon documentary sources in this chapter and advances some stimulating points arising from bilingual inscriptions. These languages include, but are not limited to, Greek and Latin but also Greek with Gaulish, Punic and Eteocypriot. Some of these texts contain the same information, which can also offer a comparison between the uses of each language. This is of interest for the study of bilingualism in the ancient world, especially when considering the idea of transliteration, where the writer uses e.g. Latin words but writes them with Greek lettering. One additional example is a Jewish epitaph in Rome where KOYAI BIEIT is written for Latin *quae vixit* (CIJ 1.257; D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe, Vol. 2, The City of Rome*, Cambridge, 1995, no. 275). One should also mention the bilingual phenomenon of ‘code-switching,’ where the writer switches from one language to another in the same text (e.g. CIJ 1.523; Noy no. 577).