

MARC J. H. LINSSEN:

The Cults of Uruk and Babylon: The Temple Ritual Texts as Evidence for Hellenistic Cult Practice.

(Cuneiform Monographs, 25.) xvi, 343 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill Styx, 2004€106. 90 04 124 2.

This book is a dissertation written at Amsterdam under the supervision of Professors Stol and van der Spek. It sets out to examine whether the cult of Babylonian temples changed under the reign of the Seleucid dynasty in the late first millennium BC. While some laconic evidence of a ruler cult is adduced, the overriding picture is of the continuation of traditional Babylonian cultic practices.

Linssen bases his findings on a rich variety of sources, including building inscriptions, legal documents, chronicles and astronomical diaries, but his principal evidence is the genre of temple rituals. These stem from Babylon and Uruk, provenances that explain the book's preoccupation with these two ancient cities of southern Mesopotamia. Linssen characterizes the rituals as "literary compositions copied from older originals". While some of these rituals contain literary works, in the form of prayers and litany, it is misleading to speak of the rituals themselves as literary. In origin they are expressly practical texts that record cultic events prescriptively. The motivation to make new copies of literary compositions in first-millennium Babylonia was academic, for they were used as copy-books by scribal apprentices. The ritual texts are manuals of instruction, set down to ensure correct practice. Copying ritual tablets was not an antiquarian occupation but undoubtedly part of advanced professional training.

Few temple rituals survive from before the mid-first millennium; the suspicion is that they emerged as a major written genre in the Late Babylonian period because the priesthood felt there was a danger of correct practice being corrupted or forgotten. But insecurity was not the sole motivation. Rituals could also be captured in writing for other purposes, particularly when the need arose to reform practice and introduce new cults. In this context we find local copies of texts imported to serve as models for local adaptation. An example is a Middle Assyrian account of the New Year rituals of Marduk's temple in Babylon; the text served to instruct the Assyrians in the proper conduct of an imported cult.

In the body of the thesis Linssen examines in turn daily, monthly and annual ceremonies and special rites such as those that attended the reskinning of a kettledrum, the rebuilding of a temple and the observation of a lunar eclipse. But the book will probably be most used for its appendix, which fills 150 pages. Here are presented the texts of the major temple rituals of Babylon and Uruk in transliteration and English translation. A few additional fragments are published for the first time and presented in cuneiform also. These editions are very welcome, for many of these texts have not been edited since Thureau-Dangin's great *Rituels accadiens*, published in 1921. Linssen's dissertation thus fills a real need, not only in Assyriology but also in the study of religions, where ancient Mesopotamian rituals have been badly neglected.

The book is rounded off with a very useful concordance of texts and indexes of words, topics and names. Note that an edition of the tablet BM 54312, cited as unpublished on p. 3 fn. 22 and p. 324, has just appeared in A. R. George, *Babylonian texts from the folios of Sidney Smith, part three*. A commentary on a

ritual of the month Nisan, in Ann Guinan et al. (eds), *If a Man Builds a Joyful House...: Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty* (Cuneiform Monographs 31, Leiden), 173–86.

A. R. George

THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

JEAN MAURICE FIEY (ed. LAWRENCE I. CONRAD):

Saints Syriaques.

(Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 6.) xxi, 224 pp.

Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004. \$35. 0 87850 111 8.

The late Jean Maurice Fiey is best known for his detailed ecclesiastical and geographical surveys of ancient and modern Syriac Christian communities, but he also worked on Syriac hagiography. The publication of this book owes much to Professor Conrad who, after Fiey's death in 1995, undertook the very difficult task of editing the manuscript. The latter had been written during the Lebanese civil war in less than ideal conditions: it had been poorly typed on a very old typewriter by a non-Francophone, non-Syriacist assistant, before being partially revised by Fiey himself, with the incorporation of suggestions from Conrad and Sebastian Brock.

Fiey's introduction gives much basic information. He notes that there was no process of canonization in the Syriac churches comparable to that in the Roman Catholic Church. Thus the title Mar or Mart is given to any venerable person, including bishops during their lifetime, and the relics of anyone considered particularly holy were often fought over. The lives and deeds of many of these saints were recorded by contemporaries, in response to public admiration for the sanctity of an individual. It only remained then for the bishop to recognize this veneration as something to be celebrated liturgically. Inevitably some saintly figures who lacked a biographer have been forgotten, while others whose names alone survived were "written up" at a much later date, and not necessarily with any degree of accuracy. Local cults celebrating a saint were eventually recognized officially by the inclusion of the saint's name in a local or more general calendar. Thus the process of "canonization" appears to be democratic and decentralized, with recognition starting at the grassroots level. In addition to the calendars, Fiey has also drawn on the martyrologies. The survey covers both eastern and western Syriac churches, but uses only the very earliest of the Maronite calendars which happens to be an adaptation of a Melkite calendar. As for modern scholarship, Fiey was aware of errors in the "classic" works of Western scholarship such as Wright, Duval, Chabot, Baumstark and Ortiz de Urbina, and so he relied more heavily on the Arabic work of Barsaum, *The Scattered Pearls*, which he wished to make more widely available (it has since become available in the English translation of Matti Moosa).

The work is arranged according to the alphabetical order of saints' names, rather than following chronological order. It presents an assemblage of facts derived from sources edited, unedited and largely inaccessible. It includes Fiey's attempts to solve the problem of the identity of some saints, who were otherwise unknown or had been confused with others of the same name. Numbered entries supply the names and spheres of renown of each figure,