

second section. Dedicated to the broad contemporary historical setting of Sennacherib's Judaeen war, this section, in its turn, would have benefited from a discussion dedicated to a relevant topic that falls outside the group of the Assyrian sources. And in line with this: this section would have been more complete were it to contain a study of the situation in the various Levantine provinces and states based on the local evidence, though admittedly this is meagre.

Furthermore, in a collection dedicated to the third campaign of Sennacherib, the absence of a fresh, thorough, summary of the scholarly view of its first biblical account (2 Kings 18–9) in the “early sources” section and somewhere else is somewhat surprising. This lack may, however, be defended in two ways: first, it is partly filled by Kalimi's presentation of the chronicler's “biblical source material” (pp. 23–6) and, second, the volume does not claim to be comprehensive (p. 2). Nevertheless, considering the depth in which other aspects of the early sources – both direct and circumstantial – were covered, this seems to remain a missing piece.

Finally, in accord with its objective, this volume provides the scholar who wishes to study the reception history of Sennacherib's Judaeen wars with an informative historical and historiographical point of departure, several useful reviews of the raw material, and an exemplary comprehensive study of it.

**Amitai Baruchi-Unna**

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

LAUREN RISTVET:

*Ritual, Performance, and Politics in the Ancient Near East.*

xiv, 315 pp. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. £65. ISBN 978 1 1070 6521 5.

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The author's main argument in this volume is that inhabitants of Mesopotamian polities created a sense of identity through the performance of rituals and daily practices, and that rituals were always politics. Priests, kings and commoners used festivals to negotiate, to establish, or to contest political power – not just in the Ancient Near East, as the author illustrates by examples from different periods and areas (cf. pp. 4–24: The Persepolis celebrations in 1971; the French Revolution; Majapahit processions on the island of Java in the fourteenth century; the Fiesta de Santa Fe; rituals for Maya ancestors in Meso-America). Having such examples and the anthropological and sociological approaches of É. Durkheim and C. Geertz in mind, the three main chapters of the book discuss ritual performances.

Ritual texts from Ebla show that they not only refer to the city, but – as can be seen by the wedding and coronation ritual of Tabur-Damu (pp. 40–42) – they aimed to connect the city/palace with the countryside, and pilgrimages to cult centres in northern Syria also played an important role in establishing political dominion in that area. Four local cultic centres (pp. 82 ff.; Gre Virike, Hazna, Jebelet al-Beda, Banat) were not only under the control of political elites, but the ritual carried out there served both the elites and resisting groups. Such ambiguity shows both the political influence and “unity” of northern Syria which was imposed on the local kingdoms by Ebla, but through the performative power of rituals and mortuary practices the local communities gained and upheld their authority. Processions between the cult centres also created networks to give rise to shared religious concepts.

The author postulates that there was a unitary cultural landscape (from Iran to northern Levante) in the Old Babylonian period that transcended the linguistic, ethnic and political diversity through the performance of elite rituals and daily practices taken from a shared past. The *kispum*-ritual was crucial for creating such shared memories (cf. pp. 113 f.). Rituals which accompanied the dead tended to be uniform, regardless of the form of the grave which included jewellery, personal adornments, cuts of meat and beer-drinking sets. The author also discusses two different terms for graves, *qubūrum* and *kimahḫum*, the latter could be used for a spacious grave-building where rituals could take place. Archaeological data (pp. 120 ff.) show that such grave-buildings are spread all over “Greater Mesopotamia” (e.g. Arbid, Aššur, Chagar Bazar, Urkiš, Isin, Uruk, Ur, Sippar, Susa): as well as such graves, vaguely anthropomorphic basalt figures (“stone spirits”) – measuring from 9 to 145 cm – were found in northern Mesopotamia, dating from the entire Bronze Age, as objects connected with ancestor practices. Other important markers of memory are the *humūsum* (pile of stones) and *rāmum* (burial cairn); as commemorative monuments they are not only connected with burials, but serve also as victory monuments or they create place for treaty making. So during the early second millennium as a period of political and social change and instability, the people’s engagement with the past through death and commemorative rituals (like *kispum*), and by monumental constructions (and also craft production) helped to transcend individual kingdoms and to create a shared vocabulary for religion and rule (cf. pp. 149 f.). This also led to a common architectural style and to the adoption of the Old Babylonian dialect, leading to a unitary culture in Mesopotamia.

The last section deals with the preservation and transmission of tradition, as can be seen best in the case of the *akītu* festival (pp. 153 ff.). The Hellenistic era brought a deep-rooted change with the loss of Babylonian political sovereignty, but this did not result in the loss of tradition. It would be too simple to say, with regard to pottery and figurines, that Greek elements were innovations and Babylonian elements were the continuing tradition, but such objects of material culture are “representative of a multicultural society that no longer made a clear distinction between Greek and Babylonian iconography and manufacturing practices” (pp. 175 f.). This multiculturalism preserved Ancient Near Eastern knowledge, and textual transmission occurred in temples and the private houses of priests. The Esagila had a library comparable in size and scope to Assurbanipal’s, and we know that the Esagila or temples in Uruk sponsored the work of hundreds of scholars, scribes, diviners and astrologers (cf. pp. 182 ff.). As Sumerian-Greek-Babylonian texts show, the priests were also busy preserving knowledge by transmitting the “dead” languages through Greek transcription and by transmitting the literary tradition (e.g. prayers to Nabu, incantations), because Babylonian religion still mattered until the beginning of the first century CE. Another example of preserving tradition is Berossos’ *Babyloniaca*, which transmitted Babylonian tradition in Greek ethnographic style (cf. p. 192). The celebration of the *akītu* festival in Babylon in 205 and again eighteen years later by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III also shows the ongoing tradition. These celebrations can be seen as paying respect to the venerable Babylonian tradition, but from the priests’ side the ritualistic “humiliation” of the king in the festival was perhaps also understood as their opposition to foreign (Seleucid) rule (cf. pp. 207 f.).

The author has well presented the close intersection of ritual, performance and politics and how rituals draw up a system of collective representation. She also shows – in my opinion more convincingly for the early second millennium and the late period – that communities are mental constructs, built through social interaction. So her book offers a new look at Mesopotamian history both by carefully reading ritualistic texts and by making use of a vast variety of objects of material culture in order to

present a “thick description” (C. Geertz) of society. In this way, the study can be stimulating for researching other areas or periods of the Ancient World.

**Manfred Hutter**

Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn

NIEK VELDHUIS:

*History of the Cuneiform Lexical Tradition.*

(Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 6.) xiv, 524 pp. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2014. \$98.29. ISBN 978 3 86835 116 3.

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The volume under review is an impressive culmination of the author’s extensive research in cuneiform lexical texts. Beginning with the archaic period, and progressing systematically to the Late Babylonian period, Veldhuis describes the available lexical sources, and evaluates their “context, institutional embedding and social location” (p. 23). His research was enabled by the Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts (<http://oracc.org/dcclt>), an essential companion to the volume (pp. 24–5).

Veldhuis emphasizes the importance of context in understanding lexical material. Context can be archaeological or based abstractly in “writing, knowledge, and power” (p. 426). For example, “one particular role of lexical texts in the field of knowledge is scribal education” (p. 428). For the first time during the Old Babylonian period (OB), lexical texts were used as part of “a structured curriculum that takes a student through all the ins and outs of cuneiform and Sumerian – from the most elementary to the most arcane” (p. 223). This is in contrast to third millennium lists, which represented a more fossilized tradition preserved by “well-educated men of letters” (pp. 142, 223).

Veldhuis describes the OB curriculum from Nippur and then compares it to that from other OB sites. However, the majority of other find-spots produced “a few dozen texts at most” (p. 213). To Veldhuis’s list on p. 213 should be added Susa, from where over 700 OB school tablets present a curriculum with many similarities to its Mesopotamian counterpart, though modified to fit the needs of Elamite students (Malayeri, “Scribal training in Old Babylonian Susa”, in *Susa and Elam* (Leiden, 2013)).

While many sites preserve school tablets, few provide enough material to test “the margins of variability of the [Nippur] curricular framework” (p. 203). Veldhuis focuses on the evidence from the *Scherbenloch* at Uruk and the house of the “diviner” at Sippar-Amnānum. Veldhuis suggests that there were at least two programmes of study: one from southern Babylonia represented by Nippur, and modified only slightly at Uruk, and one from northern Babylonia represented by Sippar (p. 215).

New OB lexical data come from over 750 school texts housed in the Jonathan and Jeannette Rosen Ancient Near Eastern Studies Seminar at Cornell University (CUNES; to be published by A. Kleinerman and A. Gadotti in a forthcoming CUSAS volume). Although this group was almost certainly not a discrete corpus in antiquity, the texts present all phases of the scribal curriculum known from Nippur, and are found on the five tablet types known to contain student exercises (see pp. 204–12 for description). The volume under review has been invaluable to the authors in preparing these texts for publication. With the limited space remaining, two examples will demonstrate how the CUNES lexical material is enhanced by Veldhuis’s work, and, conversely, how it can provide further evidence to nuance Veldhuis’s discussion of the OB lexical texts.