

for Plate 2:1 (rock-relief of Anubanini) and Plate 6 (Kul-e Farah) which would have benefitted from drawings.

Balatti's book is a serious step forward in Zagros studies as it collects most of the pertinent data, especially the texts. The author is to be congratulated for providing this very useful contribution. My impression is that studies focusing on specific and narrower zones of the Zagros and making diachronic use of all pertinent data from all available periods therein can provide further concrete advancements.

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LOUISE M. PRYKE:

*Ishtar*.

(Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World.) xv, 240 pp. London:

Routledge, 2017. £105. ISBN 978 1 138 86073 5.

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*Ishtar* by Louise M. Pryke represents a shift in the well-established *Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World* book series with the inclusion of Near Eastern topics, the first of which is the subject of this book. The aim of each volume is to “present an authoritative, accessible and fresh account of its subject” that includes both a discussion of the key themes associated with the subject of the volume – origins, myth, cult and representations – as well as a discussion of later reception and influences in modern culture (p. ix). From an accessibility point of view, the hardback edition is hardly affordable. The eBook is slightly better at £39.99. One hopes *Ishtar* will prove popular enough to merit a paperback edition in the future.

The book provides an updated thematic *tour de force* of the literary character of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar that serves as a starting point for students and non-specialists thanks to its extensive bibliography. Its thematic approach is not without issues, but given the interest in these topics, this book offers an authoritative discussion often missing in the older literature (e.g. Wolkstein and Kramer's *Inanna*), or indeed in more popular accounts. Despite a few shortcomings, the inclusion of *Ishtar* in this book series constitutes a step towards opening up ancient Near Eastern mythology to a wider academic audience and redressing longstanding assumptions.

The themes explored include “Love and intimacy” (pp. 31–59), “Sexuality and order” (pp. 60–83), “Ishtar and the pantheon” (pp. 84–110), “Kingship, battle and family” (pp. 111–32), “Ishtar and the heroes of Mesopotamian epic” (pp. 133–59), and “Vengeance and death” (pp. 160–82). Each chapter is broken down into sub-headings that generally bring together snippets from several compositions to build the semantic repertoire of the theme under discussion. Sometimes specific works are discussed in detail, including lesser-known ones such as *Inanna and Shukaletuda* (pp. 71–80). Previously understudied aspects are highlighted, especially social cohesion and Ishtar's relationship with kingship. The majority of texts quoted are taken from the ETCSL website, thus largely Old Babylonian Sumerian literature. Despite acknowledging the chronologically and geographically complex nature of Inanna and Ishtar, the distinction between the two deities is not enforced throughout (pp. 6–7). Finally, some subheadings are not self-evident and may go unnoticed by readers who choose not to follow the book sequentially. The exhaustive index at the

back will be of great assistance in such cases. Bibliographic entries are helpfully indexed.

The volume is summarized in an introduction (pp. 1–28) discussing methodological challenges surrounding the complexity of the figure of Inanna/Ishtar, and a final section exploring the “afterlife” of the goddess in academia as well as in popular culture (pp. 183–204). The latter is followed by further reading, a bibliography, and a thematic index. A very schematic map of ancient Mesopotamia (p. xv) and a timeline (inexplicably wedged between bibliography and index) are also provided.

The main shortcoming of *Ishtar* is that, for a book intent on “embracing the goddess’ complexity, rather than to diffuse it” (p. 5) and opening up cross-disciplinary discussions, it does not offer more in-depth source analysis beyond the literary. Pryke explains her overwhelming reliance on literary sources as a way of offering “fruitful generalisations” (p. 8) that will open up the field to comparative studies and reduce confusion given the inherent limitations of other sources. Yet perhaps this solution misses the opportunity to engage more fully with the vast range of textual and material evidence from Mesopotamia. Limitations of literary sources to understand contemporary religious thought and behaviour are well known, especially regarding the historical and social context of Sumerian literature production and audience. Pryke argues the challenges posed by employing a thematic approach are “reduced by maintaining a continued focus on the contexts of the evidence” (p. 6). However, it is difficult to imagine non-experts fully taking in the nuances of these contexts when compositions centuries apart are discussed together as evidence of unified traits of Ishtar. This is particularly worrisome in the case of the relationship between the goddess and the king (p. 112). Fortunately, references to further literature are conscientiously provided, and readers are encouraged to explore these issues further.

The paucity of evidence on the goddess’s cult and visual representations is surprising, despite being two main themes of the book series. On the one hand, even if not its main focus, a chapter discussing temples and shrines dedicated to the goddess, their geographic and chronological distribution, administration and cultic personnel would have helped redress the historiographical biases highlighted by the author (pp. 20–24). A section on the cultic roles of queens and high-status women would have helped redress the overwhelmingly male interaction with the goddess in the literary corpus. Pryke observes the potential for informing modern discourses on gender (p. 28) yet defines Ishtar as an “early female archetype” (p. 3). Arguments against the use of mythology to understand gendered roles in human society are well known and need not be reproduced here. Readers should be aware of these assumptions. On the other hand, illustrations are scarce and some of them are not representations of the goddess, such as the “Lady of Uruk” (p. 51), or the “Queen of the Night” (p. 180). This is not always made clear. Other important pieces are not illustrated, such as the stone mould depicting Naram-Sin and Ishtar (p. 121), or “The investiture panel” from Mari when discussing kingship.

Finally, the “Reception and influence” chapter would have benefitted from discussing occultism’s influence on many pop culture references. The rediscovery of Enochian Magick and Aleister Crowley’s Babalon-linked biblical sources with then recently translated Akkadian literature at the turn of the century. Nods to Sumerian and Babylonian mythology in popular culture usually blend scholarly (if often outdated) and occultist sources. The band Morbid Angel – a clear influence on Soulfly, whom Pryke mentions – should be credited as originators of the “Sumerian Black Metal” sub-genre. Although they do not have a song titled

“Ishtar”, their lyrics share many common themes such as destruction, vengeance and, of course, sexuality.

In conclusion, *Ishtar* is a timely contribution that will help students and non-specialists gain well-informed insights into the complexity surrounding the *literary* character of Inanna/Ishtar. Pryke’s main achievement is her clear criticism of dominant narratives fixated on the goddess’s sexuality and her development of “social networking” as a theme central to understanding the complexity of the goddess. These perspectives are sorely needed beyond Assyriological scholarly circles, where access to specialized literature is restricted and outdated views focussed on sexuality persist.

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

MUSHEGH ASATRYAN:

*Controversies in Formative Shi‘i Islam. The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs.*

(The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Shi‘i Heritage Series, 4.) xviii, 206 pp.  
London and New York: I.B.Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017. £29.50. ISBN 978 1 784 53895 8.  
doi:10.1017/S0041977X18000575

Probably ever since the publication of two seminal works, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi’s *Le Guide divin dans le shīisme originel. Aux sources de l’ésotérisme en Islam* (Paris, 1992) and Hussein Modarresis’s *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), in turn preceded by the pioneering essays by Heinz Halm on *Kitāb al-Haft wa’l-azilla* (*Der Islam* 55/1978 and 58/1981) and on Islamic Gnosis (*Die islamische Gnosis*. München, 1981), a relevant number of articles and books on early Shi‘ism and on its extremist expressions have appeared, giving birth to a varied field of research in Islamic studies. While investigating the origins and the historical development of what Muslim (whether Sunni or Shi‘i) heresiographers defined *ghuluww*, over recent years, the studies devoted to early Shiism have frequently raised two important issues. The first is the plausibility of applying to religious phenomena of the Islamic world categories, such as orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This implies a reassessment of the methodological frame in which scholarship has accepted it or refused it, rightly keeping a distance from a Eurocentric approach but, conversely, evaluating the resources of a comparative perspective. That issue seems to be all the more stimulating, the more we look at it, if a dialectics of orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy (as presented in Asatryan’s book, especially in chapters 5 and 6, although the author avoids naming it so) is observed within a religious phenomenon like Shi‘ism, whose main branch, Imamism, between the ninth and tenth centuries, promoted a strategy of refutation and censorship towards its own dissident voices. The second issue is one of a more properly historical and philological nature, concerning the ineffable, although as yet unprovable – given the dramatic lack of source materials, either direct or indirect – connection between *Ghulāt* literature and the manifold