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**Rays of Literature**

**Issue 21**

**January 2024**

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## **Note**

“Rays of Literature” is a free online journal, devoted to the publication of the literary works of the Assyrian writers and poets of the 21st century, in order to promote and preserve this ancient language, which is one of the oldest living languages. Our objective is to provide a platform for the works of the modern Assyrian authors and poets, who do not have a chance to make their articles read or heard, and to promote the Assyrian modern literature for the benefit of the general public. We hope that our website will encourage the young and the old to present their works uniquely in Assyrian; and that it will be a source to quench the thirst for modern, different and varied literary works.

This year we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the publication of our journal and we are including a few articles in English language along with articles in Assyrian, exceptionally and only in issues 21 and 22.

In this issue the articles appear in alphabetical order of the surnames of authors in their original version without any change or editing. The authors are entirely responsible for the contents and possible grammatical or spelling errors in their works.

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to the esteemed authors, who have given their precious time and have written and sent us their praise worthy articles.

## **Invitation**

While celebrating the tenth anniversary of the publication of our journal “Simkhe d’ Siprayouta” “Rays of Literature”, we are pleased to notify our honorable readers of our decision to publish articles in English language along with articles in Assyrian, exceptionally and only in issues 21 and 22 of the year 2024.

Therefore we hope our venerated and acclaimed writers will spare no time to send their esteemed articles in English and/or Assyrian languages as soon as the beginning of the year 2024 for issue 22 of this journal.

Thanking them all in anticipation.

**Simkhe d’ Siprayouta**



# Acknowledgement



**We would like to express our profound and heart felt gratitude to Rabi Yourash Haido for his exceptional and priceless support of ‘Rays of Literature’ since its inauguration in 2014 until today. His prized, excellent and dignified articles have appeared on the pages of every issue of this journal. Moreover, he has helped the journal to strive to maintain a relatively high quality of language in most of the published articles.**

**Thank you Rabi!**

**(∞) Rays of Literature**

# A Short History of “The Rays of Literature”

**By: Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan**

The online journal “The Rays of Literature” was created in 2014, due to a rift that occurred in 2010 between the late Rabi Daniel d’Bet Benyamin and the other editors of the bi-annual journal, where he was the chief Assyrian editor. The disagreement had started a few years earlier, due to the language used in the Assyrian articles selected by Rabi Daniel.

Rabi Daniel and his friends strived to clean our literary language from foreign words and incorrect grammatical structures, and they introduced alternative vocabulary borrowed from the classical Assyrian language. The other editors, who found the vocabulary difficult to comprehend and digest disagreed with Rabi Daniel and insisted that he must use only the dialect of Urmia.

The Dialect of Urmia had been selected for unknown reasons, by some of the foreign missionaries, who had travelled to Urmia, where they had established a set of grammatical rules and dictionaries, a printing press and schools to teach this dialect. Instead of using the language spoken by the more learned Assyrians, they chose one of the ugliest dialects of peasants and illiterate people, something similar to Cockney, as the official language of our nation! Naturally many books were written by the students trained by those missionaries and gradually the dialect of Urmia penetrated everywhere. The problem of this dialect is that it is infested with Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and Persian words and syntax. It seems that the foreign missionaries, who came with their crosses pretending to be devout Christians, were carrying sharp swords on the other end of their crosses that slayed our people physically during Seyfo massacres, and butchered our literary language.

The process of cleansing the language had started in 20<sup>th</sup> Century in various places. In Tehran, some of the more educated linguists and authors, notably the Late Rabi Nimrod Simono, and the late Rabi Eday Alkhas tried to use alternative words in their famous journal, “Gilgamesh”. Some Assyrian organizations, such as the Literary Committee “Seeta Sipreta” followed suit and tried to use a more pure language in their speeches and political calendars. The process of cleansing the language was taken one step further by the writers of the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. Therefore this opposition to the efforts of Rabi Daniel and his friends did not seem reasonable or justifiable.

The strongest argument offered by the opposition was that “foreign scholars are telling us: ‘What are you doing to your language?’ It is hardly believable that any scholar would utter those words, because language is not static, it evolves and changes all the time. Even if it were true and some scholars had spoken those words, people are entitled to their opinion; it does not imply that we must waver in our task. Consequently, Rabi Daniel did not give way to what the foreign scholars thought about the language he was using in that journal. In fact he and his friends believed that if for example the British would allow themselves to have an official posh dialect that we hear on their radio and television broadcasts, we should also be allowed to have a posh and pure dialect for literary works instead of the ugly dialect of the uneducated illiterate villagers of the Plains of Urmia; especially because nowadays there are hardly any Assyrian villagers left in the plains of anywhere; not in Urmia, nor on the banks of Khabour, nor in the

Plains of Nineveh. Nothing is left of Sharawate, Doukhrane, Edawate, Nissane, Zouyakhe, celebrations, singing and dancing to Davla Zourna, picnics and games in the meadows, families swimming and floating in the salty waters of the Lake of Urmia, and young boys and girls splashing in the waters of the River khabour. All have been wiped out and the great nations of the world have allowed the Turks, the Arabs and the Kurds to occupy all the former Assyrian lands and territories! Instead of the sounds of church bells, it's only Azan from the old churches turned into mosques. Nevertheless, we are expected to maintain those dialects. Perhaps miracles do take place when you live in Diaspora and are forced to speak only in local language of the country.

In any case, although it seems surprising if foreign scholars try to stop the process of improving our language, what was really surprising and incomprehensible was the attitude and behaviour of these editors who opposed Rabi Daniel. Among the ones I know personally, some are not married and don't have any children, and those who are married and have children have not bothered to teach their 'sweet precious' dialect to their own children! They speak only in English with their children and grandchildren (if any); yet they want to impose the dialect they 'worship' on the rest of the population! They even go as far as writing and publishing articles to advertise their 'adored' dialect full of grammatical errors and infested with foreign Islamic words.

We are a Christian nation and we would prefer to replace those foreign Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic and Farsi words with the precious vocabulary used by our devout forefathers who wrote highly praised liturgy in their sacred language. But those editors and their friends would write or say: "Why are Rabi Daniel and his friends digging dead words from the graves of our forefathers?" And some well-known Assyrians speaking on a popular Assyrian TV program had said "These authors (referring indirectly to Rabi Daniel and his friends) are trying to show off their knowledge of our literary language. Some of these foreign words have been christened. It's all right to use them!" In response, one of Rabi Daniel's friends said jokingly: "The question is which Imam has "Christened" those Muslim words the speaker and his TV team want to sanctify?!"

The discord was fuelled further when the editor in chief of the journal in question had gone as far as editing the Assyrian section of the second issue of that journal in 2010 without the permission of Rabi Daniel, and had censored a large number of articles prepared by Rabi Daniel. Consequently Rabi Daniel decided to resign from his position and sent me all those censored articles in an email explaining the reasons for his decision. Since two of those censored articles were mine, I felt partly responsible for the conflict because in my articles I had criticised those hypocrites who neglect teaching our language to their children. Therefore, I suggested creating an online journal that would welcome all kinds of articles without prejudice. After all, "what life would be if we had no courage to attempt anything?"\* Rabi Daniel agreed and I set to find authors who would be willing to collaborate.

The major problem was to create a website that would not cost too much money so that the online journal could be offered free to readers. At first we tried to create a website ourselves, but after months of trial and error it became apparent that we were not equal to the task. Finally I found two platforms that offered free websites, namely Google Sites and Wix. Time passed quickly and finally in 2013 we were able to finalize two free websites. There were two because the people to whom I showed the structure and colours of the two websites were ambivalent and

could not reach a consensus about which was better. Then after a few years Google changed the structure of its platform and we were obliged to abandon the website we had created there because it was no longer usable. And now Wix website is the only place where we share the online journal freely. We also decided to print the two issues published each year in a book to make the journal available to those who do not use computers. And here we are still publishing our humble journal after ten years of persistent work.

The website was and still is simple and elementary, but it was better than nothing, and some of us were happy with it. In fact we were reminded of these verses in the Scriptures: Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28<sup>\*\*</sup>. Although the end product was not exactly what Rabi Daniel had expected and hoped for: a more elaborate and sophisticated website, nonetheless he supported it and despite his acute back pain from sitting behind his computer, he continued to type and send his articles regularly until his last days.

Unfortunately, that other journal with all its pomp has ceased to exist. Perhaps it is because they did not even publish a short note showing their gratitude to Rabi Daniel while he was still alive, and not even after his death. Instead they wrote and published an article criticizing and mocking his style of writing. He had spent many tireless years working on the Assyrian section of that journal and twice a year had performed the difficult task of taking it to the printing press and bringing the printed copies back to his home, putting the copies in envelopes and taking the envelopes to the post office for distribution. He had accomplished this horrendous job even in the cold days of Chicago's winters, when the streets and sidewalks are covered in snow and it's difficult to walk on slippery pavements. He had given all his love to that journal and had managed to increase its readership tenfold. May God forgive the sins of those ungrateful editors.

We mourn the passing of Rabi Daniel and the other authors who regularly contributed to our journal in the course of these ten years. They devoted even the last years of their life to the sacred mission of preserving and improving our language. I would like to thank all the people who have continually supported this bi-annual journal by offering their precious articles and poems without expecting anything in return except for the knowledge that they are helping to keep our language alive. Below is a list of all the contributors, a few indirectly, to our journal during the past ten years. The names (forty in total) are listed in the order they appeared in the "Contents" section of all the 20 issues starting from Issue 1 to issue 20.

**Melpanita Charlet Avraham**  
**The Late Rabi Daniel David d'Bet Benyamin**  
**Rabi Gabriel Iramya Givargis**  
**Rabi Youarash Haido**  
**Rabita Joanne Yousef**  
**Rabi Givergis Yousefy**  
**Rabi Nineb Lammasu**  
**Dr. Shamiram David Pouryan**  
**Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan**  
**Dr. Helen Sakho**  
**Rabi Moushe Marogel**



**Rabi Michael Younan**  
**Rabi Philimon Darmo**  
**Dr Odisho Melco Ashitha**  
**Rabi Benyamin M. Benyamin**  
**Rabi Bailis Yamlikha Shamun**  
**The Late Rabi Yulius Petros d’Goulpashan**  
**Yaqov Bet Gosa**  
**The Late Rabi Yoab D. d’Bet Benyamin**  
**Dr. Ramina Jajoo Frindrich**  
**Baris Badal Davoud**  
**Rabita Susan Yosep Qasreta**  
**Rabi Shimon Bet Isho**  
**The Late Rabi Warda Narsay Khamo**  
**The Late Dr. William Piroyan**  
**Rabi Mikhael Mamu**  
**The Late Rabi Johnny Moradkhan**  
**Rev Ninous Moghadas Nia**  
**Corepiscopa Samuel Denkha**  
**Arch. Lorraine Davis**  
**Rabi Yosip Bet Yosip**  
**Dr. Aryan Issaia**  
**Rev. Lawrence Namato**  
**Simon Karami Sangar**  
**Diana Atoureta**  
**Babajan Lazarian**  
**Romil Benyamino**  
**Esther Ilya**  
**Engr. Franklin Benyamin**  
**Dr. Samir Denkha Chouna Ashitha**

There have been a number of individuals who have aided ‘Rays of Literature’ in various ways. We are particularly indebted to the following individuals:

**Rabi Youarash Haido** for editing a number of articles that were written in Assyrian by various authors and contained many mistakes;

**Corepiscopa Samuel Denkha** for editing a number of articles that were written in Assyrian by various authors and contained many mistakes;

**Rabi Philimon Darmo** for sending a list of books published in Australia;

**Rabi Benyamin M. Benyamin** for sending a list of books published in Australia;

**Stella Danielly** for typing a couple of articles in Assyrian;

**Rabi Bailis Yamlikha Shamun** for the translation of articles from English to Assyrian;

**Dr. Samir Denkha Chouna Ashitha** for the translation of articles from English to Assyrian;

**Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan** for the translation of articles from English or Farsi to Assyrian.

\* Quote by Vincent Van Gogh, the Dutch painter

\*\* Genesis 50:20: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

# *“The dance of winds”*

*Baris Badal Davoud*

*Oct/20/23*

*Toronto*



*As our hope and wishes fade away*

*by the “rules of conduct”, formed and performed in  
a reprehensible parade,*

*we perceived the fragmented truth  
vanquished through forbidden words  
emanating in a visual sequence;  
- The fall of "Humanity"!*

*Silenced by fear,  
we are strangled by our own strength  
in a gradual forced isolation.*

*It's hard to hold on to the moment, thoughts,  
emotions, imaginations.*

*We have been alienated from our true self  
lost in an infinitely theatrical drama, script and  
unjust compulsory values,  
chaos, deception and confusion,  
amidst the dance of winds in a foreseen storm!*

*There is no way to salvation,  
but to break the false barriers,  
the restrictions and denial of our freedom!*

*The way to consciousness is vigilance,  
To change and to understand  
...and to challenge!  
That is our human nature.*

# *“Impression”*

*Baris Badal Davoud*

*Feb.2014*

*Toronto*

*Oh, my beloved!*

*How do I portray “you”?*

*The loosened words casting away from my mind,*

*- Incompetent to define “you”!*

*... Your captivating inner beauty!*

# *“Unwritten words”*

*Baris Badal Davoud*

*Oct.-22-2019*

*Toronto*

*A gentle rage on her Face ,*

*In her eyes*

*- A sense of awakening nurtures and grows inward  
and deeper,*

*The life ... She must endure*

*... As “hope” perches in her soul.*

# A Comparative Study of ‘Abdīshō‘’s Paradise of Eden and the Maqāmāt al-Harīrī \*

فَذَذِمْهُ دِمْ دِمْ مَقَامَاتِ الْحَرِيرِيِّ

By: Yoab Benjamin  
(Studies in Language and Literature)

While there are several detailed studies written by scholars, Eastern and Western, on many and various Syriac classics, ‘Abdīshō‘ bar Brīkhā’s ܦܕܝܫܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܢ celebrated book of the Paradise of Eden (*Pardaisā Da’den* ܦܕܝܫܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܢ) which deserves a place in the catalogue of Syriac classical masterpieces has hardly been honored with a systematic analysis, nor has it received the credit it deserves.

Be that as it may, it must be allowed that there have been a few modest attempts in which this literary work was viewed with a degree of scholarly detachment. Display of appreciation of the aesthetic beauty of this work’s rhetoric and stylistic traits has been a marked feature of the approach of these reviews.<sup>1</sup>

But one can’t avoid being struck with the tenuousness of naysaying critics whose analyses hardly touch on ‘Abdīshō‘’s ingenuity and grandeur, or the exquisite beauty of his literary art.<sup>2</sup>

Those familiar with the writings of this author know the damage done to his reputation by small-minded commentators who have failed to appreciate his poetical skills. It is far from certain whether unfair evaluation of his work is due simply to the ineptitude of self-styled authorities unfamiliar with the literary elegance of Syriac. Instead, it may be due to their tunnel-vision in passing literary judgment from a parochial perspective.

‘Abdīshō‘ was born about the middle of the thirteenth century, in Gāzarthā d’bēth Zabdai ܟܘܕܝܬܐ ܕܒܝܬܐ ܕܐܒܕܝܫܘܢ, which is on the Tigris. He was a Nestorian by religious profession. Around 1285, while studying at the convent of Mār Akhā and Mār Yōkhannān ܕܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ (near Gāzarthā), he was called to the episcopal throne of Shīgār ܫܝܓܐܪ and Bēth-‘Arbāyē ܒܝܬ ܐܪܒܝܝܐ by the Catholicus Yahbālāhā III ܝܗܒܐܠܐܗܐ ܝܝܘܚܐܢܐ. In 1291, he was elevated to the position of Metropolitan Bishop of Nisībis ܫܘܒܝܒܝܐ (Sūbā

<sup>1</sup> No comprehensive study of this book has yet been published in English, but a good literary analysis which covers 14 Homilies is found in the thesis of Frederick Victor Winnett, *Paradise of Eden* (Toronto, 1929), pp. 5-11. Also see the introductory remarks (in Arabic) of Gabriel Qardāwī, *Pardaisa Da’den (Paradise of Eden)*, (Beirut, 1889), pp.5-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius Ephrem I Barsoum, the eminent Assyrian scholar presents the work of ‘Abdīshō‘ and of those who imitated him in the most negative light. See his highly prejudiced judgment (in Arabic) in *al-Lu’lu’lūl Manthūr (History of Syriac Sciences and Literature)*, (Aleppo, 1987) p.453n. Albēr Abūna goes a step further by making surprisingly aberrant remarks. See: *Adabūl Luga al- Ārāmiya, (Literature of Aramaic Language)*, (Beirut, 1970) pp. 450-452.

<sup>3</sup> A native of China who rose from a humble station to the headship of the Church of the East (1281 - 1317).



pronounced Sūva (ܣܘܒܐ) and of Armenia. ‘Abdīshō‘ was present at the consecration of the Nestorian patriarch Timothy II ܛܝܡܘܬܝܘܨ ܩܘܪܝܢܐ (d. 1332) in February of 1318. He [‘Abdīshō‘] died in November of the same year.

‘Abdīshō‘ d'Sūvā ܣܘܒܐ ܕܥܒܕܝܫܘܐ (as Assyrian are accustomed to call him) ranks amongst the more than one hundred and fifty Assyrian authors who contributed to the enrichment of Syriac public literature during its long history ranging from about the second century after Christ down to the thirteenth or fourteenth. He was an accomplished exegete, a bibliographer and a theologian of a vast erudition and a logical mind. ‘Abdīshō‘ was also deeply versed in Arabic and Greek learning. As a writer of prose he is proverbial for eloquence and purity of style, a master of verbal and phraseological resource. His literary merit lies in his originality, subjects of thought, his creative imagination and dazzling imagery, expressed in a cultivated art of pleasing and effective style. This genius enjoyed an illustrious reputation throughout the Middle Ages when his achievements were better known. His works are held in highest esteem by Assyrians to this day.

‘Abdīshō‘’s output was voluminous; we have from his pen polemical, liturgic, and philosophical compositions. At the end of his Catalogue of Syriac Ecclesiastical Works ܩܘܬܘܒܐ ܕܥܒܕܝܫܘܐ, the indispensable reference index which he compiled in 1298, ‘Abdīshō‘ listed a detailed description of his own publications, as follows:

*“And I, humble ‘Abdīshō‘ of Sūbā, wrote a commentary on the Old and New Testament, and the book entitled Kāthōlīkus, on the marvelous dispensation (life of our Lord on earth), and that of poetry, entitled the Paradise of Eden, and an epitome of Synodical laws, and the book of Shamarwarid which I wrote in Arabic. And I wrote the book entitled Margāntīhā on the truth of the faith, and a treatise on the Mysteries of the Grecian Philosophers, and another called “Scholasticus” against heresy. I also collated a book on Church Laws and Discipline, and another consisting of twelve treatises on knowledge in general, besides consolations, antiphons, and anthems for various occasions, an explanation of the Epistle which the great and wonderful Aristotle wrote to Alexander on the great artifice (philosophy). Also a work dealing with diversified subjects, and one of proverbs, arguments and riddles.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals* (London, 1852), vol. ii., p.379.

ܘܗܘܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܠܘܗܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ	: ܐܘܕܘܟܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ
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ܘܗܘܐ ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܠܘܗܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ	: ܐܘܕܘܟܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ

Mention should be made also of his commentary on an enigmatical poem of Shim'on Shanqlāwāyā ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ, a Nestorian creed *العقيدة النسطورية* in Arabic, a collection of twenty-two poems which treat of the love of wisdom and knowledge; and the *Turgāmē* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ (lit. 'interpretations') some of which were incorporated later in the liturgy of the Nestorian Church (Church of the East ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ).<sup>6</sup>

It is indeed unfortunate that only a comparatively small portion of 'Abdīshō's work has been preserved. *The Paradise of Eden* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ, *the Pearl* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ, *the Collection of Church Laws and Discipline* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ, and *the Creed* *العقيدة النسطورية* are the only books that have survived. The rest of the manuscripts are

<sup>5</sup> See: 'Abdīshō' d'Sūvā's "Index of Biblical and Ecclesiastical Writings", published in *Kthāba d'Margānītha 'Al Shrāra d'Kristyānūtha (The Book of the 'Pearl' on the Truth of Christianity)* by Yōsipp d'Qelaitā, (Mosul, 1924) p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> The loose name *Nestorian Church* tends to be abandoned.

missing or misplaced, perhaps still hidden in the dust of the depositories of deserted monasteries.

So far as ‘Abdīshō’s *Paradise of Eden* is concerned, the book has been analyzed by the indefatigable Assemani **يوسف سمعان السمعاني** (1687-176B).<sup>7</sup> The first edition of the Syriac text was brought out and published in 1916 in Urmia, Iran, by Yōsipp d’Qelaitā **ܝܫܘܦܢ ܕܩܠܝܬܐ** (1870-1952), the learned Assyrian scholar. This valuable edition was followed by his second enriched edition, republished this time in Mosul, Iraq, in 1928.<sup>8</sup> The published text was edited from several ancient manuscripts which d’Qelaitā had procured earlier. His editions show also the principal variations found in these ancient manuscripts.

The first translation of the *Paradise of Eden* was made in German by P. Pius Zingerle who published the Syriac text and a translation of poems 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13 in part, and poems 9, 14 and 24 in full, and a portion of the commentary on each.<sup>9</sup> This was followed in 1888 by a Latin translation made by H. Gismondi who published the Syriac text and a translation of a part of the introduction and poems 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 18, 29, 37, 42, 50, with excerpts from the commentary.<sup>10</sup> In 1889, the first volume of the *Paradise of Eden* (25 poems) was edited, with lucid explanations in the form of notes in Arabic, by Gabriel Qardāwī **جبرئيل القرداحي** (1845-1931), the learned native of Beirut.<sup>11</sup> In 1929, Frederick Victor Winnett published the *Paradise of Eden* in the form of a thesis. No actual Syriac text was published, but his interpretation of the first fourteen homilies is made with great care, though without following the original metrical schemes. He has also given a brief description of the work, and often very sound explanatory notes and comments of an eclectic nature. To his interpretation, a very thorough introduction is prefixed.

The *Paradise* is considered the pearl among ‘Abdīshō’s books; it marks the pinnacle of this author’s literary achievement. The book is a collection of fifty verse homilies (*memrē* **ܡܡܪܐ**), of exceptional interest and value, composed artistically in varied versification. It is a combination of creativity and craftsmanship written in a highly literary design to display the vast wealth of the Syriac language and the most intricate techniques of its stately composition. ‘Abdīshō’s book has retained its popularity among Syriac-reading public over the past centuries. We need not be surprised then if the Assyrian people look up to it today, as they always have, as one of the greatest monuments of their classic literature.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to remember here that in the aftermath of the Moslem conquest Arabic gradually became the dominant language in the lands where the Syriac-speaking inhabitants were living. Although the Assyrian community was now living in a mixed linguistic situation, its people continued to resort to the ideal qualities and attributes of their own language. They displayed a pride in the glory and tradition of their language and in their literature as well. Let us also recall that although Syriac died out as a spoken language in the tenth century, the written

<sup>7</sup> Wright, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> *Pardaisā Da’dēn (The Paradise of Eden)*, compiled and edited by Yōsipp d’Qelaitā, (Mosul, 1928), hereafter referred to as d’Qelaitā.

<sup>9</sup> Winnett, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> This book is popular among Assyrians. Its popularity is evidenced by its multiple editions. In 1988, a new reprint of d’Qelaitā’s edition was published in Chicago by Rev. Kakoo Lazar who added to it a colorless and uninteresting preface **ܡܩܝܡ ܕܗܘܐ**.

language which was grounded in an old tradition continued to serve as the only proper medium of the literary endeavor of the Assyrian authors. One indication of this continuity lies in the uninterrupted literary and colorful intellectual life of the Assyrians in the succeeding centuries.

The writers who sprang up in this age achieved the highest peaks of literary and intellectual activity. At the same time they kept alive the splendors of earlier days even after the eleventh century when the period of the decline of Syriac literature started. We know many names of contemporary elegant Syriac authors who carried, so to speak, the torch of the classic epoch and pursued its path. They brought back to mind the pristine glories of the sacred Syriac language and its true worth. We may place at the head of the list of these authors those of renown such as Timothy I ܩܝܡܝܘܢ ܩܝܡܝܘܢ (728-823), Moses bar Kēpā ܡܘܨܝܘܨ ܒܪ ܩܝܦܐ (813-903), Theodore bar Kōnī ܬܝܘܕܘܪ ܒܪ ܩܘܢܝܐ, Thomas of Margā ܬܘܡܫܘܨ ܕܡܪܓܐ (7th century), Elias of Tīrhān ܐܝܠܝܐ ܕܬܝܪܗܢ (ܕܩܝܦܐ ܕܬܝܪܗܢ), Dinysius bar Sālībī ܕܝܢܝܫܝܘܨ ܒܪ ܣܠܝܒܝ (d. 1171), Michael of Meliten ܡܝܚܐܝܠ ܕܡܠܝܬܝܢ (1199-1126), and the two dominant literary giants, Gregory bar Hebraeus ܩܪܝܘܨܝܘܨ ܒܪ ܗܝܒܪܘܘܨ (1226-1286) and his younger contemporary ‘Abdīshō‘ of Nisibis ܐܒܕܝܫܘܗܘܐ ܕܢܝܨܝܒܝܝܢ (d. 1318).<sup>13</sup> These writers branched out into almost every field of writing and produced a variety of rich and ramified works in various fields, such as theology, metaphysics and other branches of philosophy, ethics, wisdom, poetry, medicine, history, accounts of travel, fables, anecdotes, essays, grammar, astronomy and astrology, chemistry, and biography. □

Syriac influence is easily discerned in the development of the Arabic language. It is a fact too seldom remembered that Syriac played a significant role in enlarging the horizon of Arabic during the period when the literary life of the Arabic language started emerging into the clearer light of history. In this way Arabic absorbed certain linguistic influences and grammatical distinctions common to the more ancient and privileged Syriac language. In the long run, Arabic adapted these features to the logic and syntax of its own. We also find that several patterns of style, rhetorical beauties, and literary rareties with which Arabic composition abounds bear a certain resemblance to similar established postures in Syriac public literature.

As time passed, Arabic gained the upper hand especially after the eleventh century, with the onset of turmoil and adversity which initiated the decline of Syriac literature. Syriac found itself ultimately confronted with a serious challenge coupled with a complex of problems unprecedented in all its history.

What is interesting, however, is that in the heyday of their literature, the view was widely held by the literate Arab public that its rich language was possessed of more flexibility and copiousness than any other national language. The Arabs were in reality extreme in their view even to the extent of harping on the relative poverty of other languages, and Syriac in the main, as compared with the nobility of their own “most copious and ornate language”. The reader should not be surprised then if ‘Abdīshō‘ gave his comment on the point in the following fashion:

*“Now certain Arabs, who are poets in the polish of their diction and grammarians in the eloquence of their phrases, have in their rashness and folly accused the Syriac language of being without resource and unrefined and clumsy, but to their own language they have accorded and affirmed a*

<sup>13</sup> For more on this subject, see: Fr. Gabriel of St. Joseph, *Syro-Chaldaic Grammar*, (Kerala, 1984) p. xvi.

gracefulness and an abundance of subtleties at the present time.”<sup>14</sup>

لَأَتَّبِعَنَّ مِنْ أَعْيَادِ دَعْوَتِكُمْ مُمَكَّلًا فِيهِمْ  
 هَذِهِ حَيْثُ هُمْ حَيٌّ بِدَعْوَتِكُمْ هَذِهِ لِكَيْتُمْ هَذِهِ لِي دَعْوَتِكُمْ  
 هَذِهِ مَذْبُوحٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
<sup>15</sup> هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ

It is now opportune to refer to the Arabic book of the Maqāmāt al-Harīrī <sup>16</sup> مقامات الحريري. This collection appeared on the scene in the golden age of Arabic literature, the days which saw the start of diminution in Syriac literary production. These *Maqāmāt* were written basically to display the splendor of the Arabic language. They were made up to embody in a series of rhythmical and metrical anecdotes some of the most difficult traits of composition. For the Arabs of his day, this book was a literary surprise; it was exalted above all other Arabic literary treasures. It was also portrayed by Arab commentators as a masterpiece of smooth elegance and refinement. Hence, its enthusiastic admirers looked to the *Maqāmāt* as the most fitting medium to showcase the magnificence of the Arabic language. Again ‘Abdīshō‘ criticizes this Arab point of view. His remarks run as follows:□

هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
 هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ  
<sup>17</sup> هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ هَذِهِ تَهْنِئَةٌ

‘And they are continually bringing and reading to everybody the book of *Maqāmāt* as an example. And every book of poetry and of rhetoric of all languages they put below it and disparage. And its compilation of fifty stories, mixed with fabrications of all sorts, which (though they appear) like

<sup>14</sup> Winnett, p. 13.  
<sup>15</sup> D’Qelaitā, p. 2.  
<sup>16</sup> Often rendered as “assembly”. A collection of various kinds of composition on various subjects often written in rhymed prose intersected by verse.  
<sup>17</sup> D’Qelaitā, pp. 3-4.

*a many-colored bird, are found to be whited sepulchers on examination by persons of discernment, they praise and magnify and extol and they brag about them and strut about. Wherefore, it has befallen me, a most obscure Syrian<sup>18</sup> and feeble Christian, to be moved with indignation by their foolish arrogance and to humble their haughty criticisms and to wrest victory for the first of all languages, overthrowing its accusers with true arguments.”<sup>19</sup>*

□ In his preface, the author al-Harīrī tells us of the occasion of his undertaking the composition of the remarkable book of the *Maqāmāt*. A Vizeer of the Caliph Mūstarshid Billāhī had commissioned him to compose these *Maqāmāt* after the method of Badī’ul Zamān al-Hamadhānī *بديع الزمان الهمذاني*<sup>20</sup>.

On account of this, and probably guided in his experiment by envying rivalry, al-°arīrī set about writing his *Maqāmāt*, roughly between 1101 and 1110.<sup>21</sup> He composed a series of fifty narratives containing many riches of the Arabic language, and written in the highest style of Arabian eloquence. The author directs attention to the distinctive features of his *Maqāmāt* and says:□

وأنشأت على ما أعانيه من قريحة جامدة\* وفتنة خامدة\* وروية ناضبة\* وهموم ناضبة\*  
خمسین مقامة تحتوي على جد القول وهزله\* ورقيق اللفظ وجزله\* وغرر البيان ودرره\* وملخ  
الأدب ونوادره\* إلى ما وشحتها به من الآيات\* ومحاسن الكنايات\* ورصعته فيها من الأمثال  
العربية\* واللطائف الأدبية\* والأحاجي النحوية\* والفتاوى اللغوية\* والرسائل المبتكرة\* والخطب  
المُخبِّرة\* والمواعظ المبكية\* والأضاحيك الملهية\* مما أمليت جميعه على لسان أبي زيد  
السروجي\* وأسندت روايته إلى الحارث بن همام البصري<sup>22</sup>

“And I composed, in spite of hindrances that I suffered from dullness of capacity, and dimness of intellect, and dryness of imagination and distressing anxieties, fifty *Maqāmāt*, which contain serious language and lightsome [which contain both serious and lightsome language], and combine refinement with dignity of style, and brilliancies with jewels of eloquence, and beauties of literature with its rarities, besides verses from the Koran wherewith I adorned them, and choice metaphors, and Arab proverbs that I interspersed, and literary elegancies, and grammatical riddles, and decisions on ambiguous legal questions, and original improvisations, and highly-wrought orations, and plaintive discourses, as well as jocose

<sup>18</sup> In the original text, ‘Abdīshō’ uses **هم دئيي** (*Assyrians*).

<sup>19</sup> Winnett, p. 13

<sup>20</sup> Badī’ul Zamān, “the Wonder of the Age’, title of honor given to Abūl Fazl Ahmad ibn al-Husain Hamadhānī, an eminent author who had preceded al-Harīrī in the same field of labor. His *Maqāmāt* are shorter than those of al-Harīrī, but more numerous. He died in 1008.

<sup>21</sup> The first *Maqāma* (*al-Harāmiya* No. 48) was composed in 1101. Al-Harīrī completed his fifty *Maqāmāt* in 1110. *Maqāmāt al-Harīrī* (*The Maqāmāt of al-Harīrī*), published by Dar Sāder, Beirut, 1965, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Sharishi Maqāmāt al-Harīrī al-Basrī* (*The Exposition of Maqāmāt al-Harīrī of Basra*) Edited by al-Sharīshī, (Beirut, 1952), vol. i, pp. 18-19.

witticisms; the whole of which I represent as indited <sup>23</sup> by Abū Zaid (of Seruji) أبو زيد السروجي the part of narrator being assigned to Hāreth son of Hammām حارث بن همام [of Basrah] <sup>24</sup>

In these narratives, al-Harīrī designated the “wily and versatile” Abū Zaid (of Seruji) أبو زيد السروجي to display his eloquence in the *Maqāmāt*, and assigned Hāreth ibn Hammām حارث بن همام to narrate Abū Zaid’s adventures and performances. Both of these characters are fictitious: the first being the counterpart of the Abū al’ Fat’h أبو الفتح, of Badī’ul Zamān al-Hamadhānī, and the second of the Ibn Hashām ابن هشام

Though himself a good scholar and linguist, al-Harīrī drew his inspiration from Badī’ul Zamān al-Hamadhānī and followed him most minutely. The original anecdotes of the latter reappeared with some changes in the new work. Many concepts as well as literary forms analogous to those of al-Hamadhānī stand revealed in al-Harīrī’s *Maqāmāt*. This suggests al-Harīrī’s dependence on the original author.

It is not our purpose here to dwell on the influence of Badī’ul Zamān al-Hamadhānī, but a word about this may be in order. The large number of resemblances, together with the method of presentation al-Harīrī had settled upon, and the arts of design he dealt with, show that his work is by no means the direct product of his personal experience. It is in reality a detailed reworking of the precursor’s craftsmanship, woven into a new fabric. In addition to this, there are still some who question whether this book was indeed al-Harīrī’s own work.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the truth may be, the new book received a greater deal of fame and attention in al-Harīrī’s lifetime and for centuries thereafter. Unfortunately for him, the eminent al-Hamadhānī became overshadowed by his successor. His original *Maqāmāt* fell by the wayside and passed into an undeserved obscurity.

At a subsequent time, the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī gave rise to two main versions, one in Hebrew and the other in Syriac, in addition to a number of subordinate versions, composed in Arabic by his Moslem countrymen.

A very close rendering bearing a Judaic stamp was made into Hebrew by a Rabbi of Andalusia (الأندلس), Jūdah al-Harīzī (d. before 1235).<sup>26</sup> The work of this author is a model of al-Harīrī’s original, although fairly distinct from the latter with respect to its subject matter. The Hebrew counterpart, *Taskemoni*, is of a serious class of wisdom literature. The narratives which are adapted from the ones initiated by al-Harīrī “are cast into rhyming prose, with a translation of the poetry in Hebrew verse”. The names Ithiēl and Qabār are substituted for Hāreth and Abū Zaid.

Finally, the Syriac language encroached on this field as well. A new competitor for the place of honor was introduced in 1291, this time ‘Abdīshō’s Syriac book of the *Paradise of Eden*. His enthusiastic admirer, the Patriarch Yahbalāhā ܝܗܒܠܗܐ ܩܘܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܥܕܢ charged ‘Abdīshō’ with the task of writing a work in which all the literary subtleties displayed in the *Maqāmāt* al-Harīrī should be rivaled and even excelled by similar devices in Syriac. Let us now

<sup>23</sup> Literally, ‘the whole of which I dictated from the tongue of Abū Zaid.’ i.e. ‘I put them into his mouth,’ and made him sustain the part of inditing or improvising in the *Maqāmāt*,’ See: Theodore Preston, *Makamat or Rhetorical Anecdotes of Al-Harīrī of Basra*, (London, 1850) p.28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

see what ‘Abdīshō‘ says on the point:

مَلِكُهُ دِب دِعْمَتِي دِنْبِيْتِي هِنْبِيْتِي نَهْتِيْتِي: دِيْتِي دِهْتِيْتِي:  
هِيْمَتِي دِه دِيْتِي: كِيْتِي دِيْتِي هِيْتِي: نَحْبِيْتِي جِك هِيْمَتِي:  
فَهْدِيْتِي مَهْلِكِيْتِي: هُوْتُو كِب سَهْلِيْتِي: دِيْتِي دِيْتِي كَهْتِيْتِي هِيْمَتِي:  
هِيْمَتِي كَهْمَتِي كَهْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي: هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي:  
هِيْمَتِي: هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي: دِهْتِيْتِي مَهْلِكِيْتِي هِيْمَتِي:  
هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي: هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي دِيْتِي دِيْتِي هِيْمَتِي هِيْمَتِي.<sup>27</sup>

*“And particularly (is it my duty) since he who is the glory of the most illustrious and the most distinguished among the glorious, the chief of our community and the sun of our faith, the most excellent and happy of men, most wise and blessed, has charged me authoritatively and suggested earnestly that I should set up a standard for their reproof and put forward an example for the smiting of their jaws by a composition full of excellences and wit, a bringing together of words and phrases which carefully observes the rules of logic and of poetry, and the laws of rhetoric accurately maintains.”<sup>28</sup>*

By all means, and the reader should not be surprised, the gigantic task of writing such a book of excellence was not smooth for even so great a versatile writer as ‘Abdīshō‘ of Sūbā. However, being conscious of his intellectual and literary gifts, ‘Abdīshō‘ responded to the lure with unhesitated readiness and challenged the unrivaled popularity and supremacy of al-Harīrī’s Maqāmāt. Thus, and at the instigation of his Patriarch, the true master of the ancient tongue compiled his book and gave it the name of the “Paradise of Eden”. The designation is appropriate because of the numerous graces ‘Abdīshō‘ bestowed upon the book. It must be admitted that by assimilating al-Harīrī’s experience and passing beyond it, ‘Abdīshō‘ unmasked the speciousness of “the absurd exaggeration of the Arab assertion” in which the Arabic commentators had been too confident.

Turning now to the four works aforementioned, we notice a difference between the “Assemblies” مقامات of al-Hamadhānī and al-Harīrī on one hand, and the Hebrew and Syriac “Assemblies” on the other. While the first two have used their talents to write on trivial social occasions, and have turned for their themes to the art of intellectual frivolity, a strong sense of seriousness pervades the works of the two counterparts, and, these two writers (Harīrī and ‘Abdīshō‘) have drawn their themes from wisdom (in the case of Hebrew) as compared with theology (in the case of Syriac). We need not say more on this point except to add that it simply goes against the facts to assume that the work of the first two writers was really meant to serve exclusively as a vehicle for scholarship, and not for recreation and light reading as well.

When the Maqāmāt and Paradise are placed side by side, the reader will inevitably note

<sup>27</sup> D’Qelaitā, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Winnett, pp. 13-4.



the many ways in which the two collections closely connect. They both contain a number of corresponding elements and counterparts, some of which are of a striking character, whilst others are less conclusive. Conversely, in the case of dissimilarities, there is a dramatic divergence between the two collections.

An interesting feature which these two literary works have in common is that each contains a series of fifty “Assemblies” (called the *Maqāmāt* مقامات in the case of al-Harīrī, and the *Homilies* (memrē مِمْرَة 2) in the case of ‘Abdīshō’), prefixed with a lengthy introduction.

Before plunging into the study of these two collections, let us briefly view the main features of their introductions. Apparently, the text presented in both is logically arranged. Seeking to produce its effect by sheer rhetoric, both writers have employed amazingly rich language, enhanced by an extraordinarily difficult and archaic vocabulary. And perhaps next to the fascination of language comes the charm of the prose to which both writers have tended to devote great concern. This pattern of poetical prose, generally known in Arabic as *al-Saja’* السجع, is a rhetorical ornament that displays rhythm and rhyme.<sup>29</sup> It was a very prominent and ideal form in Arabic and Syriac literatures, and readers of that era embraced it easily. Speaking of it, both ‘Abdīshō’ and al-Harīrī were true masters of this genre of writing. As for Harīrī, nowhere is his style more striking than in the vivid passages of his introduction. The spirit of the language of his picturesque style bears a certain resemblance to that of the Kor’ān القرآن. An example of this artificial eloquence may serve as illustration:□

اللهم فحقق لنا هذه المنية\* وأنلنا هذه البغية\* ولا تضحنا عن ظلك السابغ\* ولا  
تجعلنا مضغة للماضغ\* فقد مددنا إليك يد المسئلة\* وبخغنا بالإستكائة لك والمسكنة\*  
واستنزلنا كرمك الجم، وفضلك الذي عم\* بضراعة الطلب\* وبضاعة الأمل\* بالتوسل بمحمد  
سيد البشر\* والشفيع المشفع في المحشر\* الذي ختمت به النبيين\* وأعليت درجته في  
عليين\* ووصفته في كتابك المبين\* فقلت وأنت أصدق القائلين\* وما أرسلناك إلا رحمة  
للعالمين\* اللهم فصل عليه وعلى آله الهادين\* وأصحابه الذين شادوا الدين\* واجعلنا لهديه  
وهديهم متبعين\* وأنفعنا بمحبته ومحبتهم أجمعين\* إنك على كل شئ قدير\* وبالإجابة  
جدير\*<sup>30</sup>

□ Similarity manifests itself in the introductions in other aspects as well. Besides telling us of the occasion for their undertaking the composition of their “Assemblies”, both authors indicate as well the end aimed by their work. Yet there is a closer parallel in the fact that both writers open their prologue with a prayer.

In discussing the core of these two collections we discover that the details are of a purely literal character. But it is hardly correct to suggest that the two works (especially ‘Abdīshō’s) were intended exclusively for popular reading. In most cases the reader finds difficulty in perceiving clearly and fully the rare words and the figurative and enigmatic expressions of the *Maqāmāt* without constant reference to the commentaries (over fifty in number compiled by Arabic and other expositors). There can be no doubt that these *Maqāmāt* were just as puzzling to the intellectual group of al-Harīrī’s own day as they are to the reader today.

The same is true of ‘Abdīshō’s *Paradise*. His work which incorporates topics that belong exclusively to the realm of theology are not intended for the untutored reader. Occasionally, the student of the book stands in need of some aid in order to comprehend the

<sup>29</sup> The love of poetry is so strong in the East that it affected the prose.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Sharīshī, vol. i, pp. 13-4.

innermost thoughts of the writer. In some cases, explanatory notes and other information are essential in order to sense the meaning and usage of the archaic and coined vocabulary that the author had had to do with, and had found helpful to meet the exigencies of the undertaking.<sup>31</sup> On this point, the author himself says that 25 years after he had written his book, he found it necessary to add an explanatory commentary, as there were few who still possessed such an understanding of the classical tongue that they could grasp the significance of all his subtleties, obscurities, riddles and allusions. In his introductory chapter we have as follows:

□

خَدَّ اَشْرِكُ مَبِي سَخْبِ اَلِكِ هَيِّمَكْلَ هَاذِيْ اَبِ دَمِيْتِي دِنَمَتِي:  
 دِيْبِدِي كَجَبْتِي اَسْتِي اَبِي لُبْدِيْبَعَدُ مَبِيْدَفَهْلِيْ دِيْهْتِي هَاذِيْ دَمِيْتِي:  
 هَاذِيْ مَلْ كَبْتِي اَسْتِي: دِيْ اَبِي اَسْتِي خَبْ اَلِكِ هَيِّمَكْلَ هَيِّهَذِيْ هَاذِيْ  
 دِنَمَتِي: مَبِيْدُ اَسْمِيْ لَحْدُ دُصْدُ يِيْ هَاذِيْ اَبِي اَبِي: دِيْ اَبِي هَاذِيْ اَبِي  
 مَلْ هَاذِيْ اَبِي. هَيِّه اَبِي اَسْمِيْ هَاذِيْ كَب: اَبِي اَبِي مَبِيْدُ اَبِي دِيْ هَاذِيْ  
 اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي. مَبِيْدُ اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي  
 هَاذِيْ دَمِيْتِي هَيِّ اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي: دِيْ اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي: اَبِي  
 اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي. هَاذِيْ اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي  
 دِيْ اَبِي اَبِي: اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي. دِيْ  
 اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي اَبِي.

It becomes apparent from a study of al-Harīrī's book that the design and form of expression are the core and the subject matter the veneer. The parts which are more impressive and which are read with highest admiration are the portions in which al-Harīrī uses his talents in exhibiting various skills in the handling of the language. His poetry passages are a subject of special admiration.

As for al-Harīrī's themes, they suffer from a fundamental lack of seriousness. As the reader goes through the pages of the *Maqāmāt*, he will discover that the greater part of the stories exhibit circumstantial details and a variety of trivial matters. The reader will also encounter some elements and adventures which will resound in his mind if he is familiar with the Arabian "Thousand and One Nights".

The themes of the stories in the *Maqāmāt* treat for the most part affairs and roguish adventures devised by a sharp-witted vagabond (Abū Zaid) who seeks charity and bounty often by means of crooked and deceitful practices. But more extraordinary are the coarse passages which al-Harīrī has incorporated in his *Maqāmāt*. These passages teem with innumerable and rationally unacceptable references to topics generally not the subject of a book intended for popular reading. Patently inappropriate passages (such as is in *Maqāmāt*, 10, 20, 40, and 42)

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the word **اَبِي** (Homily 1), **اَبِي** and **اَبِي** (Homily 2).

<sup>32</sup> D'Qelaitā, p. 6.

shock our sensibilities. Such remarks, direct or otherwise, are expressed by skillful use of colorful imagery. We must mention here that thoughts exceeding the bound of decency have been expunged from the works of most commentators and translators of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī so as not to offend the intellectually-minded reader.<sup>33</sup> Silvestre de Sacy who translated the *Maqāmāt* into Latin accuses al-Harīrī of the “abuse of wit and imagination, and of shocking his readers by repeated offenses against good taste”.<sup>34</sup>

But ‘Abdīshō‘ had no knowledge of such profane writing, and quite in contrast to al-Harīrī’s *Makamat*, ‘Abdīshō‘’s verse homilies are of a wholly different nature. This author stood on his own ground and dealt with a class of literature which is completely different from that of his counterpart.

A strong sense of solemnity pervades his entire poems; and herein lies an essential difference between the works of the two writers. Indeed ‘Abdīshō‘ could not and would not make the sacred Syriac language pronounce the gross absurdities depicted in al-Harīrī’s work, nor would this venerable father who was reared in an atmosphere of religious devoutness allow such details to offend the taste of his readers.

In addition to giving great attention to linguistic matters and to displaying virtuosity in handling the form, ‘Abdīshō‘ touched upon themes of intellectual keenness and interest. Each and every one of the fifty metric homilies is composed on an individual sublime theme. The work produced is of a dominantly theological nature, picturesque in style, meditative and hortatory in tone. In it, ‘Abdīshō‘ elaborated with unsurpassed eloquence on various aspects of ecclesiastical life side by side with intellectual examination of Christian philosophy and doctrines of Nestorian origin. He also introduced into his homilies many biblical themes and images, and a rich texture of biblical allusions.

His homilies were aimed specifically at the audience of serious and scholarly men who primarily enjoyed the unique taste of similar flavor. ‘Abdīshō‘ concentrated all the powers of his mind to produce the *Paradise* in a worthy and elegant form not only to be enjoyed by the reader but notably to allow the student of this valuable treasure many possibilities for thinking.

We know full well that artistic merit was the most significant endowment of al-Harīrī, and on it principally rested this author’s fame. He paid great attention to the syntactic structure and to the grace of expression in exemplifying various branches of Arabic literature. Though a large number of these peculiar methods were suggested to him by the example of al-Hamadhānī and of similar past works, the author created fresh nuances and new concepts never thought of or produced before.

Thus, concerning himself with the obsessive desire to set a high value on the linguistic medium of the outward form of his picaresque style of fiction, al-Harīrī employed throughout the prose passages of his narratives the *Saja*’ السجع genre, structured with ornate and elaborate language.

There is much artificiality in the language of this prose, and contrary to widespread impression, the complex interweaving of this form of writing lacks some qualities that make the anecdotes of Abū Zaid enjoyable. Successive occurrence and reverberation of the seemingly

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<sup>33</sup> See in the introduction and appendix the remarks of Preston who omitted some of the *Maqāmāt* for this reason.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Preston, xiii. He adds: “De Sacy inclines to prefer the *Maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī as more exempt from these faults, and as depicting with more simplicity a greater variety of subjects and adventures.”

jingly sound of the rhyme scheme and of the rhythmical effect of this “art prose” do not appeal to the ear. It often gives the impression of monotony.

In every *Maqāma*, some of the prose passages are interspersed with passages of verse of ingenious artifice, though often without much serious content. The poet uses artificial eloquence and a number of poetic devices to produce the poetic spirit and the artistic effect he intended.

The verse lines أبيات are decked with an amazingly rich rhyme قافية. Identical rhyme is repeated at the end of every line throughout most of the verse passages. But in a few of them, al-Harīrī has introduced varied rhyme schemes. For example, the two hemistichs (half-verses) شَطُورٌ - *the breast* الصَّدْرُ and *the rump* العَجْزُ - rhyme with one another, creating internal rhyme. There are, however, a few other passages in which rhyme does not remain the same in the verses. Also, some lines are of ear rhyme, being similar in sound but not in spelling.

The verse is cast into various metrical schemes أبخُرُ الشَّعر<sup>35</sup>. The meter *al-Basī* البسيط (the outspread) is employed in *Maqāmāt* 2, 24, 25, 31, 36, 37, 38, 44, 46, 47, 50; *al-Hazaj* الهَزَجُ (the trilling) in 6, 7, 42; *al-Kāmil* الكامل (the perfect) in 4, 6, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 29, 34, 36, 39, 46, 48, 49; *al-Rajaz* الرَّجْزُ (the trembling) in 3, 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 25, 26, 34, 35, 40, 43, 44, 47; *al-Sarī* السَّرِيعُ (the swift) in 2, 4, 13, 19, 20, 21, 25, 33, 35, 37, 40, 41, 45, 46; *al-Ramal* الرَّمَلُ (the running) in 9, 27, 30, 32, 36; *al-Ḍawīl* الطَّوِيلُ (the long) in 2, 7, 18, 21, 23, 25, 42, 45, 46, 47, 48; *al-Wafīr* الوافِرُ (the exuberant) in 24, 31, 34, 36, 42, 48; *al-Khafīf* الخَفِيفُ (the light) in 10, 12, 15, 18, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 45, 48; *al-Mujtath* المُجْتَثُ (the amputated) in 1, 13, 14, 36, 42; *al-Munsarīḥ* المنسرحُ (the flowing) in 8, 9, 28, 38; *al-Muta/ārib* المتقاربُ (the tripping) in 1, 3, 6, 12, 16, 19, 32, 33, 42, 43, 46.<sup>36</sup>

The poet creates a variety of striking images in the *Maqāmāt* by means of elaborate metaphors and similes and the like of figures which contribute to the vivid picture of the incidents of his stories. He is famous for the tricks that he plays with the internal structure and forms of words. A few of the poetical devices used in his *Maqāmāt* include the *Jinas* الجناسُ (using in close proximity two words having the same root letters but with different meanings) □

وأخوى حوى رقي برقة تغره وغادرنى النفا السهاد بغدره<sup>37</sup>

and its varieties, such as the *Mudhaiyal* المنذيلُ (one of the two words having an additional syllable), the *Mukhālif* المخالفُ (two words differing in their vocalization), the *Murakkab* المُركَّبُ (one of the two elements made up of two distinct words), the *Musahaf* المصحَّفُ (the two words differing in regard to the diacritical point of certain letters) the *Maqlūb* المقلوبُ (two words with identical letters but in different order). Other figures include the *tibāq* الطَّباقُ (mentioning of two words that have opposite meaning in the same line of verse), the *Mubālagha* المُبالِغَةُ (hyperbole). In some passages of his prose and poetry the author makes use of the *Tazmīn* التضمينُ (quoting from the Koran, the traditions, or a verse of poetry), the *Talmīh* التلميحُ (allusion with direct quotation), the *Īhām* الإيهامُ (where the more remote of the two meanings is the one intended), and many more varieties of figure of speech.<sup>38</sup> Other features that he used in some verses are *palindromes* (verses that could be read either forwards or backwards). He also constructed

<sup>35</sup> For a brief explanation of Arabic meters, see: A. J. Arberry, *Arabic Poetry*, (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 8-12.

<sup>36</sup> For synopsis of the meters, see: Dr. F. Steingass, *Assemblies of Hariri*, (London, 1897), pp. xxi-xxv.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Sharīshī, “Maqāma 23”, vol. ii, p.221.

<sup>38</sup> For explanation of Arabic poetical devices, see: Arberry, 21-26.

sentences that would furnish a good sense whether the words of them were read from the beginning or end, and verses that are devoid of points, or verses with all the letters pointed, or with the alternate words without points.

While the standard of the *Maqāmāt* is high, it does not measure up to the standard of *Paradise* in elegance of style and rhetoric, in poetic devices, or in sublimity of thought. In ‘Abdīshō’s *Paradise*, poems are the essential substance of the work, and every one of them is identifiable by a special topic. The book is divided into two volumes, each containing twenty-five metric homilies of high poetic merit. The first twenty-five homilies (Volume I) which are composed in 2626 verses stand apart from the rest since they are dedicated to Enoch ܡܢܚܝܐ. The next twenty-five homilies which comprise over 2000 verses, form a separate section of the book (Volume II). They are dedicated to Elijah ܝܗܝܘܐ. The poet appended footnotes to his homilies in addition to the obvious task of explaining what is not clear.

These homilies are written in strophic poetry remarkable for its complicated alphabetical acrosticism ܡܝܕܘܢܐ ܕܒܝܬܝܢ.<sup>39</sup> They consist of poems, written in different meters and in repetitive strophic pattern. The initial letters of such strophes form the Syriac alphabet in order. The strophes in every one of these poems consist of the same number of verses, and every one has a logical sense. With the exception of the twelfth homily which consists of *hypermetric* strophes (mixed strophes containing verses of different meters), the rest are of simple strophes, mostly consisting of four and sometimes two regular verses of equal length (syllables). They have a variety of carefully chosen rhythmical patterns and meters, devised in an admirable and graceful form of expression. The verses are fancy and forceful in their style, rich in colorful imagery, and of general interest in the topics they address. They attest to this scholar’s intellectual knowledge together with his pervasive familiarity with the immense traditional literature, and his great command of the Syriac language.

‘Abdīshō’ attracts attention in his poems by creating a variety of dazzling images and by using a variety of poetic devices displayed in a neatly arranged figurative language. Such language is the result of the poet’s choice and collocation of colorful and suggestive words in each verse so that the arrangement would express a richer meaning and create sounds and rhythms that appeal to the ear. The lines of his verse are arranged and grouped in a particular way for a particular purpose. The poet has done the same for the words in each verse. The words he chooses have the right meaning and sound, texture and flavor. He uses a number of unusual words, and many common words in unusual ways, creating a subtle rhetorical pattern. Sometimes he strains words to fit the needs of rhymes and rhythm especially in the poems of the second collection of his book where he makes a given sound sustain throughout all words of the poem. Yet his syntax invariably remains faithful to the logic and spirit of Syriac. Like that of Arabic, the morphology of the Syriac language makes it easy for the poet to play tricks with these words. It should be kept in mind that in these and like respects, ‘Abdīshō’ surpasses all the other Syriac poets. No form of language of any of them is regarded with more interest, and no Syriac poet has put the language to so wide a variety of uses or displayed such great aptitude in handling the form. Gabriel Qardāwī, the nineteenth-century Syriac scholar, praises his talent and superior ability, while others place him almost on an equal footing with even the greatest genius,

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<sup>39</sup> A composition, usually in verse, in which the initial letters of the strophes form the alphabet in order ܡܝܕܘܢܐ ܕܒܝܬܝܢ

Ephrem the Assyrian **ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܘܢܐ**.<sup>40</sup>

The special beauty of these poems is highlighted by a variety of figures which help in expressing beauty and vividness of the flowery style. The figures of speech are far too many to be cited in full. Alliteration and metaphorical allusions are the most common, while other much favored are ambiguity, metonymy, similes, and many more like figures. The poet restricts his allusions to works of his own tradition. Figures of thought are nearly as numerous. Working together, these poetical devices produce the effect ‘Abdīshō’ intended.

Different forms of meter are employed in the poems. The prevailing one, his favorite meter, is the *heptasyllabic* **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**,<sup>41</sup> used in Homilies 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 50. The next most common meter is the *dodecasyllabic* **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ**,<sup>42</sup> written in two-line strophes (couplets) in homilies 2, 7, 8, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 36, 45, 46. *Octosyllabic* or the eight-syllable lines **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ**, are found in only two poems, the third (two-line strophes) and the thirty third (four-line strophes). The twelfth homily has an irregular construction; it is written in four-line mixed strophes, the first three lines being *hexasyllabic* (of six syllables) and the fourth, which is a kind of repeated refrain **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**, *heptasyllabic* (of seven syllables).

The sixth homily that concerns the *Divine Judgments* **ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ** is a very remarkable one. It may be read either as a seven- (*heptasyllabic*), or six (*hexasyllabic*), or five- (*pentasyllabic*) syllable composition, that is either in the meter of Ephrem **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**, Narsai **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**, or Bālai **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**. These three meters are sustained throughout the individual lines of the whole poem. The meaning remains as well perfectly consistent. The metrical base of each line of the poem is composed of seven syllables. Each individual line contains a one-syllable particle, such as **ܕܝܚ**, **ܡܫ**, **ܝܚ** or a word of a simple syllable such as **ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**, **ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**, written in red. These simple-syllabic units and the particles are not really necessary to the sense and may be either read or omitted. When read, the line has seven syllables (i.e., it follows the *heptasyllabic* measure). This poem is composed in twenty-four four-line strophes. Here is the first strophe of the poem in which the rhythmic variations and the textured pattern of various metrical differences are exemplified:

<sup>40</sup> See: Qardāwī, p. 5; also, Assemani, quoted by Abūna, p. 450.

<sup>41</sup> Heptasyllabic meter is formed of seven syllables in a verse. It is generally styled as ‘*ʕraita*

**ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ** or “Nīsha d’Mār Aprem **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**.”

<sup>42</sup> Generally styled as “*ʕraita d’Mār Narsai*” **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ** or “Nīsha d’Mār

□ Yacoub” **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܘܨܝܢܐ** or “*Qraita t’Tartīn*” **ܡܫܘܚܐ ܫܒܥܝܬܐ**. This is a long

□ measure generally formed by the repetition of tetrasyllables, composed in two-line strophes. In this syllable pattern, there is always a caesura after the fourth and eighth syllable.



يَا خَاطِبَ الْدُنْيَا الدَّيَّةُ      أَنَّهُ شَارَكَ الْوَدَى  
 دَارُ مَتَى أَضْحَكْتُ      فِي يَوْمِهَا أَبْكْتُ غَدًا\*<sup>46</sup>

“Oh you who court the world of baseness, know that it is a net of destruction,  
 A habitation, which, if it makes you laugh today, makes you weep  
 tomorrow.”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the outstanding characteristic that distinguishes ‘Abdīshō’s poems is his complex interweaving of the complicated technique of acrosticism with the meticulous rhyme scheme. The poet is capable of making wide variations in construction and rhyme. In most cases, he employs in the lines of his poems a more or less regular number of words, often in parallel units. The poems range in length from 96 or so to above 200 lines and have many different structures to meet the requirements of the work. Some are quite different from the ones the Syriac reader is accustomed to seeing.

Apart from the introductory verse to every poem, the initial letters of the lines or strophes form the twenty-two letters of the Syriac alphabet in order. This letter is frequently repeated at the end of every subsequent line. The line that follows is a representative example:

كيس سيمك ديمبيد:      مسيخ كدسيك ههسيك\*<sup>48</sup>

Some of the poems have the typical (aaaa) rhyme scheme, repeating at the end of the four lines of each strophe:



ذيس سمكك بسمك هبذ:      نبيس مديت هبذ  
 هب هجك ههكب سبذ:      هبجك ههكب هبذ\*<sup>49</sup>

and some poems have strophic forms with complex rhyming. The first three lines in a four-line pattern of the strophe have the very same rhyme and the fourth alters in succession (aaab scheme):



هنين ككب قين كيمك ه:      هكب بقت ه كيمك ه  
 دكم حيس مكم ه:      هكب قين كيمك ه\*<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Al-Sharīshī, “Maqāma. 23”, p.216.

<sup>47</sup> Shah, p. 96.

<sup>48</sup> D’Qelaitā, “Homily 35”, p. cxlv.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 15”, p. lxxii.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 43”, p. clxxi.



or the same scheme (*aaab*) before 2. (*Ālap*) at the end of the line:



١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ \*<sup>51</sup> ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١



Where the fourth line of the strophe has a different ending from the other three, this rhyme (ending) is paired throughout the subsequent strophes:

١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 \* ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 \* ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 \*<sup>52</sup> ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١



In homily 2, the first two letters of each verse are identically arranged with the last two in a poem of 220 lines, (ten verses per each letter of the alphabet). We give a selection from the poem by way of illustration:



١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 \* ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١  
 \*<sup>53</sup> ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ : ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١ ١١١١

Volume Two of *Paradise* which includes homilies 26 and on (each one comprising of 96 verses), is an extremely artificial production. Indeed this work is widely recognized as of incontestable elegance and technical sophistication.

□ In the first poem (homily 26 concerning the *Orthodox Faith* ١١١١ ١١١١), all the words of its 96 verses end in an ١ (*Ālap*). The initial letter of the four lines of each strophe (composed in the manner of acrostic) is identical with the penultimate letter of each verse. This poem has a further peculiarity: it does not contain a single *g* (١), *T*(١), *s*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 17”, p. lxxviii.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 13”, p. lxii. ١١١١ (*lishān*) reads (*Ishan*), with a vowelless ١. A □ poetical necessity. See Qardāwī. p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 2”. pp. xx & xxiii.

(هـ), p (ع), Π(ق), or q (ص). The example offered is a strophe from the poem:

□

ذہر مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ  
 ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ \*<sup>54</sup>

□ Again all the words in homilies 27 and 28 contain an ل (*Ālap*), and the verse lines are decked with a range of rich and complicated rhymes. The initial letter of the first three lines of each strophe in both poems is also identical with the penultimate letter that precedes the final ل (*Ālap*) of the verse. The terminal (fourth) line upon which the strophe ends rhymes in ہ لہ (Ith) and in لہ (nā) in a recurrent manner throughout poems 27 and 28 respectively. We give a strophe from each poem by way of illustration:

□

سم تہ لہ مہر لہ دہر دہدہ : لہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ  
 لہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : لہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ \*<sup>55</sup>  
 سہ لہ دہر دہدہ لہ مہر لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ  
 ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ \*<sup>56</sup>

In the 29th, all words have a ب (*Bēth*). In the 30th a گ (*Gāmal*), and the poem has neither Tet (د), k (ک), Sade (س), nor Qop (ص):

□

بہ لہ مہر لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ  
 ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ \*<sup>57</sup>

As the reader goes through the poems that follow, he will find a د (*Dālath*) in the 31st, and so on to the end of the alphabet, completing the number of fifty poems, the last two both containing ت (*Tāw*). In the 34th homily, all words contain ز (*Zain*) and none of them has in it Tet (د), Sade (س), nor sheen (ش): as in the following example:

زہر مہر لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ  
 ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ : ہ مہر لہ دہتتہ لہ دہر دہدہ \*<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* “Homily 26”, p. cxiv.  
<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 27”, p. cxix.  
<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 28”, P. cxxii.  
<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 30”, p. cxviii.

And again in the 35th homily, we do not find any 𐌺 ('ē); yet all words of the poem have a 𐌾 (*Kheith*):

𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹  
 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹\*<sup>59</sup>

The words of the 36th contain a 𐌺 (*Teith*) and there is a deliberate avoidance of the use of 𐌹 (*Sadē*). The rhyme sound of 𐌺 (*nā*) is sustained throughout the whole poem. Listen to the conspicuous repetition of the *Teith* sound in the following example.

𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹  
 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹\*<sup>60</sup>

The letter 𐌿 (*Kāp*) is found in every word of homily 38, and on its sound the poet builds the rhyme. And here, too, the initial letter of the strope is made identical with the penultimate of each line:

□

𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹  
 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹\*<sup>61</sup>

In some homilies, such as 5, 40, 47 and 49, the lines of the poems end in 𐌺 (*Ālap*) and the penultimate letters (next to the last 𐌺 *Ālap*) of the verses are the letters of the alphabet ranked in reverse order 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹. 𐌺 (*Mīm*) exists in 40, 𐌺 (*Rēsh*) in 47, and 𐌸 (*Tāw*) in 49 from which we take the following example:

□

𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹  
 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹 𐌸𐌰𐌹\*<sup>62</sup>

All the words in the 42nd homily are devoid of 𐌹 (*Zain*), 𐌹 (*Sadē*) and 𐌸 (*shīn*) but the letter 𐌸 (*Simkath*) is present, producing rich alliteration. Let us listen to the similarity and repetition of the “s” sound:□

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 34”, pp. cxl-i.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 35”. p. cxliv.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 36”, p. cxlvii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 38”, p. cliv.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, “Homily 49”, p. clxxxviii.

هـ ج د هـ م ح م هـ تـ تـ يـ : هـ مـ مـ نـ نـ د مـ مـ تـ تـ يـ : هـ مـ مـ مـ مـ لـ هـ جـ تـ يـ  
 مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ : مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ \*<sup>63</sup>

□

And poem 43 does not possess a single م (Kheith). The letter د (‘ē) exists in all the words:

□

كـ كـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ : هـ جـ د هـ م ح م هـ تـ تـ يـ : هـ مـ مـ مـ مـ لـ هـ جـ تـ يـ  
 مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ : مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ مـ \*<sup>64</sup>

□

In the 45 homily where all words of the poem have a س (Sadē), the poet makes rich use of some sound clusters. The use of ز (Zain), ك (Kāp), nor ه (Simkath) is deliberately suppressed:

سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ : سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ  
 سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ سـ \*<sup>65</sup>

Homily 46 whose words contain a ق (Qōp) is empty of غ (Gāmal), ه (Hē), ك (Kāp), and س (Sadē): □

قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ : قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ  
 قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ قـ \*<sup>66</sup>

And there is not a single ز (Zain), ه (Simkath), nor a م (Madē) in the 48th homily whose words have a ش (Shīn).

□

شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ : شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ  
 شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ شـ \*<sup>67</sup>

□ ‘Abdīshō‘ who was impressed with some characteristics of □ al-Harīrī’s poetry, borrowed from it a trait or two. Thus some of the features we find in ‘Abdīshō’s poems, like writing verses which could be read either forward or backward, are analogous to certain postures in al-Harīrī’s poetry. In the *Maqāma al-Maghribiyā* (No. 16), al-Harīrī has composed five short palindromic sentences as follow: ( لَمْ أَخَمَلْ ),

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., “Homily 42”, p. clxvi.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., “Homily 43”. p. clxix.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., “Homily 45”, p. clxxvi.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., “Homily 46”, p. clxxix.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., “Homily 48”, p. clxxxv.

( لُدُّ بَكْلٌ مُؤَمَّلٌ إِذَا لَمْ وَمَلِكٌ بَدَلٌ ) , ( سَكَّتْ كُلٌّ مَنْ نَمَّ لَكَ تَكِسٌ ) , ( كَبَّرَ رَجَاءَ رَبِّكَ ) . And elsewhere in the same *Maqāmā*, he composed a poem of five lines in the form of a palindrome. A mere superficial glance will suffice to show that the poem looks like a word puzzle. The poem makes no sense, in addition to which uncommon words and intricate syntactical structure are conspicuous. We know that technique alone does not make a poem. This poem almost resists paraphrase:□

وارِعْ إِذَا الْمَـ زَاءَ أُسْـ أُبْرُنْ إِخْـ ذَنْتَـ سَا مُشَاغِبٌ إِنْ جَا سَا وَأَرْمِ بِمَا إِذَا رَسَا يُسْعِفُ وَقَفَتْ نَكَ سَا <sup>68</sup>	اُسْ اُرْمُـ لُ إِذَا عِـ رَا اُسْنُـ نِدْ اُخْـ نَبَاهُـ اُسْنُـ لُ جَنْـ اَبْ غَاشِـ مِ اُسْنُـ رَ إِذَا هـ بَ مَـ رَا اُسْكُنْ تَقَوُّ فَعَسَى
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The above genre of composition was regarded with much interest and therefore, ‘Abdīshō’ who seems to have been much impressed with the same technique sought to naturalize this very complicated technique to one of his poems. His poem has a striking instance of exactly similar distinctive trait like that of al-°arīrī’s. In this he stands head and shoulders above his colleague. In like fashion, he composed a poem (No. 3) of twenty-nine two-line simple strophes based as usual on the order of the letters of the Syriac alphabet. The poem contains ecclesiastical riddles ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ. Each line has the same letters, in the same order, whether it be read from the beginning or from the end. The lines are of a consecutive and consistent sense.

The poem moves unobtrusively in an *Octosyllabic* meter, i.e., in eight syllables (ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ). The language is extremely compact within an intricate syntactical structure. The verses are unrhymed, yet rhythm and symmetry persist in the structure. We give here by way of illustration a selection from the poem (the seven rhymed lines that begin with ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ), together with the accompanying translation:



* ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ * ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ <sup>69</sup>	ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ : ܟܠܗ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ :
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<sup>68</sup> Al-Sharīshī, “Maqāma 16”, vol. ii, pp. 82-5.

<sup>69</sup> D’Qelaitā, “Homily 3”, p. xxviii.

*He said: Praise, O four,<sup>70</sup> Him who reigns  
 As long as the infinite contains, the Exalted One.  
 A brother debased (His) name; alas for him who was false!  
 He perished since the bread was the Messiah.  
 (It is) Amor who had been eating the portion that Noah assigned.  
 Have mercy; know what the King of heaven has taught.  
 When he had harmed a crowd he left off;  
 A kinsman is on the watch, (so) he departed an orphan.  
 Be bold in repelling (the devil), thou who actest feebly, For a curse is laid on  
 every human being.  
 It is said (that) in the future He will enlarge the reward.  
 Moisten, relent, have mercy, O Most High.  
 I will sing a hymn of praise to relieve my spirit,  
 I will behold a likeness, I will include a suggestion.”<sup>71</sup>*

In the *Maqāma al-Qahariya* (No. 17), al-Harīrī composed a speech of two hundred words which “furnishes a good sense whether the words of it were read from the beginning or end of the composition”:

الإنسان صنيعة الإحسان\* وربُّ الجميل فعلُ التَّدبُّبِ\* وشِمةُ الخُرِّ ذخيرةُ الحمْدِ\* وكَسْبُ الشُّكْرِ  
 استِثْمارُ السَّعادةِ\* وِغْوانُ الكَرَمِ تَباشيرُ البِشْرِ\* واستِعمالُ المُداراةِ يوجبُ المُصافاةِ\* وعَقْدُ  
 المَحَبَّةِ يَقتضي النُّصحَ\* وَصِدْقُ الحَدِيثِ حَلِيَّةُ اللِّسانِ\* وفِصاحةُ المنطقِ سَحَرُ الألبابِ\*  
 وَشَرَكُ الهَوَى أَفةُ النُّفوسِ\* ومالُ الخُلَاقِ شَيْنُ الخُلَاقِ\* وَسَوْءُ الطَّمَعِ والتزامُ الحِزامةِ زمامُ  
 السَّلَامَةِ\*<sup>72</sup>

*Maqāma* No. 24 contains the “grammatical riddles” of which the author speaks in his preface. These riddles refuse translation into other languages. In this *Maqāma* al-Harīrī, the celebrated grammarian, mentions a verse in which he shows the admissibility of both the accusative and the nominative forms.

فان وصلأ به فوصلن وان صرماً فصُرم كاطلاق<sup>73</sup>

wherein each of the two words *وصل* (*Washun* - union) and *صرم* (*Surmon* -rupture) is used in the first instance as an accusative منصوب and in the second as a nominative مرفوع.<sup>74</sup>

In each of the *Maqāma al-Samar / andiyā* (No. 28) and *al-Wāsiyyā* (No. 29), al-Harīrī

<sup>70</sup> “Four” **أَرْبَعَةٌ**, means “the four quarters of the world”, i.e., Praise God all the earth. Translation given by Winnett, p. 71.

<sup>71</sup> Winnett, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Sharīshī, “Maqāma 17”. vol. ii, pp.94-99.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, “Maqāma 24”, vol. iii, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> For explanation of the grammatical riddles in this *Maqāma* see: Shah, pp. 104-106.

has a long passage, in prose, all the letters of which are without points. The following is an example from a passage in No. 28.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الْمَمْدُوحِ الْأَسْمَاءِ \* الْمَحْمُودِ الْأَلَاءِ \* الْوَاسِعِ الْعَطَاءِ \* الْمَدْعُوِّ لِحَسَنِ الْآلَاءِ \*  
 مَالِكِ الْأَمَمِ \* وَمَصَوِّرِ الرَّمَمِ \* وَأَهْلِ السَّمَاخِ وَالكَرَمِ \* وَمُهْلِكِ عَادِ وَإِرَمِ \* أَدْرَاكَ كُلِّ سِرِّ  
 عِلْمَةٍ \* وَوَسِعَ كُلِّ مَصْرِحِ حِلْمَةٍ \* لَا وَالِدَ لَهُ وَلَا وَالِدٌ \* وَلَا رَدْعَ مَعَهُ وَلَا مُسَاعِدَ \* أَرْسَلَ  
 مُحَمَّدًا لِإِسْلَامِ مُمَهَّدًا \* وَلِلْمِلَّةِ مُوْطِدًا \* وَلَا إِلَهَ مُؤَكِّدًا<sup>75</sup>

And in the *Maqāma al-Halabbīyā* (No. 46), he has ten verses without points on any letter:

□

أَعْبَدُ لِحُسْنِ أَدَاكِ حَذِّ السَّلَاحِ وَأُورِدِ الْآمِلَ وَرَدَّ السَّمَاخَ وَأَغْمِلُ الْكُؤْمَ  
 وَصَارِمُ اللَّهْوِ وَوَصِّلُ الْمَهَا وَسُومِرُ الرَّمَّاحِ<sup>76</sup>

another six lines with all the letters pointed:

فَتَبَّتْ نِيَّيَ فَجَبَّتْ نِيَّيَ تَجَبَّتْ نِيَّيَ تَجَبَّتْ نِيَّيَ  
 شَعَفَتْ نِيَّيَ بِجَفِّ نِيَّيَ ظَبِّي غَضِيضِ غُنَجٍ يَفْتَضِي غُنَجٍ يَفْتَضِي<sup>77</sup>

another five verses with the alternate words without points, and with all the letters pointed:

إِسْمِخَ فَبَسَّتْ السَّمَاخَ زَيْبُنْ وَلَا تُخْ بَ أَمَامَ لَا تَضَبِي يَفْ  
 وَلَا تُجِرْ زُرْدِي سُؤَالَ فَنَنْ أَمَ فِي السُّؤَالَ خَفَفْ<sup>78</sup>

□

Harīrī who often seems to seek out complicated techniques delights in playing with patterns. He composed five verses with all the words in pairs of similar words:

زَيْبَتْ زَيْبُ بِقَدِّ يَقْدُ وَيُؤْلَاهُ نَهْدُ يَهْدُ يَهْدُ  
 جُنْدُهَا جِيدُهَا وَظَرْفُهَا وَظَرْفُهَا نَاعِسٌ تَاعِسٌ بَخْدُ يَخْدُ<sup>79</sup>

another couple of verses with five syllables, identical at the beginning and at the end of each line:

سِيمِ سِيمَةٍ تَحْسُنُ آثَارُهَا وَاشْكُرْ لِمَنْ أَعْطَى وَلَوْ سِيمِ سِيمَةٍ  
 وَالْمَكْرُ مَهْمَا أَسْتَطَعْتَ لَا تَأْتِيهِ لَتَقْتَنِي السُّؤُودُ وَالْمَكْرَمَةُ<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, “Maqāma 28”, vol. iii, pp. 76-7. Here, al-Harīrī breaks the rule of normal usage. In words like (الرحلة، مساورة، روعة) he considers the vocalized final (tā’) التاء المحركة as a (hā’). Obviously, this (tā’) is a pointed Arabic letter.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, “Maqāma 46”. vol. iv. p. 186.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192 & 194.

and a poem of nineteen lines containing all the words that have the letter ظ (*Dā*) in the Arabic language (105 words).

أَيْهِيَ السَّائِلَ عَنِ الضَّادِ وَالظَّاءِ    ءِ لِكَيْلًا تَنْضِئَةَ الْأَفْظِ  
 إِنَّ حِفْظَ الظِّمَامَاتِ يُغْنِيكَ فَاسْتَمِعْهَا    اسْتَمِعْ أَمْرِي لَهُ اسْتَمِعْ تَقِظْ  
 هِيَ ظَمِيحًا وَالْمِظَالِمْ وَالْإِظْلَامِ    وَالظَّامِ وَالظُّبَيْ وَالْحِظَظِ<sup>81</sup>

□

In Makama 26 (*al-Ra / □a'*), al-Harīrī has composed a long passage in prose (using the *Saja'* genre, as was his wont) intersected with poetry with the alternate letters pointed and without points. We give a selection of this passage as example:

سَيِّدٌ قَدْ سَابَّ سَبُّهُ مَبْرُورٌ    فَطِنٌ مَعْرِبٌ عَزُوفٌ عِيُوفٌ  
 مَخْلُوفٌ مُتَلَفٌ أَغْرَرٌ قَرِيذٌ    نَابِيَةٌ فَاضِلٌ ذِكْيٌ أَنْوُوفٌ<sup>82</sup>

□

‘Abdīshō‘ has not tried to imitate these characteristics of composition. This idiosyncratic Arabic technique cannot be naturalized to Syriac for the Syriac system of writing is different. Except in very rare cases, it is not possible to form a Syriac word without points. A Syriac letter, as soon as it forms part of a written word, does not, in the majority of cases, represent a consonant but a consonantal followed by a vowel sound represented by diacritical points. Nor is it easy to form words with all letters having points. If this technique is possible in Arabic, it is because the Arabic alphabet has a group of fifteen pointed letters. Syriac has only two, the ܕ (*Rēsh*) and ܕܐ (*Dālath*).

As if to compensate for these and the like restrictions, ‘Abdīshō‘ has used uncanny skill in displaying in his poems other characteristics and techniques peculiar to Syriac, and in some cases, to both Arabic and Syriac. □

□

□

\* This article was sent to ‘Rays of Literature’ by the late Rabi Daniel d’Bet Benyamin in 2015. However since the policy of this journal has been to publish only articles written in Assyrian language by ‘living’ authors, we were unable to publish it in the previous issues. Due to its importance and value we are including it in this issue although Rabi Yoab Benjamin has already passed away.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, “Maqāma 26”, vol. iii, pp. 49-51.



# **The Oldest Cookbook from Ancient Mesopotamia: A Glimpse into the Culinary Traditions of the Past**

**By: Indrajit Roy Choudhury**

Food has always been an integral part of human existence. From hunting and gathering to agriculture and domestication, humans have evolved alongside their food sources. The oldest known cookbook, discovered in Ancient Mesopotamia, sheds light on the culinary traditions of one of the world's earliest civilizations.

Mesopotamia, located in present-day Iraq, was home to a complex society that flourished between 4000 BCE and 539 BCE. The Mesopotamians were skilled farmers and traders who relied on the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to grow crops such as barley, wheat, and lentils. They also raised livestock such as sheep, goats, and cows for meat, milk, and cheese.

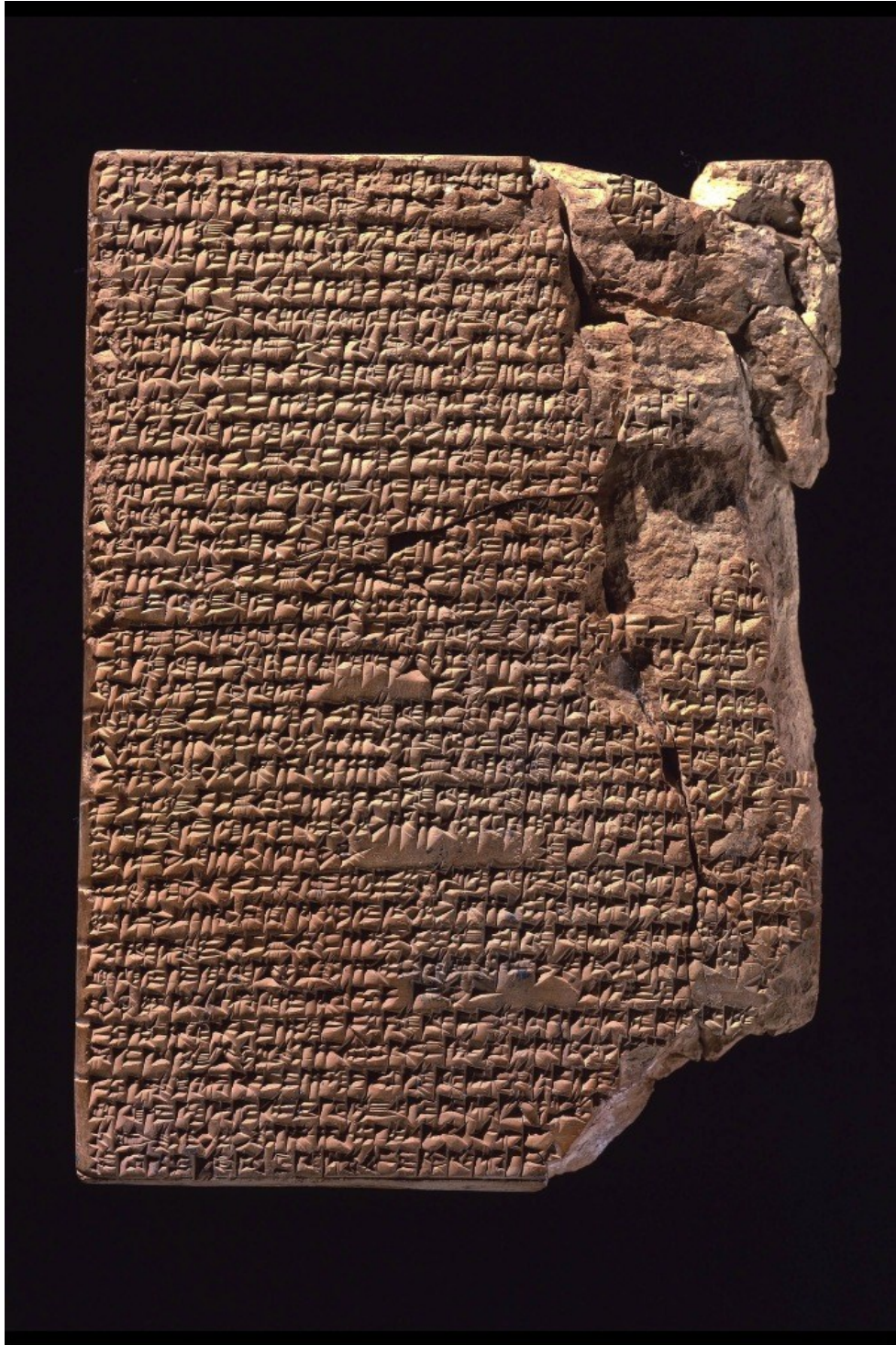
The Mesopotamian recipe book is the oldest and the first documented cuisine in the world, of which only three Babylonian cuneiform tablets are extant today (housed at the Babylonian Collection of Yale University). It's a set of cracked tablets engraved by an early civilization's version of a master chef going back to 1700 BCE. The three Old Babylonian tablets were not written by the same hand, and a physical analysis of the clay shows that it originated from at least two different sources. All the tablets list recipes that include instructions on how to prepare them.

The cookbook contains a collection of recipes for various dishes and beverages, including stews, soups, bread, beer, and wine. Some of the recipes are surprisingly similar to modern-day dishes, such as a lamb stew seasoned with onion, garlic, and coriander.

One of the most interesting aspects of the cookbook is the use of spices and herbs. The Mesopotamians were known for their love of flavor and aroma, and they used a wide range of ingredients to achieve this. Some of the spices mentioned in the cookbook include cumin, cardamom, saffron, and cinnamon. Herbs such as mint, parsley, and cilantro were also commonly used.

Comparing the Babylonian recipes to what we know of medieval cuisine and present-day culinary practices suggests that the stews represent an early stage of a long tradition that is still dominant in Iraqi cuisine. Boiling the meat into stew with spices and other ingredients was the basic culinary technique. Iraqi Pacha is prepared almost in similar ways as are described in the tablets.

The earliest cookbooks found around the world give people today a fascinating look at not only what the people of the time ate but also their lifestyles, mainly of those from the upper class. It's hard to compare modern Middle Eastern cuisine with its ancient predecessors — for one, the Babylonians appear to have been fond of pork, which is forbidden by Islam and virtually nonexistent in modern Iraq.



**YBC 4644 from the Old Babylonian Period, circa 1750 BCE: This tablet includes 25 recipes for stews, 21 are meat stews and 4 are vegetable stews. The recipes list the ingredients and the order in which they should be added, but does not give measures or cooking time – they were clearly meant only for experienced chefs.**

**(Image Source: Yale University Library)**

The three small clay tablets found by archaeologists were inscribed with intricate cuneiform signs, although damaged to different degrees, which provide cooking instructions for more than thirty-five Akkadian dishes. Cuneiform was at first written in the Sumerian language. The recipes are elaborate and often call for rare ingredients. They represent Mesopotamian haute cuisine meant for the royal palace or the temple and also a fairly accurate picture of the standard Mesopotamian diet. The ancient cookbooks contain recipes for 21 types of meat dishes and 4 kinds of vegetable ones, almost all of which involved combinations of meat, fowl, vegetables, or grain cooked in broth. The dishes were slow-cooked and simmered in a covered pot to make the food extra tasty. Instructions call for most of the food to be prepared with water and fats.



**YBC 8958 Old Babylonian Period, circa 1750 BCE: This tablet has seven recipes which are very detailed. The text is broken in several places and the name of the second recipe is missing, but it is a dish with small birds, maybe partridges.  
(Image source: Yale University Library)**

Ancient foodies seem to have preferred fowl and mutton. Babylonian chefs had easy access to meat, as Mesopotamian farmers had been raising sheep and chicken since prehistory. Meats included stag, gazelle, kid, lamb, mutton, squab and a bird called *tarru* (believed to mean fowls). Fish were eaten along with turtles and shellfish. Various grains, vegetables and fruits such as dates, apples, figs, pomegranates and grapes were integral to diet. Roots, bulbs, truffles and mushrooms were harvested for the table. Frequently mentioned seasonings included onions, garlic and leeks, while stews were often thickened with grains, milk, clarified butter, fats, beer or animal blood. Salt was sometimes mentioned. Scholars have not been able to identify all the ingredients.

The use of animal intestines is said to have been perfected by the Sumerians, who are credited with the invention of sausages about 4000 BCE. Babylonians made spicy sausages with minced meat, stuffing the mixture into animal intestines to act as skins in approximately 1500 BCE.



**The Banquet Scene' relief panel, 645-635 BCE (Source: The British Museum)**

The dishes mentioned in these tablets were probably not the kind of food that was commonly consumed by the average ancient Mesopotamian. This is due to the fact that the ingredients required for the dishes were not easily obtained by the ordinary person. Moreover, the instructions for the preparation of these dishes are quite elaborate. Therefore, it is likely that it was the elites of Mesopotamian society who savored these dishes, perhaps on some festive occasion.

The cookbook also provides insight into the social and cultural significance of food in Mesopotamia. Many of the recipes are associated with specific festivals and ceremonies, such as

the New Year's feast. Food was not only a means of sustenance but also a way to celebrate and honor the gods.

Mesopotamia had its share of legendary feasts. A banquet held in the ninth century BCE. by the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II, according to records found inscribed on a brick, drew 69,574 guests. Over 10 days they consumed 25,000 lambs and sheep, 500 stags, 500 gazelles, 30,000 birds, 10,000 eggs, 10,000 loaves of bread and thousands of gallons of wine and beer.

The oldest cookbook from Ancient Mesopotamia offers a fascinating glimpse into the culinary traditions of one of the world's earliest civilizations. It highlights the importance of food in Mesopotamian society and provides evidence of their advanced knowledge of cooking techniques and flavor combinations. As we continue to explore the history of food, we can appreciate the legacy left behind by these ancient cooks and the impact they have had on our modern-day cuisine.

**\* This article was first published in "Ancient Middle East" Cultural Heritage" on 03 August 2019 by "Indrosphere, Navigating Life's labyrinth"**

# Babylon: An Ancient City with a Rich History

By: Indrajit Roy Choudhury



Babylon was one of the most famous and influential cities of ancient Mesopotamia dating back to the third millennia BCE. It was the capital of several empires and the center of culture, religion, and commerce for thousands of years. This once great city was one of the most important cultural and political centers of the ancient world. Founded in the 3rd millennium BC, Babylon was initially a small Akkadian town. However, it grew in size and importance over time, becoming the capital of the Babylonian Empire under the rule of Hammurabi in the 18th century BCE.

Today, its ruins are located in Iraq, near the modern town of Hilla and on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, about 85 km south of Baghdad, and it is open to visitors who want to explore its rich heritage and culture. The earliest known mention of Babylon as a small town appears on a clay tablet from the reign of Shar-Kali-Sharri (2217–2193 BCE) of the Akkadian Empire.

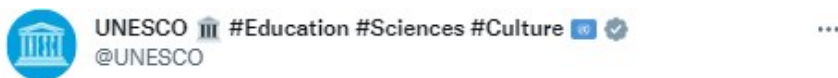
Babylon's history spans nearly two millennia, from its founding in the third millennia BCE by the Akkadian-speaking people of southern Mesopotamia, to its fall to the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE. During this time, Babylon rose and fell several times, experiencing periods of glory and decline under different rulers and dynasties.

One of the most notable rulers of Babylon was Hammurabi, who reigned from 1792 to 1750 BCE. He is famous for his code of laws, which is one of the oldest and most comprehensive legal codes in history. Hammurabi also expanded Babylon's territory and made it the capital of a large empire that encompassed much of southern Mesopotamia and part of Assyria.

Another period of greatness for Babylon was under the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which lasted from 626 to 539 BCE. This empire was founded by Nabopolassar, who rebelled against the Assyrian domination and liberated Babylon. One of Babylon's most famous landmarks is the

Hanging Gardens, which were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The gardens were built by King Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife, who missed the green hills and valleys of her homeland. The gardens were built on a series of elevated platforms and were irrigated by a complex system of canals.

Babylon faced many invasions and conquests by foreign powers, such as the Hittites, the Kassites, the Assyrians, and the Persians. However, it also experienced periods of revival and prosperity, especially under the Neo-Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar II, who rebuilt the city and constructed its famous Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Babylon was also a center of learning and science, where astronomers, mathematicians, and scribes developed advanced knowledge and skills. In addition to its architectural wonders, Babylon was also known for its contributions to science and mathematics. The Babylonians were skilled astronomers and were able to accurately predict eclipses and other celestial events.



**BREAKING**

New inscription on @UNESCO #WorldHeritage List:  
Babylon in #Iraq 🇮🇶. Bravo! 🌟

[#43WHC](https://on.unesco.org/en43whc)



Government of Iraq - العراقية الحكومة and 4 others

4:49 PM · Jul 5, 2019

Babylon is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2019, and efforts are being made to preserve and restore its archaeological remains for future generations. The World Heritage Committee inscribed 29 new sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List during its 43rd session (30 June 2019 – 10 July 2019) in Baku, Azerbaijan, which includes Babylon of Iraq. Iraq had been lobbying since 1983 for the 4,000-year-old site to be added to the United Nations' prestigious list. Unesco previously declined to list Babylon as a World Heritage Site on the grounds that restoration and rebuilding work carried out there under the regime of the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had badly distorted the original ruins. (Source: [BBC](#))

Babylon was not only a political and military center, but also a cultural and religious one. It was home to many temples dedicated to various gods and goddesses, such as Marduk, Ninmakh, Ishtar, Ea, and Sin. The most important temple was the Esagila, which housed the ziggurat or tower called Etemenanki. This tower was believed to be the model for the biblical Tower of Babel, a symbol of human pride and ambition.

Despite its many achievements, Babylon's power began to decline in the 6th century BCE. The city was conquered by the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great, and later by Alexander the Great.

Today, Babylon's legacy lives on in its rich history and culture, which have inspired many works of art and literature. Although much of the city has been destroyed over time, its legacy lives on as a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of the ancient Babylonians.



Babylon was also home to the famous Ishtar Gate, which was one of the main entrances to the city. The gate was constructed during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II and was dedicated to the goddess Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love, fertility, and war, although Nebuchadnezzar pays homage to other Babylonian deities through various animal representations.





The front of the gate is adorned with glazed bricks with alternating rows of dragons and bulls. The beasts are furnished in yellow and brown tiles, while the bricks surrounding them are blue.



**The replica of the Ishtar Gate at Babylon**

The gate's imposing effect was achieved not only by size but by bold color and fine craftsmanship: Its striking enamelled tiles bore reliefs of animals: lions, dragons, and bulls, arranged in tiers. Lions are often associated with Ishtar, bulls with Adad, and dragons with Marduk.



**The Mushussu is a creature from ancient Mesopotamian mythology, which guards the Ishtar Gate of Babylon. A mythological hybrid, it's a scaly dragon with hind legs resembling the talons of an eagle, feline fore legs, a long neck and tail, a horned neck, a snake-like tongue, and a crest. It's a sacred animal of Marduk, the patron deity of the city of Babylon and his son Nebu, the god of knowledge and wisdom during the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The Mushussu most famously appears on the famous Ishtar Gate of the city of Babylon, dating to the sixth century BCE. (National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad)**

Mesopotamia, the land between two rivers, was home to many ancient civilizations. One of the most intriguing aspects of these civilizations is their mythology. Among the many creatures that populate Mesopotamian mythology, Mushussu stands out as one of the most fascinating. The mythical creature is depicted as a serpent or dragon with the front legs of a lion and the hind legs of an eagle. It is believed to have been a powerful symbol of the gods and played an important role in the religious beliefs and rituals of the ancient Mesopotamians.

The name Mushussu comes from the Akkadian language, which was spoken in Mesopotamia during the 3rd millennium BCE. The creature was often associated with the god Marduk, who was one of the most important deities in the Babylonian pantheon.

The significance and symbolism of the Mushussu in ancient Mesopotamian culture are not entirely clear. It may have represented a protective deity or served as a guardian figure. The depiction of composite creatures combining different animal features was common in ancient Mesopotamian art, often representing a fusion of various divine attributes.

According to the Babylonian creation myth, Marduk defeated the primordial sea monster Tiamat and her army of chaos creatures, using his bow and arrows, his mace, and his net. He then split Tiamat's body in half and created the heavens and the earth from her remains. He also took some of Tiamat's creatures as his own, including the Mushussu, which he rode as his steed.

Mushussu is also sometimes called SIRRUSH, a corrupted form of its name that was used by European scholars in the 19th century. The Mushussu is one of the oldest mythical creatures in history, dating back to the third millennium BCE. It is described as Marduk's loyal servant and is tasked with guarding the entrance to Marduk's temple in Babylon.

In addition to its role as a guardian of the gods, Mushussu also has a symbolic meaning in Mesopotamian culture. The creature is often associated with water and fertility, two important elements in Mesopotamian agriculture. Mushussu's serpent's tail is thought to represent the life-giving waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Its wings symbolize the winds that bring rain and nourish the crops.

Mushussu also has a connection to kingship in Mesopotamia. The creature is often depicted on royal seals and monuments, indicating its importance in royal iconography. The king was seen as a representative of the gods on earth, and Mushussu's role as a guardian of the gods made it an appropriate symbol for kingship.

The myth of Mushussu has had a lasting impact on Mesopotamian culture. The creature's image can be found in art and literature throughout Mesopotamian history. Its symbolism has been interpreted in various ways by scholars, but its connection to water, fertility, and kingship is widely accepted.

The Mushussu is a fascinating example of how ancient cultures imagined and represented their gods and their world. It shows how they combined elements from different animals to create a unique and powerful creature that expressed their beliefs and values. It also shows how they preserved and transmitted their traditions through art and architecture, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations.

Today, Mushussu remains an important symbol of Mesopotamian culture and mythology. Its image can be found in museums around the world, and it continues to inspire artists and writers who are fascinated by its mysterious and powerful presence. Whether viewed as a guardian figure or a symbol of fertility and prosperity, Mushussu remains an enduring symbol of the rich cultural heritage of ancient Mesopotamia.

The gate and the Processional Way served mostly a religious purpose for the New Year procession, which marked the beginning of the agricultural year and featured religious festivals and rituals. The relief representations on the walls are lions, the symbol of the goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. Other ancient Babylonian gods that appear in the bricks are Adud and Marduk, illustrated in the Bull and the Dragon, respectively. The street is long and is divided into three parts. The first and the third parts are surrounded by fences to prevent people from entering. The original tiles are still in situ!



**The lion is from the Ishtar Gate, the eighth gate to the inner city of Babylon, which was constructed circa 575 BCE under the orders of Nebuchadnezzar II. Lions were one of the primary symbols of the goddess Ishtar. (National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad)**

In ancient Babylon, the new year started with the spring equinox and marked the beginning of the agricultural season (Akitu). The Processional Way was used for the New Year's celebration, through which statues of the deities would parade down and the path paved with red and yellow stones. Each one of these stones has an inscription underneath: a small prayer from King Nebuchadnezzar to the chief god Marduk. It was this processional way that led to the temple of Marduk.

The Gate of Ishtar and the Processional Way were built around 675 BCE and were commissioned by King Nebuchadnezzar II. The gate was one of the most impressive structures in ancient Babylon and was considered a symbol of the city's power and wealth. The gate, as well as the Processional Way leading into the city, were decorated with glazed tiles and bas-reliefs of alternating tiers of the god Marduk's snake-dragons, lions of the goddess Ishtar, and bulls of the weather god Adad.





**The Processional Way**



**The Processional Way**

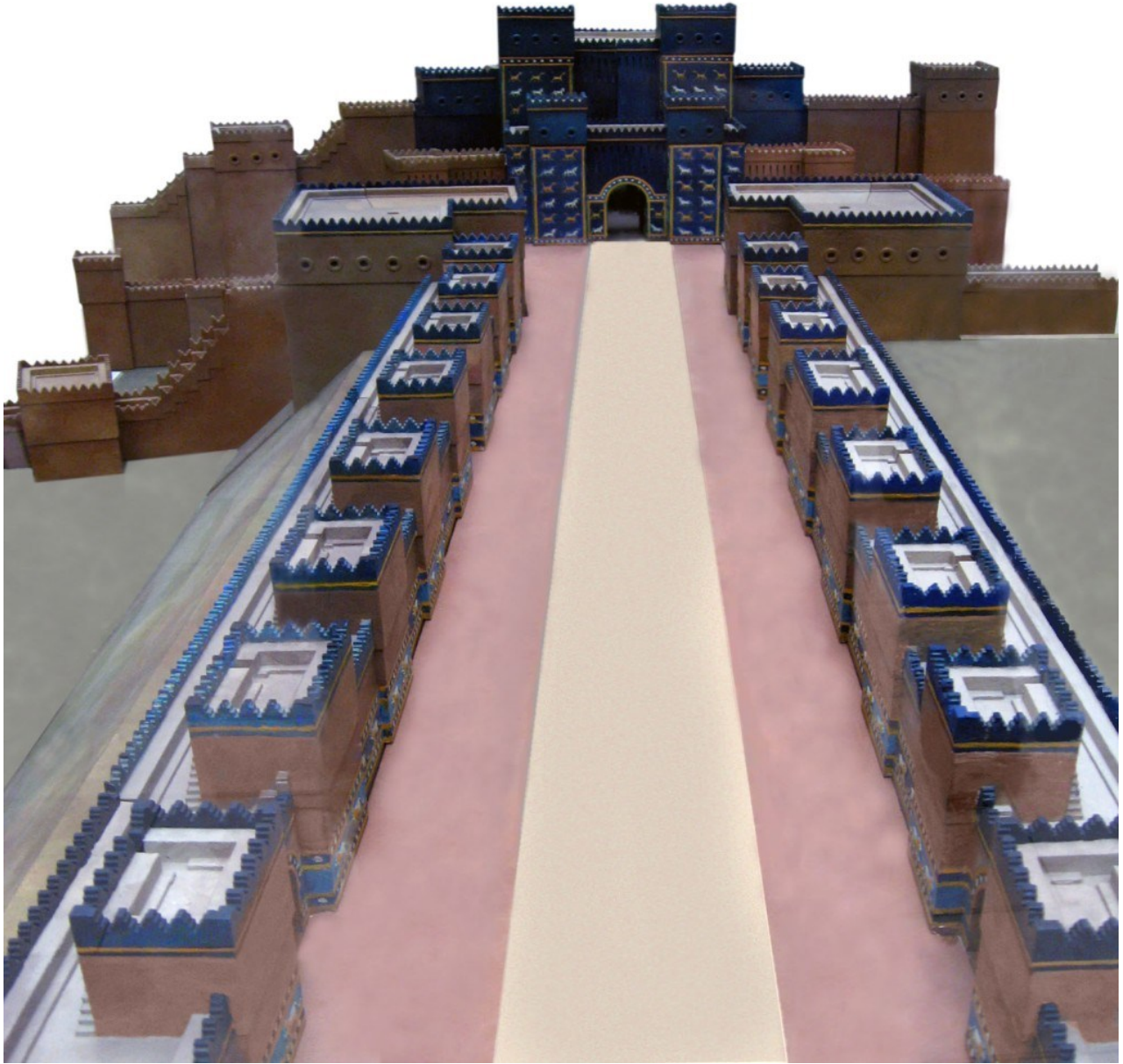


Ishtar Gate, in a depression a little short way off the Street of Processions, still has some of its old wall decorations of bulls, the symbol of Adad, the god of storms, and dragons, the symbol of Marduk, the chief god. The dragon here is a composite animal with the physical attributes of snake, lion and eagle. These brick reliefs are not glazed, as the beautiful glazed-brick panels figuring bulls, dragons and lions (symbol of Ishtar) which decorated the Gate, the Palace and the Street of Processions were all taken, prior to World War I, to Berlin by the German expedition which excavated Babylon then.

Nebuchadnezzar II commissioned the construction of the gate in the late 6th century BCE as a symbol of his personal power and the power of the Babylonian empire, and the Processional Way is a tribute to the omnipotence of the gods to whom everything was subject.

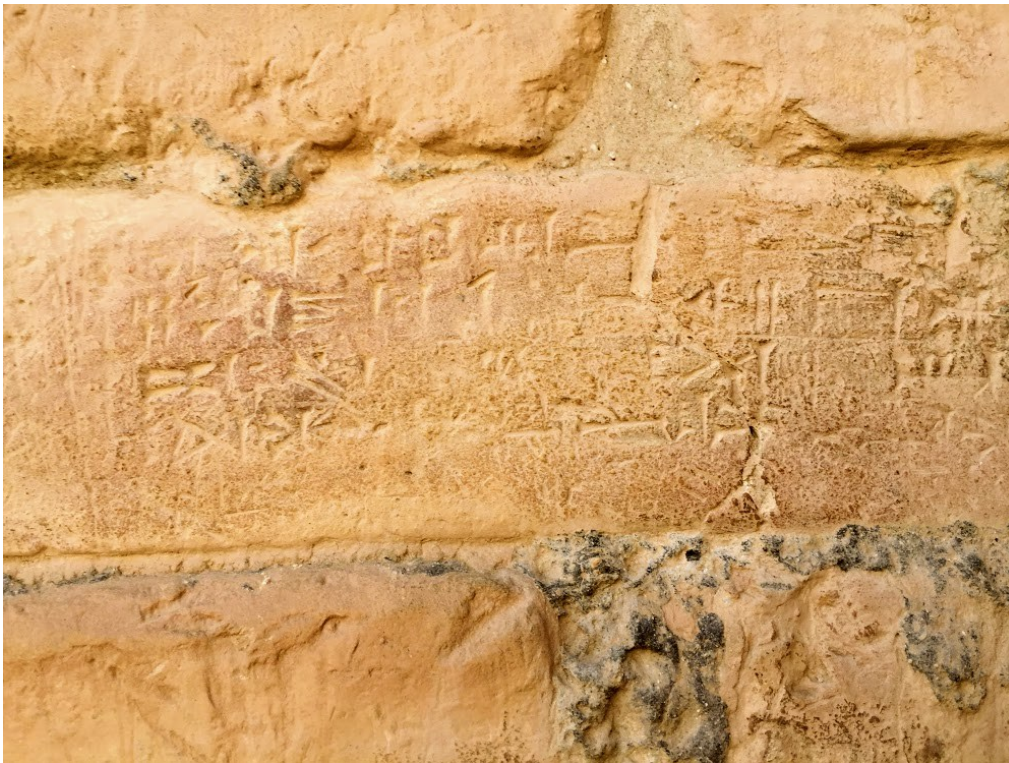
The Babylonian king installed a plaque on the gate explaining its purpose and design: “I placed wild bulls and ferocious dragons in the gateways and thus adorned them with luxurious splendour so that people might gaze on them in wonder.”

The Processional Way and Ishtar Gate of the ancient city of Babylon functioned to glorify the city of Babylon and exemplified the inordinate cultural advancements under King Nebuchadnezzar II, and was directly commissioned as a means to make the city one of the wonders of the ancient world.



**A representative diagram of the Ishtar Gate and the Processional way at Pergamon Museum, Berlin**





**Among the well-preserved status of the bricks during the initial excavation is perhaps the most valuable artefact, which is the brick fragment with inscriptions containing statements from Nebuchadnezzar II. The inscription provides the reason for the construction of such a magnificent gate and other works, which in his own words is so “Mankind might gaze upon them in wonder”.**



At the right side of the Processional Way lies the Ninmakh temple. Ninmakh was the mother goddess in ancient Mesopotamia. The temple was built by Nebuchadnezzar II circa 575 BCE. It is situated east of the Ishtar Gate and was called the e-mah (great temple) of the mother goddess Ninmakh. Ninmakh means the Great Lady.



The central courtyard of the temple is characterised by the presence of the holy well. The inner sanctum of the temple of Ninmakh was restricted to women only, who would gather in the sacred precinct of the temple and pray for good marriages and married women would pray for offspring among other worship rituals. The women also used the water from this well for ritual bathing and for purification. It was one of the several sacred wells located in the sacred precincts around the city. The walls elsewhere were made of square stones but the temple walls were built with burnt mud bricks because the temple is for the god or goddess and thus had to be purified.



The Lion of Babylon is a symbol of ancient and modern Iraq, representing its rich cultural heritage and national identity. The statue, made of black basalt and dating back to the sixth century BCE, depicts a lion crushing a human enemy under its paws. This stone sculpture was built by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II. The lion was associated with Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and war, and also symbolized the power and authority of the Babylonian kings.





In the sculpture, the lion's back has marks indicating that it was meant for a precious saddle upon which the goddess Ishtar would stand.

The statue was rediscovered in the late eighteenth century and has since become one of the most celebrated archaeological artefacts in the region. The Lion of Babylon has also inspired various artistic and political expressions, such as the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Iraq and the name of an Iraqi tank brigade during the Gulf War.



The southern palace was 1,065 feet (325 m) by 720 feet (220 m) in size. It included a throne room with a glazed brick panel showing palmettes, floral reliefs and lions. The throne and room tiles are now on display at the Berlin museum.

The entry hall into the palace was acoustically constructed with walls at such a distance that sound echoes. This was done to alert the guards of intruders into the palace. Further claps were used to alert the guards. That was an amazing architectural masterpiece at that time.





**The wall of the palace**

The palace was also protected by a maze to confuse the enemies intruding on the palace while the palace guards could watch them and kill them from the top of the walls.



**Inside the maze**



### **The maze or labyrinth**

The king also had a northern palace (which hasn't been fully excavated) and a summer palace, on the northern tip of the outer wall.



### **Ruins of the Northern Palace of King Nebuchadnezzar II**

On the other side of the highway outside the entry gate to the Babylon site, is the Marduk temple. We were told that there is nothing there and due to the hot sun, we also didn't go inside and returned home. It seemed that our faces were burning inside the skin. If possible, we may visit again on some cooler days.



It's pathetic to see how such a heritage site has been destroyed over the period. German archaeologists excavated the remains of the gate in the early twentieth century and reconstructed it in Berlin's Pergamon Museum using original bricks. The Iraqi government has put up a replica of the gate. Other artefacts are now on display in the Pergamon Museum. There are several museums in the world that have received portions of the Ishtar Gate: the Istanbul Archaeology Museum, the Detroit Institute of Art, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Louvre, Munich's State Museum of Egyptian Art, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Oriental Institute of Chicago, and many others.

In the early 1980s, former Iraqi leader Saddam razed a large part of the ancient city in order to build a replica on top of some of the original ruins. After the Gulf War, he also built an extravagant modern palace for himself on another part of the ruins, overlooking the main site.

According to a UN report, American troops and contractors caused substantial damage to the archaeological site at Babylon in Iraq after the 2003 invasion. The report says key structures were harmed and the site was subjected to "digging, cutting and levelling".





**A modern place built by Saddam Hussein looms over the ancient ruins of the northern palace in Babylon**



**A modern place built by Saddam Hussein looms over the ancient ruins of the northern palace in Babylon**

There is a need to bring back the artefacts from the museums in the West to the original historical sites and recreate them in their original splendour to reconstruct the history. Will that be ever possible?

Visiting Babylon in Iraq was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I learned a lot about the ancient civilization that shaped human history and culture. I also felt a sense of awe and wonder at seeing the ruins of one of the greatest cities ever built. I highly recommend anyone who is interested in history and archaeology to visit Babylon in Iraq but do visit during winter.

**\* The original version of this article was first published in “Ancient Middle East, Cultural Heritage” on 03 August 2019 by “Indrosphere, Navigating Life’s labyrinth”; and the section about Mashussu was published as a separate article in the same journal and by the same author on 09 July 2023 under the title: “Mashussu: the Mythical Creature of Mesopotamia”**

# Babylonian Marshlands in Today's Iraq Named UNESCO World Heritage Site

By: Indrajit Roy Choudhury



A wetland in southeast Iraq, thought to be the biblical Garden of Eden — the **Ahwar** of southern Iraq, has now become a UNESCO world heritage site, reports Reuters. Fed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the marshlands of Mesopotamia are spawning grounds for Gulf fisheries and home to bird species such as the sacred ibis. They also provide a resting spot for thousands of wildfowl migrating between Siberia and Africa,

Home to the Marsh Arabs, three archaeological sites and an array of species of birds and fish, the marshes are “unique, as one of the world’s largest inland delta systems, in an extremely hot and arid environment”, says UNESCO. It also contains the ancient sites of **Uruk, Tell Eridu and Ur** — the birthplace of Biblical patriarch Abraham.

The Ahwar is made up of seven components: three archaeological sites and four wetland marsh areas in southern Iraq. The archaeological cities of Uruk and Ur and the Tell Eridu archaeological site form part of the remains of the Sumerian cities and settlements that developed in southern Mesopotamia between the 4th and the 3rd millennium BCE in the marshy delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Ahwar of Southern Iraq – also known as the Iraqi Marshlands – are unique, as one of the world’s largest inland delta systems, in an extremely hot and arid environment.

The Ahwar of Southern Iraq evolved as part of the wider alluvial plain during the final stage of the alpine tectonic movement, which also led to the creation of the Zagros Mountains. Several factors intertwined to shape the property including; tectonic movements, climatic changes, river hydrology dynamics, precipitation variation, and changes in sea level. The sea level variation and the climatic changes had a significant role in influencing the quantity and quality of water entering the Ahwar through rivers and their branches, in addition to advancement and regression of the sea and intrusion during dry to semi-dry to wet conditions during the last 18,000 years.

Between 5000 and 3000 BCE, sea water level reached its maximum extent some 200 km inland of the present coastline with marshes stretching further inland. The marshy and moving landscape of this deltaic plain was the heartland where the first cities flourished. Uruk, Ur and Eridu, the three cultural components of the property, were originally situated on the margins of freshwater marshes and developed into some of the most important urban centres of southern Mesopotamia. These cities saw the origin of writing, monumental architecture in the form of mudbrick temples and ziggurats, and complex technologies and societies. A vast corpus of cuneiform texts and archaeological evidence testifies to the centrality of the marshes for the economy, worldview and religious beliefs of successive cultures in southern Mesopotamia.

Starting in 2000 BCE, the sea regressed towards the south. This led to another climatic change towards a more arid environment leading to the drying up of the ancient marshes and in turn to the decline of the great cities of southern Mesopotamia. Today the mudbrick ruins of Uruk, Ur and Eridu are dominated by the remains of ziggurats which still stand within the arid but striking landscape of the desiccated alluvial plain.



With the regression of the sea water, new marshes formed to the southeast. The main marshes of the Ahwar as we know them today were formed during this period around 3,000 years ago. The **Huwaizah**, East and West **Hammar** and Central Marshes of the Ahwar are predominantly fed by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Saddam Hussein, who accused the region's Marsh Arab inhabitants of treachery during the 1980-1988 war with Iran, dammed and drained the marshes in the 1990s to flush out rebels hiding in the reeds. In the 1970s, the marshes, formally known as the Ahwar of Southern Iraq, covered some 9,000 sq. km, but were reduced by Saddam to barely 760 sq. km. Iraq has said it aims to recover a total of 6,000 sq. km.

After his overthrow by the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, locals wrecked many of the dams to let water rush back in, and foreign environmental agencies helped breathe life back into the marshes. Over the past decade, local efforts to re-flood the area and help from environmental agencies have replenished about half the wetlands. Wildlife and Marsh Arabs, native to the wetlands for about six millennia, have also since made a return.

The origins of the Marsh Arabs are still a matter of some interest. British colonial ethnographers found it difficult to classify some of their social customs and speculated that they might have originated in India.

**\* This article was first published on 18 July 2016, by the author in Cultural Heritage, Iraq, Landscapes, in “Indrosphere: Navigating Life’s Labyrinth” with the title: “Iraq’s Marshlands Named UNESCO World Heritage”**

# **From the Meadows of Wisdom**

## *A Bunch of Proverbs*

**Collected By: Rabi Youarash Haido**

- \* A good maxim is never out of season.
- \* A bad day never has a good night.
- \* Good language cures great sores.
- \* Good accounts make good friends.
- \* Good deeds remain, all things else perish.
- \* Grasp all, lose all.
- \* Gratitude is the sign of noble souls.
- \* Great designs require great consideration.
- \* Great men have more adorers than friends.
- \* Great minds agree.
- \* Great barkers seldom bite.
- \* Grace will last, favor will blast.
- \* Guests that come by daylight are best received.
- \* Guilt is always jealous.
- \* Happy is he that is happy in his children.
- \* Happy men shall have many friends.
- \* Hatred is blind as well as love.
- \* A good friend never offends.
- \* A little debt makes a debtor, but a great one an enemy.
- \* A man is known by the company he keeps.
- \* A moment's patience is ten years' ease.
- \* Better a bad excuse, than none at all.
- \* Better a blush in the face, than a spot in the heart.
- \* Better a tooth out, than pain forever.
- \* Better be pitied than envied.
- \* Better do it than wish it done.
- \* Better live with a dragon than with a wicked person.
- \* Better spared than spent.
- \* Better starve free than be a fat slave.
- \* Better to do well than to say well.
- \* Beware of little expenses.
- \* Be warned by others' harms.
- \* Work is the salt of life.
- \* Destroy the seed of evil or it will grow up to your ruin.
- \* Defer not till tomorrow what may be done today.
- \* Despair gives courage to a coward.
- \* Death defies the doctor.
- \* Do all you can to be good, and you will be so.
- \* Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.

# **Hormizd the Mountaineer**

## **Hormizd the Plainsman**

*Written in Vernacular Assyriac by: Sa'eed Shamaya*

**Translated By: Rabi Yourash Haido**

He used to fill his lungs with the pure air of the lofty mountains, and satisfy his eyes with the fascinating spectacle of the sunrise from behind the mountain peaks, and endure the hardness of the rocky, rugged pathways and deep desolate valleys. He would embrace the plain and clad himself with patience while crossing the vast plains of Nineveh, cherishing in his imagination the vivid picture infused in him by Rabi Qasha, of his great, mighty Assyrian forefathers.

He would rise with the early birds and hail the dawn that anointed his eyelids with dewy frolicsome breeze. On his arrival at one of the villages of the plain, he would be welcome by its dwellers who shouted, "Here comes Hormizd the mountaineer. Hormizd the mountaineer has arrived!" And he would greet them with a pleasant joyous smile wreathing his innocent face.

There he would exchange with them raisins, figs, quinces, walnuts, hawthorn and other yields of the mountain for wheat, barley, white flour, bruised wheat and semolina. The people of the village would gather about him and listen with great pleasure to his pleasant tales which he narrated in his mountainous dialect, as sweet as honey and honeycomb. Some would entreat him to sing them a roundelay or two of "Rawi".

The next day he would start his journey back home with his mule loaded with blessings and good things of the plain. On his arrival, he would soon forget his tiredness through hearing the familiar shout of his neighbours, "Hormizd the plainsman has arrived. Hormizd the plainsman is home again!"

They would buy from him the goods they needed and hear joyous tales of the plains. He would sing the song, "I saw a dove flying", a song from "Alqush", and "I love you", from Telcape, and other songs sung in other villages of the plain.

Between his ascension and descent, he would rest for a few days at home. One day he asked his wife, "What do you say my beloved Sarah, am I a mountaineer or a plainsman?"

The answer came forthwith from Sarah's lips in a sweet tone full of love, "Your head is crowned with the loftiness of the mountains and your heart is as vast as the plains. In the snowy and chilly days of winter, your love warms me, and in the height of summer's heat, the beatings of your heart cool me."

On hearing this answer, he embraced her and sang, "We have strewn our hearts in the mountains and in the plains. In our blood we have mixed the plains and the mountains."

He married his son Adam to a woman from Sapna; his other son Ashur to a woman from Alqush; his daughter Elizabeth to a youth from Tisqupa; his second daughter Shaina to a young man from Barwar, and he wedded Marta to a youth from Baghdaida.

His mother had conceived him through the intercession of Rabban Hormizd: therefore, she had named him after the Saint as a sign of good omen and gratitude. When the day of Hormizd's departure approached, he uttered his last words: "Let my bones rest in the courtyard of Rabban Hormizd. It was he to whom she had appealed to have a son."

The church bell rang a mournful tone that was echoed by the valleys and mountains announcing the death of Hormizd. People came up from the plain, and many gathered from the mountain villages. On his grave they all wept with sad hearts and said, “May God repose your soul in peace. With a rope made of your heartstrings, you have bound the mountain and the plain together in a firm combination.”

# **Tales for Children**

## **Collected By: Rabi Youarash Haido**

### **A Bad Tempered Boy and the Nails**

#### **By: Anonymous**

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all.

He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now should pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one.

You can push a knife into a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say "I'm sorry", the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one. Friends are very rare jewels. Indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. They lend an ear, they share words of praise and they always want to open their hearts to us."

### **The Two Happy Little Ones**

#### **By: Anonymous**

Ashur and Shamoramath are walking abreast along the lane that leads to their school. It is springtime and the sun is shining bright in a clear azure sky. A frolicsome fragrant breeze is blowing from the eastern verdant hillocks. The two little ones are singing as joyously as a nightingale. They are singing an old song, a song that their grandmothers used to sing when they little children and will be sung by the children of their grandchildren.

The songs of the world are sweet and deathless. They fly from mouth to mouth and pass from generation to generation. The lips that sing them will wither and die one day, but the song will be ever flying from mouth to mouth. Yea, Ashur and Shamoramath are singing happily. Their little mouths look like roses. Their song is rising, melodious and sweet, into the firmament.



# Did Sargon Eat he Pitip?

ܡܢ ܚܘܒܐ: ܗܘܩܝܢ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܝܬܝܢ ܠܗܘܕܝܢܢ

**From the book: Lessons for Teaching the Assyrian Language**

**By: Rev. Shlemon E. Khoshaba**

**Translated from Syriac by: Rabi Youarash Haido**

One day Sargon's mother went to the market and bought some peaches. She intended to divide them equally among her children after supper. She washed the peaches and put them on a plate.

Sargon had never eaten peaches before. These beautiful fragrant peaches aroused his appetite greatly. He began to walk around them unceasingly, smelling the fragrance that emanated from them. When he was left alone in the house, he could not resist his desire any more. So he picked up one peach and ate it.

In the evening before supper, Sargon's mother counted the peaches and found out that one was missing. She told the father about it. The father asked his sons when they sat at the table for supper if one of them had eaten the missing peach. They all answered, "No." Sargon blushed and said: "No, I did not eat the peach." Then the father said: "Now listen, if one of you ate the peach, he did not behave well, but the trouble is not in eating it. In fact the problem is that the peaches have pits that if swallowed will cause death within twenty four hours. That's what worries me."

Sargon turned yellow and shouted: "No, no, I did not swallow the pit. I cast it out of the window!" Everyone laughed, and Sargon began to cry,

# Religious Reflections

By: Rabi Youarash Haido

## The Acts of the Apostles

This is the title of the fifth book in the New Testament. But one, however, should not think that the book mentions all the acts of the Apostles. The chief purpose of the book is to tell how the early followers of Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, spread the Good News “in Jerusalem, in all of Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The Acts is a significant and beautiful supplement to the history of the Gospel, describing with great accuracy and literary charm the story of the Christian movement as it began in Jerusalem and went on to become a faith for the whole world. It depicts the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to sanctify, guide and strengthen His Church, and so it is sometimes aptly called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

The Acts may be divided into three parts, reflecting the ever widening area in which the Gospel was proclaimed and the Church established: The beginning of Christianity in Jerusalem following the ascension of Jesus; expansion into other parts of Palestine and further expansion into the Mediterranean world as far as Rome.

In the Church missionary activity in Judea and Samaria, we find four important events: first, Philip’s preaching in Samaria and the conversion of the Ethiopian official, (Chapter 8: 4-40); second, the transformation of Saul of Tarsus who accepts Jesus and begins to proclaim His Gospel with great zeal, (Chapter 9: 1-30); third, Peter’s proclamation of the Gospel in Syria, and Cornelius’ acceptance of the faith, and the Church’s conviction that the Gospel must be proclaimed to the Gentiles as well as the Jews; fourth, the establishment of the Church in Antioch, which became the centre whence the lights of the Gospel were sent to the Gentile world.

The first and most eminent personality is first Saint Peter, and then Saint Paul. The Book, however, mentions on certain occasions the acts of other apostles. The book is addressed, like the third Gospel to “Theophilus”, who must have been a gentile of significant rank or office in the Roman Empire. In the Prelude to the Book, the author, addressing Theophilus, refers to “The Former Book”, which is beyond any shadow of doubt the third Gospel. From the reference we can infer that the author of “The Acts of the Apostles” and the third Gospel is one person, Luke.

The Gospel of Luke presents a vivid picture of the ministry of Jesus regarding its generality and comprehensive character. The Book of Acts of the Apostles, in like manner, shows how the message, which dawned in Judea, continued to shine till it reached the farthest end of the world known then. The style of writing in both books is the same.

The author does not mention his own name in either books but he, in some portions that tell of Saint Paul’s missionary journeys, uses the plural form of the first person, which indicates that the author was Saint Paul’s companion in some of his wanderings and that he met him in his second missionary journey and accompanied him to Philippi. Later in the third missionary journey, he met the apostle in Philippi again. He accompanied him to Jerusalem and travelled with him from Caesarea to Rome.

## **The Date of Composition**

It is widely believed that the Book of Acts was written at the end of the two years which Saint Paul spent in Rome (Chapter 28: 30) preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, namely about 63 A.C. Many believe that the author ended the Book at this point to say that the message of Jesus had reached the end of the earth, and that it had reached the heart of the Roman Empire, and that its greatest apostle proclaimed it in Rome itself. The historical valuableness of this book is exceedingly great for it is s forceful reference book of the history of the birth and rise of the Christian Church.

## **Contents of the Book**

- 1- Preparation for the witness
  - a- Jesus' last command
  - b- The successor of Judas
- 2- The witness in Jerusalem
- 3- The witness in Judea and Samaria
- 4- The ministry of Paul
  - a- The first missionary journey
  - b- The conference in Jerusalem
  - c- The second missionary journey
  - d- The third missionary journey
  - e- Paul a prisoner in Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome.

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# What the Psalms Are

A psalm is a sacred song or hymn, especially one of those in the Bible. King David is widely known as the psalmist, namely the writer or composer of the psalms. One of the books of the Old Testament is the Book of Psalms. It is a collection of religious poems melodized and sung to the harp or other musical instruments. In Hebrew this book is sometimes called “The Book of Praises”, “*Sepher Tehillim*”. Jesus called it the Book of the Psalms. These psalms are generally called the Psalms of David or merely “David” and in Assyriac they are often called “Davida”, on the basis of the prevailing belief that David the king and prophet was the writer of the psalms or at least of many of them; thus he is regarded as the most celebrated of all Psalmists.

David, according to some resources did not write all these Psalms. Other researchers go even further and state that David was not the author of any of the Psalms, one hundred and fifty in total. But whatever the truth may be, seventy three of the Psalms are attributed to King David; others are said to be written by the sons of Core, Asaph, Solomon, Moses, Heman the Ezrahite, and Ethan the Ezrahite. However, some Psalms are composed by anonymous authors.

The Book of Psalms is divided into five sections. This division or sectioning may symbolize the five books of Moses. Each section ends with a song of praise and the word “Amen”. The first section includes forty one Psalms, most of which are ascribed to David and four are written by anonymous authors.

Section two includes thirty one Psalms, some by the sons of Core, one by Asaph, a few by David, one by Solomon or for Solomon and four by anonymous writers. This section is concluded with “Amen, Amen. The prayers of David, son of Jess are ended”.

The third section comprises seventeen Psalms. Eleven of them are by Asaph, three by the sons of Core, one by David, one by Heman the Ezrahite and one by Ethan the Ezrahite.

The fourth section also contains seventeen Psalms among which one is ascribed to Moses; two are of David and the rest by unknown authors.

The fifth section includes forty four Psalms, fifteen of which are of David; one by Solomon and the rest by anonymous authors. This section contains hymns of ascent, which the Jews chanted during their pilgrimage to the Holy City. It also includes Psalms of exultation or jubilation.

The Psalms were composed during a period of about one thousand years, from the days of Moses till the Return from Captivity or even a little longer until the days of Ezra. But most of them were written in the days of David and Solomon.

The Psalms are a miscellaneous collection of religious poems that marvelously express powerful feelings that gush forth from the deepest depths of the human heart, feelings of sadness and sorrow, repentance and regret, hope and faith. Some are prayers appealing for aid or calling upon God for help, others are hymns of praise and glorification or thanksgiving. Some are prophetic and Messianic indicating God’s promise to David and his house. Some are

instructional dealing with the characteristics of the righteous and the wicked and their lot, the excellence of the Law of God, the futility of the life of humans, the obligations of the rulers and invocation against the wicked.

Most of the Psalms have titles. Some consider the phrase “Hallelujah, Praise the Lord” at the beginning of a number of Psalms as titles and consequently reduce the number of untitled Psalms to twenty four only. What the origin of these titles is, no one can tell. But it is believed that the compilers of the books added them. Nevertheless, they are very old and useful. It is worth mentioning that many of the Psalms attributed to David refer to events in his own life and that many of them correspond to those found in the books of the Old Testament.

These Psalms composed by pious individuals centuries before Christ have been used in the rituals of different Christian churches and they are suited to the taste of all sects equally. Next to the Gospels, Psalms are the most readable. They are true poetry and to comprehend their deep meaning, similar feelings to those of the poet are required. Therefore, some of the Psalms cannot be easily appreciated or comprehended except in time of anguish, distress or depression; others in time of persecution; others in time of glee and delight.

Owing to these characteristics the Psalms have become the corner stone of the Christian hymns used in individual or congregational worship all over the world. And so they will remain evermore.

# The Splendor of Christmas

Two thousand years ago, in a humble village in Judea, named Bethlehem, a baby was born in a cave used as a stable. His mother wrapped him in clothes and laid him in a manger. This was in the days of Herod the Great, king of Judea, and Augustus Caesar “Octavianus” the first Roman emperor. This baby was called Jesus. The details of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ are quite familiar to us with all its beauty and magnificence through the narration of the evangelists: Matthew and Luke.

But why do we celebrate the birth of Jesus every year and all over the world? For centuries and on December 25 of every year, the melodious bells over the spires of the churches and splendid cathedrals swing to proclaim the advent of Christmas. Celebrating Christmas every year has a deep signification. Jesus Christ was not merely a great teacher who taught men to live pure and virtuous life, or a brave man who gave his life for his great mission, or a revolutionist who defied the hypocrite Pharisees and attacked them in their own house. Jesus was all this.

Jesus, beyond any dispute, was the greatest and profoundest teacher of mankind. The immortal Sermon on the Mount is a sufficient proof. He was the bravest hero that ever lived. He carried his Cross and marched to Golgotha fearlessly and steadfastly, and from upon the Cross he asked his heavenly Father to forgive those who crucified him. He was also a great revolutionist who did not appeal to violence. These noble characteristics are in themselves enough to make the whole world celebrate His birthday every year. However, there is something which is more significant than all this.

Mankind celebrates the birth of Jesus every year because it holds Him the Savior whom the ages longed for. Luke tells us of the great tidings which the angels conveyed to the Shepherds, **“I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Savior was born- Christ the Lord.”**

The heavenly hymn which the angels chanted saying, **“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good hope towards men.” (Luke 2:14)** came to support the Good News. This wonderful heavenly hymn sums up in an eloquent and marvelous manner, the mission of Jesus. With the arrival of Christmas every year, people everywhere celebrate the occasion in commemoration of the glorious birth of Jesus Christ. In every home, a Christmas tree is prepared and embellished with colorful lamps and other beautiful ornaments. People exchange visits and congratulations with their relatives, friends and neighbors or send them Christmas cards. Thus they glorify this immortal memory and express their exceeding joy on this great occasion.

All this is, of course, splendid. But it is not sufficient. What is still more splendid and more magnificent is that while we are celebrating Christmas particularly, we should remember that the message of Jesus who came to this world and died on the Cross for our sake, is based on love of our neighbor. Jesus came to tell the world that true religion does not lie in certain systems, creeds, or rites, ‘but in the performance of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others, in genuine goodness.’

Jesus has emphasized this in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and in many other occasions. In the Sermon of the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

But peace cannot be made without the love of our neighbor through our love of our Heavenly Father, The absence of Love may lead to enmity, hatred, strife and dissension among

individuals and nations. And if these evil passions are unleashed, this world would end in desolation and destruction.

Hence, if we wish to live as true Christians, we must follow the example of the Divine Master and imitate and practice His sublime lessons. We must obey Jesus' words and make them the foundation of our character. We must rid ourselves of selfishness which extinguishes the brand of love and dispels the graces that beautify and perfume the character. We must always be ready to render help to those in need of it, as did the Good Samaritan. We, as Christians, must sacrifice for the good of others whether they are members of the family, the Church, or the society. If we meet (with) someone in tribulation, or in agony, we must hasten to offer him help without hesitation and with a good grace. For the love of God in our heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor. (1 John 4:11, 20)

Love, mercy and kindness to all men: this is what Jesus has taught us, and this is what we should remember, not only when we are celebrating Christmas, but always and so long as we are alive.

Now, while people all over the civilized world have celebrated Christmas 2023 and have commenced the New Year 2024, I hail and congratulate the children of our Holy Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, and other sister churches and all the good-hearted and good-willed people throughout the globe wishing them all a very blessed and happy new year; supplicating our Lord to bestow upon our planet the grace of peace, prosperity and security. Amen.

# Lamentations of a Broken Heart\*

**By: Rabi Moushe David Marogel**

**Author's Note:** I intended to compose this story in the Nightmare series in Assyrian, but then since it's not my own story, I decided finally to write it in English and submitted it for this special issue of the Simkhe d'Siprayouta. I wasn't sure which title would be more suitable. Several titles came to mind: "A Mysterious Murder", "An Unsolved Case", "Confidences of a Friend", etc. I suppose the reader can decide on a better title. The story began because an acquaintance, an Assyrian lady in her fifties had lost her mother. My wife and I had not been able to attend the funeral as we were travelling and teaching at the time. Therefore we contacted the bereaved lady and arranged to call on her to convey our condolences. This is an account of our conversation after the initial exchange of civilities. I have given myself permission to write this story despite my promise to the lady in question to keep her secret, as she has recently left this world and because I am certain nobody knows who she was. She may even be a fictitious character, a being from my own imagination.

**My Wife:** "How did your mother pass away? Was she ill?"

**The Lady:** "She had a heart attack."

**My Wife:** "How sad! Actually cardiovascular diseases are one of the major causes of death in our time. In particular among Assyrians, because foods such as greasy Dolma topped with Kezkezta, Harissa piled with melted butter, Kade, Nazouge and Halva, all cooked with loads of butter, not to forget those layered cakes with custard cream..."

**I** (Interrupting my wife as I was certain she was about to give a lecture on the merits of healthy eating): "How old was your dear mother when she passed away?"

**The Lady:** "She was almost eighty."

**I:** "Well, that's not too bad. She wasn't that young. At least that's a consolation. I have heard many praises about your mother. Apparently she was a devoted Assyrian

**The Lady:** "Yes, she was devoted to Assyrianism. Actually she was madly devoted. It was like a sickness. It cost her dearly, this love of Assyrians! She lost her life for it!"

**My Wife** (Trying to change the subject): "Do you have any siblings?"

**The Lady:** "Yes, I have a sister."

**My Wife:** "Oh that's wonderful! Sisters can console each other."

**The Lady:** "Yes, it's true. Actually my sister and I felt rather guilty when our mother died as it was such a tragedy!"

**I** (A little surprised): "A tragedy? Yes, I understand. Losing a parent can be devastating. I suppose you feel you should have been present more, but you know this modern life does not give us much time to spend it with our parents."

\* This story is a work of fiction; any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, past or present is purely coincidental.



**The Lady:** “Yes, that is true, but I mean the way she died was devastating... Actually she drowned!”

**My Wife:** “I thought you said she died of a heart attack”

**The Lady:** “Yes, that’s what we told the priest. Just between ourselves. I’m telling you this in confidence. Please do not breathe a word to anyone. It’s not good for my mother’s reputation!”

**I (Confused):** “But why is drowning damaging for someone’s reputation? Although it’s rather rare, it can happen to anyone. If you are in a shipwreck, for example...”

**The Lady (Wiping tears away):** “Yes, I know! It’s about the way it happened. It’s hard for me to talk about it.”

**My Wife:** “Oh dear! I’m so sorry.”

**The Lady:** “Yes, so am I! In fact I cannot stop thinking about it. It’s like a nightmare! In truth, she had a heart failure and fell into a brook next to the path where she regularly went for a walk and drowned although the water was not that deep!”

**My Wife (Trying to change the subject):** “Does your dear mom have any living relatives apart from you and your sister?”

**The Lady:** “Yes, she has a sister.”

**I (Trying to encourage her):** “Well that’s nice. Your aunt can be like a mother to you now.”

**The Lady (Indignantly):** “No, she cannot! I loathe that woman!”

My wife and I exchanged glances. We were quiet for a short while, not knowing what to say.

**The Lady (Continuing talking to herself as if she had forgotten we were still there):** “She is a germ, a virus, a pain in the worst places! (Turning suddenly to us) Do you know what I call her?”

**My Wife and I (Simultaneously):** “No!”

**The Lady:** “I call her Dr. Artita!”

**My Wife (Taken aback):** “You don’t say! But why?”

**The Lady:** “Unlike my mother, whose love for Assyrians was unselfish and pure, my aunt likes to be around Assyrians only to show off her Ph.D. She likes to give lectures pretending she is very patriotic so that people would clap and praise her. She also demands that people call her Dr., even her friends! That’s why I call her Dr. Artita! It sounds so nice! Doesn’t it? Dr. Artita!”

**My Wife:** “Is that how you address her? Doesn’t she mind?”

**The Lady:** “No, of course I do not address her that way. Not to her face anyway. Actually I refuse to see her after what she had done to my mother!”

**I (Curious):** “What has she done?”

**The Lady:** “She killed her! That germ is an assassin!”

I had started to think the lady had lost her mind, but didn’t know how to handle the situation. Just as I was contemplating to find an excuse to leave, her maid brought in coffee and tea and the lady busied herself serving us. She offered us sweets, chocolates and cakes, which we declined, because of our diet. The rules of etiquette obliged us, however, to remain seated sipping our coffee and tea politely.

**The Lady:** “Do you know my aunt at all?”

**I:** “Yes, actually I have heard her name but I have not met her in person.”

**The Lady:** “That’s not surprising as she has earned herself a name through her deceitful ways working for various Assyrian associations. I can assure you she does not care a farthing for Assyrians. She has not even bothered to teach our language to her own children, but then she gives lectures and writes articles about preserving our language and teaching it! She even encouraged all her children to marry non-Assyrians as she confessed to me once that she doesn’t like to have Assyrian in-laws!! She is such a disgraceful hypocrite!”

**My Wife:** “How can the members of associations be so blind? Can’t they see her hypocrisy?”

**The Lady:** “The older ones are more or less exactly like her, hypocrites! They just talk about Assyrianism but don’t do anything about it! They don’t follow their own teachings. It’s a habit among them not to speak in Assyrian to their children. In their meetings they don’t speak in Assyrian, they use the language of the country. Even if they address each other in Assyrian, as soon as they encounter a youth or child they start speaking in the language of the country as if the new generation of Assyrians are not really Assyrians or have emerged from another country! As a result the older members of these associations are pleased to praise my aunt and glorify her because this justifies their own demands for glorification despite their unworthiness. The younger members see this hypocrisy clearly and many of them feel disgusted and deceived and turn away from Assyrian associations appalled. Then the older members, the traitors wonder why the Assyrian youth does not show interest in associations’ activities!”

**I:** “You are absolutely right! How can this be changed?”

**The Lady:** “I believe the leadership must be given into the hands of the youth. Unfortunately the older members feel they own these associations and are unwilling to let go of them. Moreover they want to keep the status quo and do not wish to let our society progress.”

**My Wife:** “But who are they working for? Aren’t they supposed to work towards our progress?”

**The Lady:** “Yes, that is what they pretend to be doing, but sometimes I feel they are working for our enemies and trying to keep us back. They try to put our people to sleep.”

There was silence for a short while, each of us submerged in our personal reflections on this difficult subject. Then our host resumed her troubled story.

**The Lady:** “Actually the hypocrisy I hate most is that my aunt claims to have become an ardent and devout Christian! I remember years ago when I was a teenager she was not even a believer let alone one who would practice the religion. Now she tells us that she believes in God and Christianity because when she has a problem that she cannot solve, she prays to Jesus and he shows her the way. Can you believe that Jesus has nothing better to do than to make her devilish wishes come true? I suppose it was the good old Jesus who gave her the idea of stealing my sister’s work of art and publishing it in one of her books despite the fact that my sister had forbidden her to use that picture? And what’s even more abhorrent is that she sent a message to my sister saying that now she is the lawful owner of that work since it has been published in her book and if my sister ventures to use it, Dr Artita would sue her because she has a copyright on that piece of artwork!!! Isn’t that appalling? Isn’t that shockingly disgraceful? Isn’t that monstrous, abominable and wicked? Would someone who claims to be an ardent follower of Jesus descend to such depths? When I see sinful people such as her talk of religion, I completely

feel put off of all religions and all gods. How can God see such things and keep quiet? And that's not the end of that story. She told all our relatives, including me, lies about my sister to justify her devilish act!! She is so unscrupulous. I checked those falsehoods with my sister, of course, and heard her side of the story, too. What is really pathetic is that she wants to think that Jesus has forgiven her wrong doings. She probably thinks if she forgives herself then the evil she has committed will go away! But it will not because we, the victims, have not forgiven her. She is so selfish and stupid that she doesn't realize that she must put her wrong doings right with us. There's no forgiveness for her because she doesn't deserve it. No, she is the devil's daughter! ” She started drinking her tea quietly.

**My Wife:** “I suppose you found your sister's account more reasonable. Then your sister can sue her for using her artwork without permission.”

**The Lady:** “Although my sister is telling the truth, she would not sue our own relative. She doesn't want to descend to the same low level as that bitch! We all know what a liar and thief she is. We had heard complaints about her awful lies from other relatives. Moreover some years ago when her son married a non-Assyrian and converted to her religion, he sent us pictures of his wedding ceremony in which it was apparent he had converted. Then when my mother who was earnestly against marriage with non-Assyrians commented about her nephew's conduct, my aunt stole those pictures to hide the evidence! And that's why she killed my mother!”

**I:** “Are you certain about this murder? Didn't you say your mother drowned? Do you mean your aunt actually drowned her? Have you reported this murder to the police?”

**The Lady** (Setting her tea cup and saucer on the table and wiping her tears): “I haven't any proof. She didn't do it physically so to speak. She induced it psychologically.”

**I:** “Oh, I see. What you need is a detective like Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot to prove the crime!”

**The Lady** (Looking at me askance with annoyance): “I see that you think this is a joke! But I can assure you it's not. That's why I don't talk about it to anyone, knowing what the Assyrians are like! I thought you would understand as you are educated and learned and have travelled a lot.”

**My Wife:** “Please forgive my husband for his indiscreet remarks. He is fascinated by these fictional detectives. That's why he mentioned them. But seriously, this is a grave matter and perhaps a detective should look into it.”

**The Lady:** “No, I would not like to do or say anything that would tarnish my mother's name. And please do not say anything to anyone. I had to talk to someone to get it out of my chest. I wanted ... at least someone must know the truth. And you have been such dear listeners. I'm sorry if I have upset you with my blathering!”

**I:** “Oh dear lady, please rest assured that your truthfulness has struck me more than anything else. I can imagine your immense distress. I mean it's absolutely devastating to realize that your aunt has caused your dear mother's death. This is a tragedy that cannot be born easily. Rest assured that your secret is safe with us and we will not breathe a word.”

**My Wife:** “But you have not told us yet how your aunt caused this dreadful tragedy!”

**The Lady:** “One day I got a phone call from my mother. She was very upset. She asked me if I knew about my nephew’s new girlfriend. I said I didn’t. She said her sister had told her about his non-Assyrian girlfriend. I phoned my sister and asked her if her son had a non-Assyrian girlfriend. My sister assured me she did not know and doubted that it was true. My mother did not wait for us to investigate these allegations and find out the truth. She was devastated as she had devoted more than ten years of her life raising her two grandchildren, my sister’s children. My mother had sacrificed more in those ten years than my aunt has ever given for the sake of her own children all their lives. My poor mother could not bear to see her own grandson marry a non-Assyrian. It was so important for her that we Assyrians try to preserve our identity and purity. As I said already this Assyrianism was like an illness with my mother; she was more patriotic than anyone I know. She had hoped that her own grandchildren would set an example for others to follow. I suppose she felt betrayed and defeated. She was so demoralized and she felt so wretched and dejected that she had a heart attack from chagrin. Then a few days after her death we discovered that the girl in question was only a class mate and my aunt had invented that lie to revenge my mother for her comments about my aunt’s son’s marriage to a non-Assyrian. Can you imagine such a satanic, deceitful and spiteful thing to do? That’s why my sister and I feel so guilty, because we feel if only we had realized how desperate and wrecked my mother was feeling and had investigated the facts more quickly and had revealed the truth sooner, she would be living today.”

She stopped talking and sobbed violently but quietly. She buried her eyes in her paper tissue and we could see her shoulders jerk by the force of her sob of despair.

**My Wife:** “I completely sympathize with you. I see why you are so deeply wounded. This wound cannot heal easily.”

**The Lady:** “No, never. I will never forgive that daughter of Lucifer. Dr. Artita is abhorrent, a true criminal.”

**I:** “But I’m sure from every dreadful event something good results.”

**The Lady:** “It’s rather ironical but at the same time strange and miraculous that my nephew became friendly with a very nice Assyrian girl shortly after this tragic event and my niece who had given up finding her ideal Assyrian husband was introduced to this young Assyrian man she approves of and finds quite charming! I sometimes feel my mother’s spirit has led them to find their lifelong partners!”

**I:** “There you are! It is a sad reality but the old must perish to give life to the new offspring!”

**My Wife:** “I totally agree. Moreover, your mother had a quick and almost painless death. Perhaps if she had lived longer she would have suffered from one of these long crippling diseases. I personally prefer to die by a heart attack!”

**I:** “But if she died of drowning, how did you manage to tell the priest the cause of death was heart attack? Doesn’t the priest examine the death certificate before he authorizes the burial?”

**The Lady:** “Fortunately in the initial death certificate that was issued they had mentioned heart attack. But then the police got suspicious. In the pockets of her clothes they could not find any keys. As she lived alone they wondered where her keys had gone missing. When they asked us

we told them she carried a small purse when she went for a walk to carry her keys and small items like a pack of paper tissues. But the police could not find the purse. Even her corpse had been found one day after her death because the police dogs cannot sniff anything that is in the water. The police had concluded that she might have been surprised by a pickpocket who had tried to pinch her purse. You know how old people are often victims of assault. The police thought perhaps she had been pushed in the water as a result of a struggle with her attackers. So the police ordered a more thorough postmortem and the new report revealed the actual cause of death had not been the heart attack because it had been minor. If she had not lost her balance and had not fallen in the water the heart attack would not have killed her. The actual cause had been drowning. Apparently she was unconscious when she fell in the water and did not struggle to prevent herself from drowning. However a few days later her purse was washed to the shore by the currents. Therefore they realized nobody had attacked her. The autopsy report also showed no sign of struggles with an assailant. We had kept the initial death certificate and we showed that one to the priest. You know death by drowning sounds rather dubious. People may change and exaggerate the facts and gossip, and the next thing you know rumors are spread about how the drowning had come about!”

**My Wife** (Getting up to leave): “In any case, I’m sure you will find consolation when your niece and nephew marry. You will be rejoicing with them.”

I got up following my wife’s example. We shook hands with the poor lady, exchanged the usual civilities and left her in the hands of the god she did not believe in anymore.

# Festivals in Ancient Mesopotamia

**By: Joshua J. Mark**

Festivals in ancient Mesopotamia honored the patron deity of a city-state or the primary god of the city that controlled a region or empire. The earliest, the Akitu festival, was first observed in Sumer in the Early Dynastic Period (2900-2334 BCE) and continued through the Seleucid Period (312-63 BCE) along with other religious celebrations.



**Assyrian Wall Relief Depicting Musical Instruments  
From Nineveh, northern Mesopotamia, Iraq.  
Neo-Assyrian period, reign of king Sennacherib, 705-681 BCE.  
The Pergamon Museum, Berlin.  
Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin (Copyright)**

This alabaster bas relief depicts marching shield bearers accompanied by a group of musicians who carry different musical instruments. The male musicians are carrying rectangular drums with a string; this instrument can still be found in modern Iraq and northern Africa and is seen here for the very first time! The same applies to the cymbals, which are made of two sound boxes and handles; the second woman on the right holds a cymbal. At the end of the procession walks a richly decorated woman who holds a round drum.

The arrangement and cut of these wall reliefs suggest that the whole representation and scene was placed on the side walls of a descending ramp that leads from the Royal Palace to the Ishtar Temple. Therefore, the Assyrian king was able to go directly from his palace to the temple during cult ceremonies.

As there was no concept of separation of religion and politics, festivals also served a political purpose in uniting a king's subjects in honoring his god and, in the case of the Akitu festival, legitimizing the king's rule through a public demonstration of the patron god's approval of his reign. Festivals were celebrated throughout the year for several reasons including:

- New Year
- gods' birthdays and incidents from their lives
- ceremonial mourning (such as the rites of the god Tammuz)
- memorable events (such as a military victory)
- sowing and reaping (harvest festivals)
- a monarch's coronation
- birth of royal children
- completion and dedication of a palace, temple, or city

All of these were explicitly or implicitly associated with the patron god of the city or with the Mesopotamian pantheon generally as the gods were understood as the true monarchs and the king as simply their steward. In order to maintain his authority, the king needed to court the goodwill of the gods, and although they made their approval clear through military victories, bountiful harvests, and prosperous trade, events such as the Akitu festival provided an annual opportunity for the divine to continue its relationship with the ruling house or withdraw its favor.

Evidence for the continuance of Mesopotamian festivals becomes sparse after the Seleucid Period, but those of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE to 224 CE) and Sassanian Empire (224-651 CE) are thought to have been influenced by them. The Akitu festival is the oldest observance of a New Year's celebration in the world, and other festivals held throughout the year, although little or nothing is known of many of their details, are also thought to have established celebratory traditions later adopted by other civilizations.

## The Nature of Mesopotamian Festivals

The gods were understood to have created order out of chaos, providing people with all they needed in their lives and, although human beings were expected to honor them daily by living in accordance with their will, festivals marked days purposefully set aside for giving thanks. Scholar Stephen Bertman explains:

**“The greatness of the gods and their manifold blessings were celebrated on special holy days and festivals. The most important of these sacred occasions in a community honored its local god, who was its patron and protector. But on a larger scale across their country, the people of Mesopotamia also expressed their gratitude in common for the fertility of their land whose bounty sustained their lives and derived from divine favor. The greatest of these agricultural holidays was called, in Sumerian, the Akiti, and in Akkadian, the Akitu, a word of uncertain meaning that may in fact be pre-Sumerian ... In some communities, like Babylon, the ceremonies were conducted once a year immediately after the barley harvest in March at the time of the spring equinox (barley was Mesopotamia's chief grain). In other communities, like Ur, there were two celebrations a year, one at the time of the harvest and the other in September when new seed was sown.”**

In the Early Dynastic Period, these festivals were observed independently by each Sumerian city-state in honor of its god, and while this practice was continued during the Akkadian Period (2334-2218 BCE), they were observed throughout Sumer in honor of the divine triad of Akkad, the gods **An (Anu)**, **Enlil**, and **Enki**, as well as **Ishtar** (derived from the Sumerian **Inanna**). Among the earliest rites were those observed for the dying and reviving god

figure, Tammuz, known by scholars today as rituals of ceremonial mourning in which the god dies and returns to life, ensuring fertility and prosperity. These festivals followed the same basic paradigm as those observed earlier by Sumerian kings and served the same purpose: to honor the gods, legitimize the king's rule, and unite the people in religious belief and practice.

## Religious Practice in Mesopotamia

The central belief in Mesopotamian religion was that human beings had been created by the gods as co-laborers to maintain the established order. Whatever job one held, one was expected to perform those duties in gratitude and humility, recognizing what was owed to the gods who, by one's labor, were freed to manage their own respective responsibilities. **Galu**, the goddess of healing, could concentrate her energies on health; **Nisaba** was free to inspire writing and creativity, **Nergal** to assure victory in war. Whether one was digging an irrigation ditch or crafting fine jewelry, one was still helping the gods collectively in the maintenance of life on earth.

Among the thousands of deities of the Mesopotamian pantheon were the seven divine powers originally conceived of by the Sumerians:

- Anu
- Enki
- Enlil
- Inanna
- Nanna
- Ninhursag
- Utu-Shamash

Mesopotamian art and architecture honored these seven – and the many others – through depictions of their great deeds as told in the works of Mesopotamian literature and in structures such as temple complexes centered around a towering ziggurat. People did not attend worship services at these temples – one's daily life was supposed to be lived as a kind of devotion – and they were instead regarded as the home of the deity they were dedicated to. The god or goddess was understood as living in the temple in the form of their statue, tended to by the high priest or priestess and lesser clergy, and like any of the humans who served them, they periodically needed a vacation and change of scenery offered by festivals.

During these celebrations, the statue of the deity would be taken from the temple and carried somewhere else – either to another city, around their city, or out of the city to a shrine in the countryside – to give them a holiday just as they were providing to the people. An example of this is given in the Sumerian poem *Shulgi and Ninlil's Barge*, dated to the reign of **Shulgi** of **Ur** (2029-1982 BCE) in which Shulgi decks out a ship in honor of Enlil and his consort Ninlil and takes them (in the form of their statues), as well as other deities associated with them, downriver from Nippur, the holy city, to the sacred site of Tummal for a banquet.

## The Great Ziggurat of Ur

The ziggurat was built by the Sumerian King **Ur-Nammu** and his son **Shulgi** in approximately the 21st century BCE (short chronology) during the Third Dynasty of Ur. The massive step pyramid measured 210 feet (64m) in length, 150 feet (46m) in width and over 100 feet (30m) in height. The height is speculative, as only the foundations of the Sumerian ziggurat



have survived. The ziggurat was a piece in a temple complex that served as an administrative center for the city, and which was a shrine of the moon god Nanna, the patron deity of Ur. The construction of the ziggurat was finished in the 21st century BCE by King Shulgi, who, in order to win the allegiance of cities, proclaimed himself a god. During his 48-year reign, the city of Ur grew to be the capital of a state controlling much of Mesopotamia. King Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BC, after "finding little left but the last stage and nothing to guide him as to the monument's original appearance", had it restored in seven stages rather than three.



**The ruins of the Great Ziggurat of Ur , taken in 2005 CE near Ali Air Base in Iraq  
Hardnfast (CC BY-SA)**

## **Akitu & Zagmuk**

The most famous festival, however, was the Akitu, which is most clearly documented through its observance in Babylon during the reign of **Hammurabi** (1792-1750 BCE), at which the god **Marduk**, and his son **Nabu**, were honored. Marduk was the patron god of Babylon and Nabu, who had replaced **Nisaba** as the patron god of writing, was the patron of nearby **Borsippa**. The Akitu festival absorbed the earlier New Year's festival of **Zagmuk**, which had been observed for twelve days in December, celebrating Marduk's triumph over Tiamat as given in the *Enuma Elish*. The Akitu festival also ran for twelve days in honor of the same event but was observed in March. Scholar Christian Roy comments:

**“Having started out as a sowing and harvest festival, [Akitu] came to prominence in Babylon as the proper occasion for the crowning and investiture of a new king. On this occasion, the reigning monarch's divine mandate was renewed in connection with the sky god Marduk's victory over Tiamat, the goddess of salt water. As a spring festival, Akitu thus bound together the renewal of nature's fertility, the reestablishment of the king's**

**divine authority (formerly a fall ceremony), and the securing of the people's favorable destiny over the coming year – especially the scorching summer heat – while putting an end to the sterility of the winter months when the world seemed old and worn out.”**

In the *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat makes war on the younger gods and defeats them in battle repeatedly until they choose Marduk as their leader. As the divine champion of order, Marduk vanquishes the forces of chaos under Tiamat, kills her, and creates the known world. The Akitu festival celebrated this victory while also acknowledging all the gifts of the gods that proceeded from it.

## Conclusion

Besides the Akitu festival, as noted, there were many other celebrations throughout the year in every era of Mesopotamia's history. Some form of the oldest of these may have been observed in the Uruk Period (4100-2900 BCE), or earlier, but are first attested in writing from the Early Dynastic Period. The holy city of Nippur, dedicated chiefly to the cult of Enlil, was an important pilgrimage site and host of various celebrations from this era onwards, but festivals were observed in virtually every city throughout Mesopotamia.

From the Early Dynastic Period through the Old Babylonian Period (c. 2000-1600 BCE) on into the Assyrian Period (c. 1307-912 BCE), Neo-Assyrian Period (912-612 BCE), and further at least through the Seleucid Period, the state sponsored festivals, attested to through inscriptions, stele, reliefs, monuments, and literary works including the *Hymn to Inanna*, *Enlil in the E-kur*, and *Shulgi and Ninlil's Barge*. Among the best documented of the Neo-Assyrian Period is the **greatest party ever thrown: Ashurnasirpal II's Kalhu Festival** in 879 BCE to celebrate the completion of the city of Kalhu, attended by 70,000 guests.

Festivals, as noted, served both political and religious purposes but, on an individual level, were the primary means of public, ritual participation in the religious life of the city. As noted, one did not attend religious services weekly or listen to sermons but, instead, served the gods daily through one's actions and offerings brought to the temple complex. Only through festivals was the average person allowed to view the statue of their patron god or take part in a public expression of faith. Scholar A. Leo Oppenheim comments:

**“The basic function of the temple for the community seems to have been its mere existence in the sense that it linked the city to the deity by providing a permanent dwelling place. The house in which the god lived was maintained and provided for in due form in order to secure for the city the prosperity and happiness which the god's presence was taken to guarantee. Beyond that, the common man was given the opportunity to admire only from afar the glamor of the image displayed in the background of the sanctuary, which he himself was not permitted to enter, at least in Babylonia. Or he was a spectator when the images were carried in processions which displayed the temple's wealth and pomp, and he participated in the collective joys of festivals of thanksgiving and expressions of ceremonial mourning.”**

Besides serving the interests of the king and state, Mesopotamian festivals met the religious needs of the people by providing them with the opportunity to interact face-to-face with their god. These celebrations were manifestations of the relationship between the people and the divine as they were allowed the chance to personally address and give thanks to the god and, in return, directly receive assurance of blessing, prosperity, and the comfort in knowing that a higher power cared for and would continue to watch over them.

## Appendix: The Greatest Party Ever Thrown:

### Ashurnasirpal (Aššur-nāšir-apli) II's Kalhu Festival

The menu from the celebration has been preserved; the king's Banquet Stele records that the feast included, but was not limited to:

- 1,000 oxen
- 1,000 domestic cattle and sheep
- 14,000 imported and fattened sheep
- 1,000 lambs
- 500 game birds
- 500 gazelles
- 10,000 fish
- 10,000 eggs
- 10,000 loaves of bread
- 10,000 measures of beer
- 10,000 containers of wine (Bauer, 337)

Ingredients, spices, and other edibles included sesame, grains, grapes, onions, garlic, honey, mustard, milk, nuts, cheese, olives, dates, ghee, and turnips. As Van de Mieroop writes, **“This was a special banquet, and worthy of boasting”** (*Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 155). Scholars continue to speculate, however, on why the king would throw such an elaborate festival for the people when he did not have to do so. There is no reason given for the party and one is left to conclude that the king simply felt like hosting a grad event.

**\* This article was compiled by a friend, who wishes to remain anonymous, from the following sources: The original version of the main article by J. J. Mark was published on 08 March 2023 in World History Encyclopedia, and the description of the Assyrian Bas Relief by Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin was published on 31 August 2014 in World History Encyclopedia website, and the text about the Great Ziggurat of Ur was borrowed from Wikipedia; and the section on Ashurnasirpal II's grand party was taken from an article by J. J. Mark published on 31 March 2020 in World History Encyclopedia.**

# Enlil in the E-kur

By: Joshua J. Mark

**Enlil in the E-Kur emphasizes Enlil's greatness and the splendour of his home in Nippur**



**Nippur**  
David Stanley (CC BY)

***Enlil in the E-Kur*** (c. 2000 BCE) is a Sumerian hymn praising the sky god **Enlil**, his **temple/ziggurat** at **Nippur**, and his consort **Ninlil**, depicting all three in glowing terms and Enlil as a creator-god. **The piece is highly regarded as an important work of Mesopotamian literature as well as for its influence on books of the Bible.**

The hymn was almost certainly sung at festivals in ancient Mesopotamia in honour of Enlil whose temple complex at Nippur was among the most opulent in Sumer. Nippur was always regarded as a holy city, seat of Enlil's cult, and kings of the Early Dynastic Period (2900-2334 BCE), Akkadian Period (2334-2218 BCE), and Ur III Period (2047-1750 BCE) – as well as later monarchs – made it a priority among their building, renovation, and restoration projects.

The kings of the Ur III Period, beginning with **Ur-Nammu** (r. 2047-2030 BCE) and his son **Shulgi of Ur** (r. 2029-1982 BCE), paid special attention to Nippur as they claimed their

authority to rule from Enlil and Ninlil and the poem is thought to date from the reign of Shulgi as similar works are also, including the poem *Shulgi and Ninlil's Barge*.

*Enlil in the E-Kur* (also known as *Enlil A*, *Hymn to Enlil*, and *Hymn to the E-kur*) was clearly popular based on the number of copies found at Nippur and elsewhere. The piece was included in the curriculum of the *edubba* ("House of Tablets"), the Mesopotamian scribal school, as part of the advanced course of study known as the **Decad** toward the end of a student's formal course of education.

The **cuneiform** tablets were found in fragments in the early 20th century, and the work was first translated and published between 1918 and 1928. Today it is among the most popular works of ancient Mesopotamian literature for its detailed description of the E-Kur (temple), its depiction of Enlil as the source of all creation, and **the influence it is thought to have had on the later books of the Bible, especially the Book of Psalms.**

## Summary & Commentary

Enlil began as the Sumerian god of the air, son of **An (Anu)** the Lord of the Heavens, but eventually replaced his father as King of the Gods while also forming a divine triad with Anu and Enki, the god of wisdom. In some myths, Enlil seems subordinate to Anu or Enki or his consort Ninlil, but in most, he is the most powerful deity of the **Mesopotamian pantheon**, keeper of the **Tablets of Destiny** which held the **fates** of gods and humans, and the creator and preserver of universal order. He was worshipped from c. 2900 to c. 141 BCE.

**1-9:** Enlil's commands are by far the loftiest, his words are holy, his utterances are immutable! The fate he decides is everlasting; his glance makes the mountains anxious, his ... reaches (?) into the interior of the mountains. All the gods of the earth bow down to Father Enlil, who sits comfortably on the holy dais, the lofty dais to Nunamnir, whose lordship and prince ship are most perfect. The Anuna gods enter before him and obey his instructions faithfully.

**10-17:** The mighty lord, the greatest in heaven and earth, the knowledgeable judge, the wise one of wide-ranging wisdom, has taken his seat in the Dur-an-ki, and made the Ki-ur, the great place, resplendent with majesty. He has taken up residence in Nibru, the lofty bond (?) between heaven and earth. The front of the city is laden with terrible fearsomeness and radiance, its back is such that even the mightiest god does not dare to attack, and its interior is the blade of a sharp dagger, a blade of catastrophe. For the rebel lands it is a snare, a trap, a net.

**18-25:** It cuts short the life of those who speak too mightily. It permits no evil word to be spoken in judgement (?). ..., deception, inimical speech, hostility, impropriety, ill-treatment, wickedness, wrongdoing, looking askance (?), violence, slandering, arrogance, licentious speech (?), egotism and boasting are abominations not tolerated within the city.

**26-34:** The borders of Nibru form a great net, within which the hurin eagle spreads wide its talons. The evil or wicked man does not escape its grasp. In this city endowed with steadfastness, for which righteousness and justice have been made a lasting possession, and which is clothed (?) in pure clothing on the quay, the younger brother honours the older brother and treats him with human dignity; people pay attention to a father's word and submit themselves to his protection; the child behaves humbly and modestly towards his mother and attains a ripe old age.

**35-43:** In the city, the holy settlement of Enlil, in Nibru, the beloved shrine of father Great Mountain, he has made the dais of abundance, the E-kur, the shining temple, rise from the soil; he has made it grow on pure land as high as a towering mountain. Its prince, the Great Mountain, Father Enlil, has taken his seat on the dais of the E-kur, the lofty shrine. No god can cause harm to the temple's divine powers. Its holy hand-washing rites are everlasting like the earth. Its divine powers are the divine powers of the abzu: no one can look upon them.

**44-55:** Its interior is a wide sea which knows no horizon. In its ... glistening as a banner (?), the bonds and ancient divine powers are made perfect. Its words are prayers, its incantations are supplications. Its word is a favourable omen ..., its rites are most precious. At the festivals, there is plenty of fat and cream; they are full of abundance. Its divine plans bring joy and rejoicing, its verdicts are great. Daily there is a great festival, and at the end of the day there is an abundant harvest. The temple of Enlil is a mountain of abundance; to reach out, to look with greedy eyes, to seize are abominations in it.

**56-64:** The lagar priests of this temple whose lord has grown together with it are expert in blessing; its gudu priests of the abzu are suited for your lustration rites; its nuec priests are perfect in the holy prayers. Its great farmer is the good shepherd of the Land, who was born vigorous on a propitious day. The farmer, suited for the broad fields, comes with rich offerings; he does not ... into the shining E-kur.

**65-73:** Enlil, when you marked out the holy settlements, you also built Nibru, your own city. You (?) ... the Ki-ur, the mountain, your pure place. You founded it in the Dur-an-ki, in the middle of the four quarters of the earth. Its soil is the life of the Land, and the life of all the foreign countries. Its brickwork is red gold, its foundation is lapis lazuli. You made it glisten on high in Sumer as if it were the horns of a wild bull. It makes all the foreign countries tremble with fear. At its great festivals, the people pass their time in abundance.

**74-83:** Enlil, holy Urac is favoured with beauty for you; you are greatly suited for the abzu, the holy throne; you refresh yourself in the deep underworld, the holy chamber. Your presence spreads awesomeness over the E-kur, the shining temple, the lofty dwelling. Its fearsomeness and radiance reach up to heaven, its shadow stretches over all the foreign lands, and its crenellation reaches up to the midst of heaven. All lords and sovereigns regularly supply holy offerings there, approaching Enlil with prayers and supplications.

**84-92:** Enlil, if you look upon the shepherd favourably, if you elevate the one truly called in the Land, then the foreign countries are in his hands, the foreign countries are at his feet! Even the most distant foreign countries submit to him. He will then cause enormous incomes and heavy tributes, as if they were cool water, to reach the treasury. In the great courtyard he will supply offerings regularly. Into the E-kur, the shining temple, he will bring (?) ...

**93-99:** Enlil, faithful shepherd of the teeming multitudes, herdsman, leader of all living creatures, has manifested his rank of great prince, adorning himself with the holy crown. As the Wind of the Mountain (?) occupied the dais, he spanned the sky as the rainbow. Like a floating cloud, he moved alone (?).

**100-108:** He alone is the prince of heaven, the dragon of the earth. The lofty god of the Anuna himself determines the fates. No god can look upon him. His great minister and commander Nuska learns his commands and his intentions from him, consults with him and then executes his far-reaching instructions on his behalf. He prays to him with holy prayers (?) and divine powers (?).

**109-123:** Without the Great Mountain Enlil, no city would be built, no settlement would be founded; no cow-pen would be built, no sheepfold would be established; no king would be elevated, no lord would be given birth; no high priest or priestess would perform extispicy; soldiers would have no generals or captains; no carp-filled waters would ... the rivers at their peak; the carp would not ... come straight up (?) from the sea, they would not dart about. The sea would not produce all its heavy treasure, no freshwater fish would lay eggs in the reedbeds, no bird of the sky would build nests in the spacious land; in the sky the thick clouds would not open their mouths; on the fields, dappled grain would not fill the arable lands, vegetation would not grow lushly on the plain; in the gardens, the spreading trees of the mountain would not yield fruits.

**124-130:** Without the Great Mountain, Enlil, Nintu would not kill, she would not strike dead; no cow would drop its calf in the cattle-pen, no ewe would bring forth ... lamb in its sheepfold; the living creatures which multiply by themselves would not lie down in their ...; the four-legged animals would not propagate, they would not mate.

**131-138:** Enlil, your ingenuity takes one's breath away! By its nature it is like entangled threads which cannot be unravelled, crossed threads which the eye cannot follow. Your divinity can be relied on. You are your own counsellor and adviser; you are a lord on your own. Who can comprehend your actions? No divine powers are as resplendent as yours. No god can look you in the face.

**139-155:** You, Enlil, are lord, god, king. You are a judge who makes decisions about heaven and earth. Your lofty word is as heavy as heaven, and there is no one who can lift it. The Anuna gods ... at your word. Your word is weighty in heaven, a foundation on the earth. In the heavens, it is a great ..., reaching up to the sky. On the earth it is a foundation which cannot be destroyed. When it relates to the heavens, it brings abundance: abundance will pour from the heavens. When it relates to the earth, it brings prosperity: the earth will produce prosperity. Your word means flax, your word means grain. Your word means the early flooding, the life of the lands. It makes the living creatures, the animals (?) which copulate and breathe joyfully in the greenery. You, Enlil, the good shepherd, know their ways (?). ... the sparkling stars.

**156-166:** You married Ninlil, the holy consort, whose words are of the heart, her of noble countenance in a holy ma garment, her of beautiful shape and limbs, the trustworthy lady of your choice. Covered with allure, the lady who knows what is fitting for the E-kur, whose words of advice are perfect, whose words bring comfort like fine oil for the heart, who shares the holy throne, the pure throne with you, she takes counsel and discusses matters with you. You decide the fates together at the place facing the sunrise. Ninlil, the lady of heaven and earth, the lady of all the lands, is honoured in the praise of the Great Mountain.

**167-171:** Prominent one whose words are well established, whose command and support are things which are immutable, whose utterances take precedence, whose plans are firm words, Great Mountain, Father Enlil, your praise is sublime

## Conclusion

The hymn ends with a final praise for Enlil, departing from the tradition of praising Nisaba, the goddess of writing, at the conclusion of a written work, to emphasize the god's greatness. The central message of *Enlil in the E-kur*, in fact, is summed up in lines 167-171 as the earlier praise lavished on his temple only has meaning because Enlil was thought to reside there. His home is praised because his presence elevates it and, to provide him with a residence worthy of that elevation, no expense was spared in the E-kur's construction and ornamentation. Black comments:

“In Sumerian cosmology, Enlil's sanctuary Dur-an-Ki was conceptualized as the bond between heaven and earth – which is what the name itself signifies. Its great stepped tower, still prominent in the desert landscape today, must have been a dominant, awe-inspiring landmark in ancient times too.” (321)

The hymn's praise of the temple would have worked as a mirror of the structure itself, carefully composed to elevate the souls of its audience just as the building complex did. *Enlil in the E-kur*, sung at festivals, would have reminded the people – just as the towering ziggurat did – that, whatever challenges or struggles they were contending with, their god was in control, guiding and helping them.

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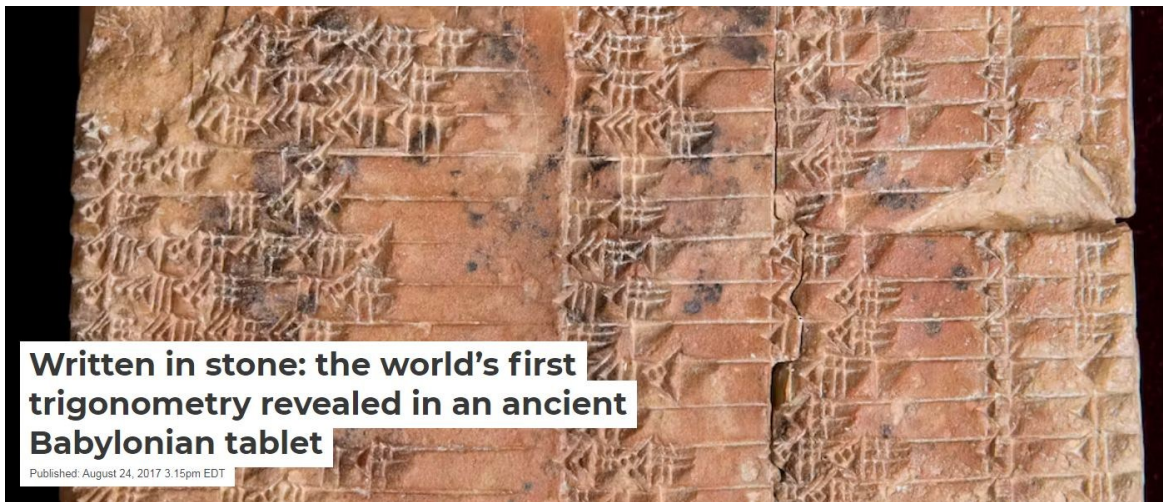
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# Early Assyrian/Babylonian Trigonometry\*

By: Dr. Daniel Mansfield and Prof. Norman Wildberger

Compiled by: Dr. Shelagh Mirza, Ph.D.



The ancient Babylonians – who lived from about 4,000BCE in what is now Iraq – had a long forgotten understanding of right-angled triangles that was much simpler and more accurate than the conventional trigonometry we are taught in schools.

Our new research, published in Historia Mathematica, shows that the Babylonians were able to construct a trigonometric table using only the exact ratios of sides of a right-angled triangle. This is a completely different form of trigonometry that does not need the familiar modern concept of angles.

At school we are told that the shape of a right-angled triangle depends upon the other two angles. The angle is related to the circumference of a circle, which is divided into 360 parts or degrees. This angle is then used to describe the ratios of the sides of the right-angled triangle through sin, cos and tan.

$\sin \theta$	$\cos \theta$	$\tan \theta$	$\theta$
0.017452	0.999848	0.017455	1
0.034899	0.999391	0.034921	2
0.052336	0.998630	0.052408	3
0.069756	0.997564	0.069927	4
0.087156	0.996195	0.087489	5

**The three ratios of a modern trigonometric table, rounded to six decimal places, with auxiliary angle  $\theta$  in degrees. Daniel Mansfield, Author provided**

But circles and right-angled triangles are very different, and the price of having simple values for the angle is borne by the ratios, which are very complicated and must be approximated.

This approach can be traced back to the Greek astronomer and mathematician Hipparchus of Nicaea (who died after 127 BCE). He is said to be the father of trigonometry because he used his table of chords to calculate orbits of the Moon and Sun. But our new research shows this was not the first, or only, or best approach to trigonometry.



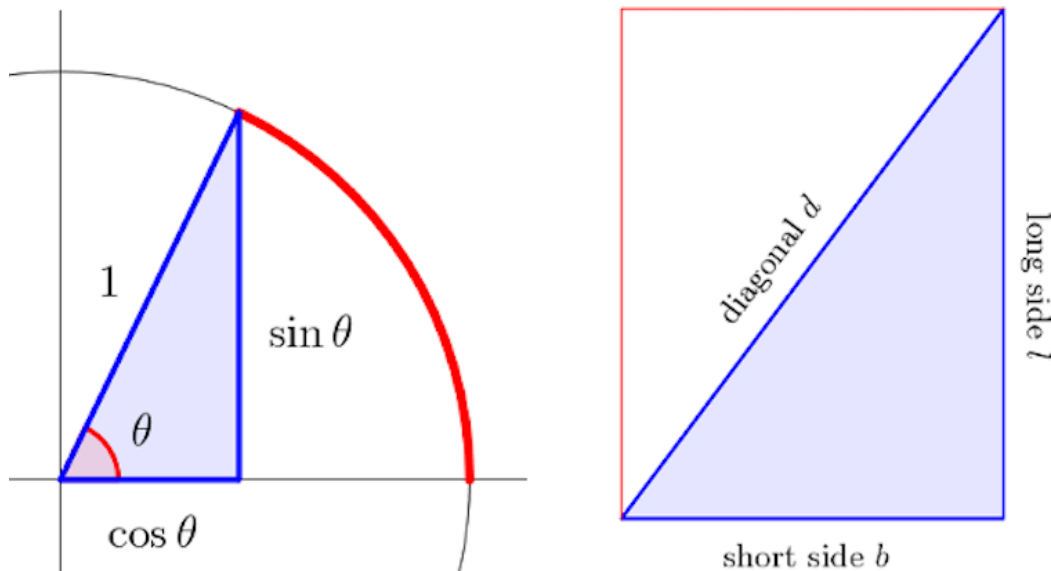
The most famous relation in geometry is the relation between the sides and the hypotenuse of a right triangle. In modern times, this is called the Pythagoras' theorem. In reality, elements of this understanding are apparent throughout history. More than a thousand years before the Greek astronomers were looking at the night sky, Babylonian surveyors who had their own understanding of right triangles and rectangles, were using them, but they were not looking at the sky, they were looking at the ground.

## **Babylonian Trigonometry**

The Babylonians discovered their own unique form of trigonometry during the Old Babylonian period (1900-1600BCE), more than 1,500 years earlier than the Greek form.

Remarkably, their early form of trigonometry contains none of the hallmarks of our modern trigonometry - it does not use angles and it does not use approximation.

The Babylonians had a completely different conceptualisation of a right triangle. They saw it as half of a rectangle, and due to their sophisticated sexagesimal (base 60) number system they were able to construct a wide variety of right triangles using only exact ratios.



**The Greek (left) and Babylonian (right) conceptualisation of a right triangle. Notably the Babylonians did not use angles to describe a right triangle.**

**Daniel Mansfield, Author provided**

The sexagesimal system is better suited for exact calculation. For example, if you divide one hour by three then you get exactly 20 minutes. But if you divide one dollar by three then you get 33 cents, with 1 cent left over. The fundamental difference is the convention to treat hours and dollars in different number systems: time is sexagesimal and dollars are decimal.

The Babylonians knew that their sexagesimal number system allowed for many more exact divisions. For a more sophisticated example, 1 hour divided by 48 is 1 minute and 15 seconds.

This precise arithmetic of the Babylonians also influenced their geometry, which they preferred to be exact. They were able to generate a wide variety of right-angled triangles within exact ratios  $b/l$  and  $d/l$ , where  $b$ ,  $l$  and  $d$  are the short side, long side and diagonal of a rectangle.

The ratio  $b/l$  was particularly important to the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians because they used this ratio to measure steepness.

## **The Plimpton 322 Tablet**

We now know that the Babylonians studied trigonometry because we have a fragment of one of their trigonometric tables.

Plimpton 322 is a broken clay tablet from the ancient city of Larsa, which was located near Tell as-Senkereh in modern day Iraq. The tablet was written between 1822-1762 BCE.

Plimpton 322 is arguably the most interesting and most sophisticated mathematical document from the ancient world. It tells us that past civilizations understood mathematics a lot better than we thought. In particular the Mesopotamians understood Pythagorean Triples at a level of sophistication that we never expected.



Plimpton 322, a 3800-year-old Babylonian clay tablet, was discovered by the archaeologist, academic and adventurer Edgar Banks who is believed to be the inspiration behind Indiana Jones. In the 1920s Banks sold the tablet to the American publisher, antiques collector and philanthropist George Arthur Plimpton.

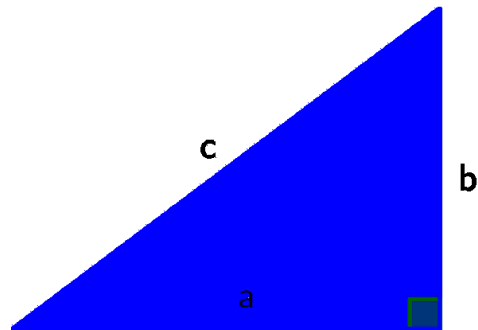
Plimpton bequeathed his entire collection of mathematical artefacts to Columbia University in 1936, and it resides there today in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. It's available online through the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative.



**Archaeologist, academic and adventurer Edgar Banks**

At the time it was not known how important Plimpton 322 was. In 1945 the tablet was revealed to contain a highly sophisticated sequence of integer numbers that satisfy the Pythagorean equation  $a^2+b^2=c^2$ , known as Pythagorean triples. Subsequently, it has become one of the most studied objects from the ancient world.

This is the fundamental relationship of the three sides of a right-angled triangle, and this discovery proved that the Babylonians knew this relationship more than 1,000 years before the Greek mathematician Pythagoras was born.



$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

**The fundamental relation between the side lengths of a right triangle.  
In modern times this is called Pythagoras' theorem, but it was known to the Babylonians  
more than 1,000 years before Pythagoras was born.**

Plimpton 322 has ruled space on the reverse which indicates that additional rows were intended. In 1964, the Yale based science historian Derek J de Solla Price discovered the pattern behind the complex sequence of Pythagorean triples and we now know that it was originally intended to contain 38 rows in total.



**The other side of the Plimpton 322 tablet. UNSW/Andrew Kelly, Author provided**

The tablet also has missing columns, and in 1981 the Swedish mathematics historian Jöran Friberg conjectured that the missing columns should be the ratios  $b/l$  and  $d/l$ . But the tablet's purpose remained elusive.

$b/l$	$d/l$	Information relating to $b/d$ or $d/b$			row
		$(d/l)^2$	$b$	$d$	
0.99166666	1.40833333	1.98340277	119	169	1
0.97424768	1.39612268	1.94915855	3367	4825	2
0.95854166	1.38520833	1.91880212	4601	6649	3
0.94140740	1.37340740	1.88624790	12709	18541	4
0.90277777	1.34722222	1.81500771	65	97	5

**The first five rows of Plimpton 322, with reconstructed columns and numbers written in decimal.**

The surviving fragment of Plimpton 322 starts with the Pythagorean triple 119, 120, 169. The next triple is 3367, 3456, 4825. This makes sense when you realise that the first triple is almost a square (which is an extreme kind of rectangle), and the next is slightly flatter. In fact the right-angled triangles are slowly but steadily getting flatter throughout the entire sequence.

Watch the triangles change shape as we go down the list.



So the trigonometric nature of this table is suggested by the information on the surviving fragment alone, but it is even more apparent from the reconstructed tablet.

This argument must be made carefully because modern notions such as angle were not present at the time Plimpton 322 was written. How then might it be a trigonometric table?

Fundamentally a trigonometric table must describe three ratios of a right triangle. So we throw away sin and cos and instead start with the ratios  $b/l$  and  $d/l$ . The ratio which replaces tan would then be  $b/d$  or  $d/b$ , but neither can be expressed exactly in sexagesimal.

Instead, information about this ratio is split into three columns of exact numbers. A squared index and simplified values of  $b$  and  $d$  to help the scribe make their own approximation to  $b/d$  or  $d/b$ .

## No approximation

The most remarkable aspect of Babylonian trigonometry is its precision. Babylonian trigonometry is exact, whereas we are accustomed to approximate trigonometry. The Babylonian approach is also much simpler because it only uses exact ratios. There are no irrational numbers and no angles, and this means that there is also no sin, cos or tan or approximation.

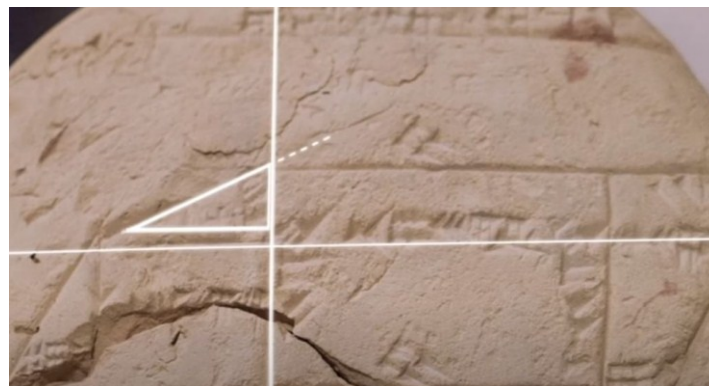
It is difficult to say why this approach to trigonometry has not survived. Perhaps it went out of fashion because the Greek approach using angles is more suitable for astronomical calculations. Perhaps this understanding was lost in 1762 BCE when Larsa was captured by Hammurabi of Babylon. Without evidence, we can only speculate.



New research has finally shed light on a long-standing mystery. How ancient Babylonians may have used these clay tablets. The Babylonians didn't have what we call the theorem, instead they knew all the particular cases where the theorem held true. So all these different examples of rectangles, which have very pleasant, easy to manage measurements are called the Pythagorean Triples.

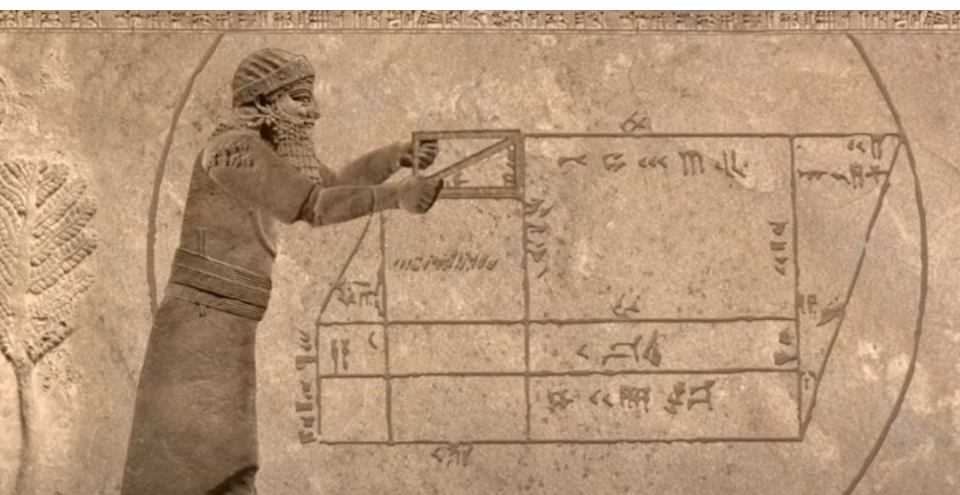
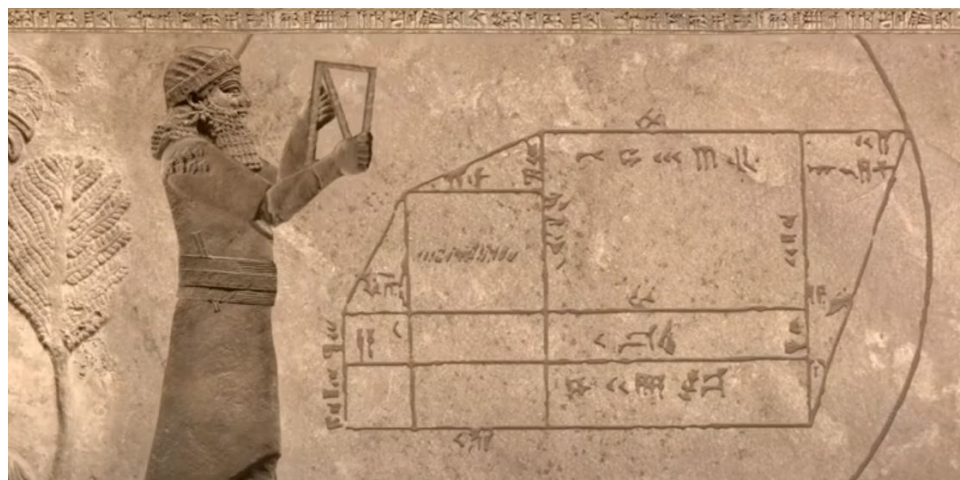


This tablet, Si 427, shows us that application is actually surveying. These people were making boundaries, and they were making really accurate boundaries, using their understanding of geometry.





Pure mathematics is the study of mathematics for its own sake, but it's often motivated in the problems of the day. Plimpton, 322, arguably fits into this category, because we see a mathematician generating all these rectangles, and then analysing them to see which ones have regular sides, which is a relevant problem in contemporary surveying. This tablet shows us that Babylonian surveying became a lot more accurate during this time, which is understandable because people are starting to own land privately.



And when we've got land owned by private individuals, we've got disputes over who owns which parts of land, or who owns which date palms and boundaries. Plimpton 322 is arguably the most interesting mathematical artefact from the ancient world. It tells us that past civilizations understood mathematics a lot better than we thought.

We know about this today because we have thousands upon thousands clay tablets from the lost cities of ancient Babylon. These have been preserved beneath the sands of modern day Iraq, and finding their ways into libraries, private collections and museums. I believe that there are so many tablets out there just waiting for someone to read them.



And they are going to surprise us because the Babylonian understanding of the world was so different to how we see it today. We are only beginning to understand this ancient civilisation, which is likely to hold many more secrets waiting to be discovered.

### **Note from Dr. Shelagh Mirza, Ph.D.**

We, the survivors of the ancient Assyrians / Babylonians are most grateful to scholars who shed light on the Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations. This small tablet and thousands of similar tablets today reveal how knowledgeable and advanced the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians were. Furthermore, we understand from the above tablet that as long back as 3800 years ago, ordinary Babylonians owned land and orchards. This reveals a completely different picture to me; personally, as I remember that even today in our so-called advanced world, in some Western countries ordinary people cannot own land and property, because all the land belongs to the monarchy. The king or queen bestows certain parcels of land to dukes and counts and lords, who lease their land and all the properties, built on those parcels, to individuals and collect rent and taxes. This shows that ancient Babylonians were much more advanced in social justice than certain modern world countries in 21<sup>st</sup> century!

The enemies of our ancestors killed millions of Assyrians and Babylonians throughout the ages and tried their best to burn their cities, libraries and everything that bore witness to the glory of those ancient civilizations. The few people, who were spared, were forced to convert to other religions to forget who they were and what connections they had to Ashur.

The name Assyrian was wiped out to such an extent that most people believed all the Assyrian /Babylonian people were destroyed and had disappeared from the face of the earth. Moreover, all their achievements were attributed to others, such as Greeks, Arabs, and Turks. One good example is these Pythagorean Triples, which were actually Babylonian and Assyrian. Why are they called Pythagorean then if not to avoid the mentioning of the name Assyrian or Babylonian in connection with something good and valuable?

It's surprising that even the authors of these two articles compiled here did not know about the advances Assyrians / Babylonians had made in astronomy and they refer to the Greeks as the founders of astronomy! Actually, the Assyrians / Babylonians are famous for their astronomical achievements because they had calculated the orbits of the sun and a few other planets very accurately to an amazing precision a long time before the Greeks. Thus the traditional history of geometry did not really start in ancient Greece, as most people wrongly think. It all started in Assyria / Babylonia, where astronomers used geometry to understand the movement of celestial bodies through the night sky. Surely they did not stop just at Pythagorean Triples; they had amazing methods to calculate tangents and cotangents of angles very accurately. In fact according to the latest findings, the Greeks had copied all their knowledge from Babylonian documents.

In short, throughout centuries people did not know the truths about Assyrians and Babylonians, and relied solely on old religious scriptures written by people, who held strong grudges against our ancestors and wrote many lies about them. As a result a strong resentment and hatred has been generated towards our ancestors; and even history books all over the world present Assyrians and Babylonians as warlike and cruel nations who didn't leave anything behind but destruction.

Most Assyrians felt and still feel ashamed for being Assyrian. They think that according to those ancient scriptures our nation is cursed and we are doomed. They prefer to be anything but Assyrian because they feel there's no hope for us. Even today, in order to generate hatred towards our ancestors, certain people point to ruins of some ancient towns and claim that Assyrians or Babylonians had destroyed and demolished those places. But what proof is there that actually Assyrians and Babylonians were responsible? Did our ancestors leave their DNA signature on those ruins? Perhaps other nations had destroyed those villages and towns, for what we know!

It may sound unbelievable, but even in our modern times, despite all the scientific advancements, I've heard from educated Assyrians that the story of the Tower of Babel is true and caused the spread of various languages in the world !!! Yes, unfortunately the marvellous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is reduced to a symbol of man's stupidity and arrogance and the cause of discord, misunderstanding and disagreement culminating in human failure; and Babylon, the greatest ancient civilization in the world is made in old scriptures, to symbolize sin, corruption and decadence. Because of this ridiculous story of Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), many Assyrians of today condemn ancient Babylonians for having committed a sin against God by building a high tower to reach the Heavens.



### **Hanging Gardens Of Babylon — Maarten van Heemskerck [Public Domain]**

The story of Tower of Babel, actually, raises a number of questions. How tall was the tower? Given the technologies of those days, it could not have been taller than the Great Pyramid in Egypt (146.5 m, 481 ft.). Diodorus stated that it was about 400 ft. wide and 400 ft., tall, and the height of the walls was 80 ft. Do you, dear fellow Assyrians who cling to the small god of ancient scriptures, believe that your god was afraid of such a short and tiny edifice? What kind of all-powerful god would be afraid of such an insignificant building? Why wasn't he afraid of the Great Pyramid and its builders? Where is that god now? Why isn't he afraid of the sky scrapers standing tall in all major cities of the world today? The Eiffel Tower, which stands at 300 meters (984 ft.), is not the tallest in the world. Aren't people arrogant now? Are they more humble and down to earth than the Babylonians? What about airplanes that fly above the highest mountains? Aren't they reaching too high in the realm of your god? And what about those who send satellites to orbit the earth and rockets and space crafts to reach the far away planets in the solar system and are penetrating further into "Heavens"? Aren't they sinners, too? Why isn't your god making their projects fail by creating chaos in their plans? Where has your little nomadic god gone? Has he disappeared mysteriously? Moreover, all educated people know that the reason there are so many different languages in the world is not because someone wanted to build a tower!! Actually this story shows how naive and ignorant the people who wrote those stories were.

Prof. Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian and a professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem argues that Biblical stories are just "stories". No wonder

there are so many unexplained contradictory and illogical ideas present in various parts of the Bible. And no matter how much some staunch believers, who really “need” to prove the existence of god and the authenticity of Bible, try to explain away such contradictions, at the end all they have to say is: “These things are mysteries. We cannot explain them”!! Or “This is all part of God’s mysterious ways and we shouldn’t question it.”! All so laughable! And the efforts of those who try to find a “pseudo-scientific” proof of the existence of the characters and the authenticity of the events in the Bible, or try to stretch and interpret those silly stories of thousand years ago with today’s understanding and scientific discoveries to find some sense and meaning in them, are futile.



**Tower Of Babel — Pieter Bruegel the Elder [Public Domain]**

The world hates us, the Assyrians, and Assyrians hate themselves because of the incredible untrue stories written about ancient Assyrians and Babylonians in the old scriptures. It’s surprising that the authors of these ridiculous stories, despite all that they had learned from Assyrians and Babylonians and knew about their advanced civilization, wrote so many falsehoods about them.

Inspired by the scriptures, the name Babylon appears even in literature as a place of wickedness and immorality. Referring to the great Babylon, the centre of knowledge and all human advances in sciences, technology, philosophy, astronomy and even religion, as “The

Whore” in the New Testament (Revelations 17: 1-18) is truly preposterous and disgraceful. “The Whore”? Really? Excuse me, but is this language suitable for a “holy” book?

Besides, why not “Rome, the Whore”? Didn’t the Romans kill thousands of Israelites during the first war in 66 AD? According to Josephus, Romans killed 1.1 million people during the siege in 70 AD, of which a majority were Jewish; and they destroyed the temple to the ground in 70 AD, and today only a wall survives, as “predicted” by Jesus (Matthew 24:3, Luke 21:20) (Actually the so-called “words” of Jesus were recorded **after** the temple had been levelled by the Romans: Luke and Matthew wrote their Gospels in 85 AD). Didn’t the Romans throw hundreds of early Christians in their arenas to be devoured by wild hungry animals? Didn’t the “Christian” Romans burn thousands of innocent people, accused of being “heretics” during the Inquisition period? When did Assyrians or Babylonians ever commit such atrocities? Nevertheless there are no curses against the Romans, as far as I know, and we don’t find versus like: “Rome, the Whore”! What happened to those prophets, the wise men and the bold story tellers after the fall of Jerusalem in the hands of the Romans? Or perhaps there were indeed some writings but the Christian monks did not copy them and the originals were destroyed. Or perhaps the Roman popes and clergy, during their synods decided those writings were not suitable and set them aside together with other “apocrypha”. Which Roman would want to blemish the name of Rome?

It is indeed very astonishing that although Assyrians and Babylonians never destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and never slaughtered thousands of Jewish people, there’s so much malice against them in the writings of Biblical stories. As a result of those outrageous writings, I’ve heard many insulting remarks from non-Assyrian “friends” as well as laughable and illogical beliefs against ancient Assyrians from Assyrians of today. The truth is that ancient Assyrians and Babylonians were not more brutal than other nations in the past and present. The fact that after the fall of Babylon, the Assyrians and Babylonians were never able to re-establish their kingdom is a proof that their enemies had so brutally killed everyone they could lay their hands on and had destroyed anything that was destroyable that few people were left. Some had fled and the remaining Assyrians and Babylonians were ruled and treated like slaves and made to work in the roughest conditions. The fact that today the majority of us Assyrians have been obliged to flee from the countries of our birth, leave our jobs, possessions, and friends points to the cruelty and brutality of these countries and the ruling people in the middle east. And the Western countries who boast of their advanced civilizations murdered millions of their own people during the two World Wars, and even used atomic and chemical bombs and other weapons of mass destruction, whose side effects are still present among the attacked nations. When and where have Assyrian and Babylonian rulers committed such monstrosities? Also the fact that today we Assyrians, who have sought refuge in the Western countries to save our lives and our identity, are under pressure through psychological methods to assimilate and forget our true identity and our precious language, is another proof of how some Western people hate foreigners and immigrants and are prejudiced and xenophobes.

Unfortunately, even today many people think of the Bible as a book of ancient history and believe every word; and most ordinary people consider the Old Testament the word of God and cannot doubt its authenticity and condemn Assyrians and Babylonians and consider them barbarians and pagans. They don’t realize it’s a book of philosophy and spirituality. Actually, this type of misunderstanding about the scriptures can be dangerous for believers, because when a believer finds out that the actual historical events did not happen as described in the Bible, they become disillusioned and lose their faith altogether. Although the writers of the Biblical stories

referred to certain historical characters, but what they wrote about them is not the exact truth. No Babylonian king became a cow, for instance! These authors have tried to elaborate on a spiritual lesson. And even their lessons are rather outdated and ridiculous with today's standards. Their aim, in short, was not to write a concise history book. Therefore the Bible must not be taken literally and used as a historical reference.

Fortunately, we have brains and cognitive abilities. We can research and read; understand and analyse; judge and arrive at our own conclusions. We don't have to base our truths, as did our grandparents, on scriptures that spread only lies and hatred towards Assyrians to feel hopeless, cursed and ashamed. We don't have to listen to lies and blindly believe them because an old bearded man tells us to

**\* This article was compiled from two sources:**

- 1) "Written in stone: the world's first trigonometry revealed in an ancient Babylonian tablet"  
Published: August 24, 2017 3.15pm EDT in **The Conversation**

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- 2) "The Mathematics of Ancient Babylon"

**BBC video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ddf5e-2SfM>

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# Akitu - a Millennium-old Festival in Mesopotamia \*

Compiled By: Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan

The Akitu Festival of Mesopotamia dates back to 4th millennium BC. It traces the tens of thousands of years of history of Mesopotamia, the development of domination and the struggle for liberation. Akitu lasts from 21 March to 1 April and is celebrated by the Assyrian population today.



The Akitu Festival has an ancient history. Akitu goes back well into the Sumerian period, if not back to the Neolithic period and marks the date for the cereal sowing. The first indications of Akitu go back 6,700 years. However, festive traditions around the beginning of spring and sowing are particularly important in the context of the Neolithic revolution and the beginning of organized agriculture, so it can be assumed that Akitu is still far older and was influenced by the goddess cult in the early times. The history of Akitu even traces the development of state civilization and patriarchy.

The word Akitu itself is Sumerian and means nothing else than **celebration**. It lasted twelve days and concluded 5,000 years ago in Uruk with the "holy wedding" between the ruler of the city and the goddess Inanna.

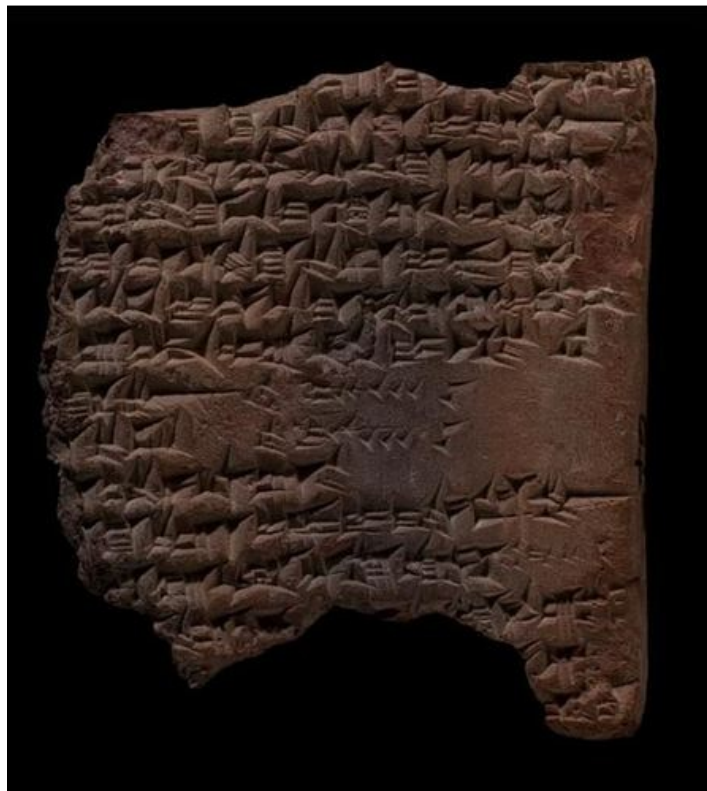
In Gilgamesh epic, the patriarchal man Gilgamesh breaks this tradition and denies the Sumerian city goddess Inanna the wedding, so he brings down great misfortune on Uruk. Traditionally, Akitu is also closely linked to the creation story. As part of the enforcement of patriarchal social structures and state civilization, the mother goddess Tiamat became a dragon in the Mid-Babylonian era, who was killed by her own son or grandson Marduk and from whose bodies the world was created. This fight was repeated during the festival, which was called Rêš-šattim at Babylonian time, again and again.



The Akitu Festival in ancient Mesopotamia was a celebration of new beginning. The Akitu was a spring festival and New Year's celebration held on the first day of first month of the year that is in March/April.

The New Year celebration is one of the oldest and most universal festivals in human history. Different cultures and religions have marked the beginning of a new year at different times, usually based on astronomical or agricultural events. The earliest recorded New Year celebration is Akitu, which dates back to the third millennium BCE. However, the details of the festival are mostly known from cuneiform tablets dating to the first millennium BCE.

Although the Akitu festival was observed in different cities, sometimes under different names, throughout Mesopotamia's history, the best documented celebration comes from Babylon and so the Babylonian rites are presented below. Preparation for the festival most likely involved a ritual purification of the city, as was done elsewhere, though this is unclear. It is documented, however, that prior to the first day, the statues of gods from other cities were mounted on boats, carts, carriages, or sledges and began their journey toward Babylon to participate in the celebration.



**Fragment of a Tablet Describing the Akitu Festival  
The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA)**

Akitu was a time to celebrate the sowing of barley, the rebirth of nature, and the renewal of life. It was also a time to honour the supreme god Marduk, his son Nabu, and other gods who protected Babylon and its king. In the Babylonian calendar, this month was known as Nisannu (and in the modern Jewish calendar is still called Nisan). This was the first month of the Babylonian calendar, corresponding to the spring equinox.

The Akitu festival lasted for 12 days, from the first to the twelfth day of Nisannu. Each day had its own rituals and ceremonies, which involved the king, the priests, and the people of Babylon. The festival was celebrated in a special temple outside the city walls, called Bait Akitu, or “the house of Akitu”.

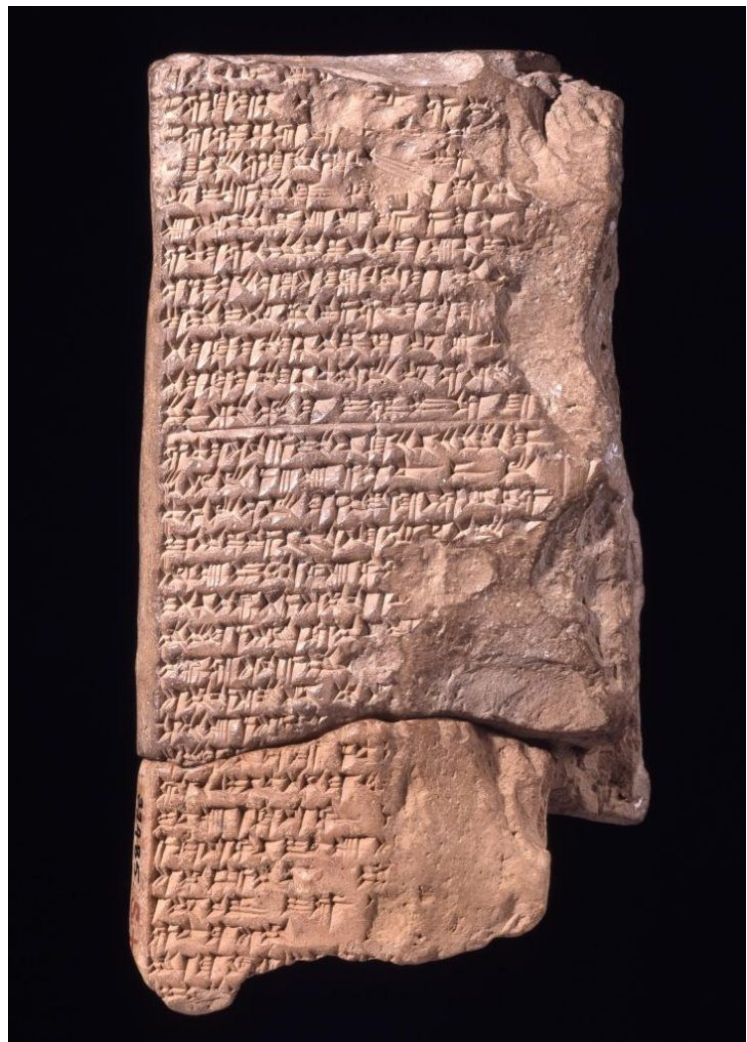
Originally, Marduk was the god of Babylon, but in the eighteenth-century BCE, when this city became the capital of Babylonia, he became the supreme god of the Mesopotamian pantheon. As such, he was recognized by the gods of the cities that were subjected by the Babylonian kings.

The festival was divided into two parts: the first part took place in the city of Babylon, where the king and the priests performed sacrifices and prayers at the Esagila temple, the house of Marduk. The second part took place outside the city walls, at a special temple called Akitu House, where the king and the people participated in a cultic drama that re-enacted the creation myth of Enuma Elish, which described how Marduk defeated the forces of chaos and created the universe.

The first three days of the festival were dedicated to prayers and offerings to Marduk and other gods. The priests would recite sad laments that expressed humanity’s fear of the unknown and begged Marduk for forgiveness and protection. The king would also participate in these rituals, bathing in the Euphrates River and entering the Esagila temple, where Marduk’s statue was housed.

**Fragment of a clay tablet,  
Prayers of Amil-urgal,  
New Year ritual at Babylon,  
72 lines of inscription,  
Neo-Babylonian.**

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## The Twelve Days of Akitu

**Day One:** Marduk's temple complex at Babylon and Nabu's at Borsippa were ornamented and prepared for the celebration.

**Day Two:** The high priest of Marduk at Babylon dedicated himself to the god through an act of renewal, thanked the god for his gifts, and prayed for his ongoing protection of the city.

**Day Three:** The high priest of Marduk officiated at a ceremony where two human figures, most likely male and female, were made from wood and represented devotees of Nabu.

**Day Four:** Prayers were offered to Marduk in Babylon as the king left for Borsippa to accompany the statue of Nabu on its river journey to the city. The high priest made offerings to Marduk and his consort Sarpanitum (also given as Zarpanitum and Sarpanit, among other variations), asking for their blessings, and, in the evening, would recite the *Enuma Elish*. The fourth day was a day of joy and celebration. The high priest of the Esagila used to open the festival, saying that the New Year had begun. The king would lead a procession of gods' statues from Esagila to Bait Akitu, accompanied by music and dancing. The people would cheer and praise their king as he passed by, showing their loyalty and devotion. The king would then perform a ritual called "taking the hand of Bel", in which he would grasp Marduk's hand and receive his blessing and authority for another year.



The Processional Way, Babylon, Iraq

**Day Five:** The high priest would confer with Marduk and Sarpanitum in the temple while the lesser priests cleansed the shrine of Nabu and the central temple complex. Once rituals were complete, the shrine was covered in a canopy of gold, and the people waited in prayer for the return of the king with Nabu's statue and entourage. After the king arrived, the high priest stripped him of his royal robes and insignia and forced him to kneel before the statue of Marduk. The king confessed whatever sins he had committed but swore that he had not abused his authority or forsaken his duties. The priest then slapped the king hard enough to bring tears to his eyes, symbolizing the sincerity of the confession, and the monarch's clothing and insignia were returned to him. Prayers of thanks were then offered to Marduk's and Nabu's planet (Mercury), and Nabu's statue was placed in its shrine. The fifth day was also a day of rest and preparation for the next day's events. The priests would adorn two wooden figures with gold and jewels, representing Marduk's enemies Tiamat and Kingu, who had tried to destroy the world in the ancient myth of Enuma Elish (the Babylonian creation myth). These figures would be used in a symbolic battle on the sixth day. One of the most interesting aspects of the Akitu festival was the ritual of the humiliation of the king, when he had to strip off his royal garments and enter the Esagila temple barefoot. He also had to endure a slap in the face from a high priest, who also pulled his ears to make sure he was listening. The king had to cry out loud to show his repentance and submission to Marduk. Only then he was allowed to put on his clothes again and receive a royal sceptre from Marduk as a sign of his restored kingship.



**The Akitu Festival and the Humbling of the King**

**Day Six:** The sixth day was the climax of the festival. The statues of the gods from other cities arrived and were positioned at intervals between Nabu's shrine and Marduk's temple. The two wooden figures that had been made on Day Three were then offered to Nabu, their heads cut off, and were ritually burned. Bertman suggests this may have been symbolic of earlier human sacrifice, but the significance of the act and the figures is unclear. This ritual may have symbolized Marduk's victory over chaos and his renewal of order in the cosmos because the priests would recite *Enuma Elish*, the epic story of how Marduk defeated Tiamat and Kingu and created the heavens and the earth. As they narrated the story, they would act out the battle with the wooden figures, smashing them to pieces and throwing them into a bonfire.



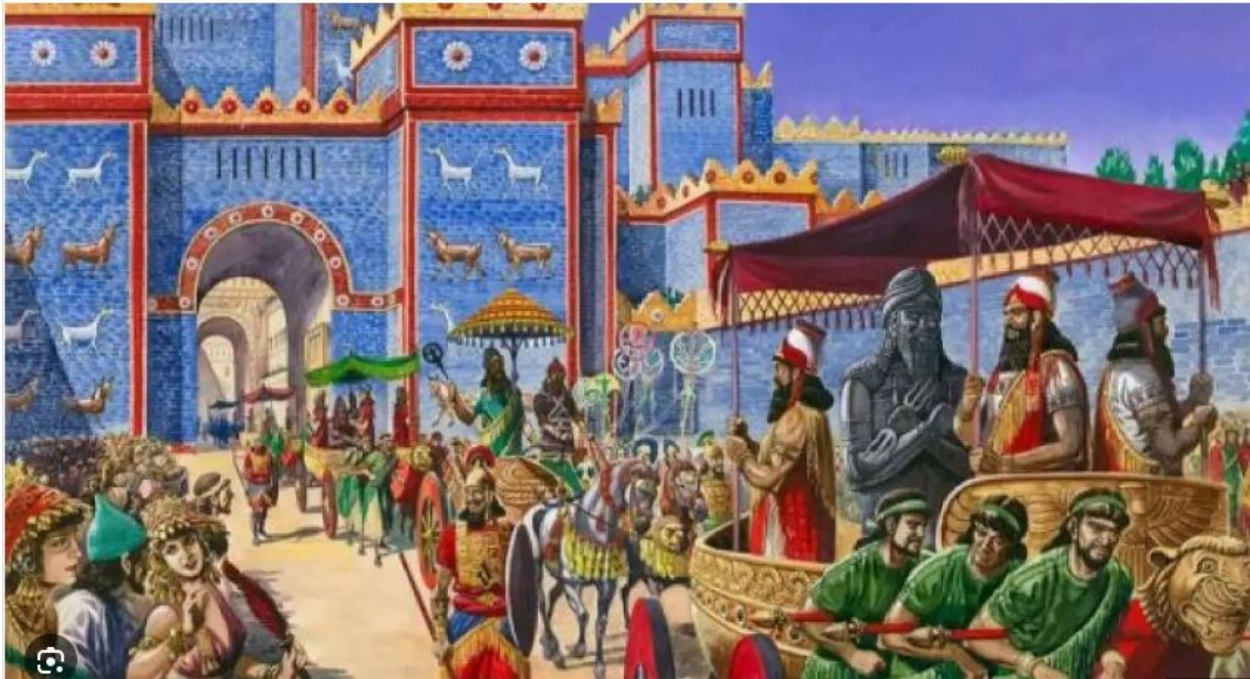
**Days Seven and Eight:** The ceremonies of these two days seem to blend. The seventh day was a day of thanksgiving and celebration. The statues were cleaned and received new dresses. The king would offer sacrifices to Marduk and other gods, thanking them for their favours and gifts. The people would also join in the festivities, feasting and drinking wine. Then the king "took the hand" of Marduk, renewing his dedication to serving the god, and ritually led him from his temple into the streets of the city. People followed the statue as the procession – which included the statues of the visiting gods – made its way to the Shrine of Destinies near Nabu's shrine. The priests called on Nabu to give his prophecy regarding the king and the coming year, and, once received, this was recorded. The statues of Marduk, Nabu, and the visiting deities were positioned around the king to honor him, and the "sacred marriage" ritual was enacted to ensure the fertility of the land in the New Year. This rite may have involved the king engaging in sexual intercourse with a priestess of Inanna/Ishtar or a ritual simulation of the act, and, afterwards, Marduk's statue was carried out of the city to his shrine, known as bit-Akitu, located in a large park ornamented with flowers.

**Days Nine and Ten:** With Marduk situated in his shrine, Nabu in his, and the visiting deities in their respective places of honor, the great feast of Akitu was held over two days. The state provided entertainment, food, and drink for the banquet attended by all the people of the city as well as visitors. The eighth to eleventh days were also days of rest and relaxation. The king would enjoy his leisure time with his family and courtiers, while Nabu's statue would be entertained by musicians and poets at Bait Akitu. The people would also have fun, playing games and sports. Nabu was the patron god of scribes, literacy, and wisdom. He was also the inventor of writing, a divine scribe, the patron god of the rational arts, and a god of vegetation.



**A gigantic limestone statue of Nabu, god of knowledge and wisdom, found in one of gates of the Nabu temple in Nimrud dated to the 8th century BCE. Characterised by the homogenous style and technique as well as conventional posture of a worshipper showing bent arms and clasped hands, National Museum of Iraq, Baghdad  
Osama Shukir Amin (Copyright)**

**Day Eleven:** Marduk's statue was carried back into Babylon to Nabu's shrine, and the statues of the visiting gods were placed nearby. The prophecy of Nabu recorded on Day Seven was read aloud, and afterwards, closing ceremonies were observed.



**Day Twelve:** The twelfth day was the final day of the festival. The king would lead another procession of gods' statues from Bait Akitu to Esagila, where he would reunite Marduk with Nabu. The priests would recite prayers and hymns to praise Marduk's greatness and power. The festival concluded with ceremonial rites, and Nabu's statue was taken from his shrine and brought back to the ship he had arrived on to return to Borsippa. After Nabu departed, the statues of the visiting deities and their attendant priests and dignitaries returned to their cities. The king would then return to his palace, while Marduk's statue would be placed back in his shrine.

The purpose of this ritual was to remind the king that he was not a god, but a mortal human who depended on Marduk's grace and protection. It was also a way to test his humility and loyalty to Marduk, who was considered the true king of Babylon. By enduring this humiliation, the king ensured that Marduk would bless him and his people with prosperity and peace for another year.

The Akitu was not only a religious festival, but also a social and political event. It was a time for people to express their joy and gratitude for Marduk's benevolence, as well as their loyalty and obedience to their king. It was also a time for people to enjoy music, dancing, feasting, and games. The Akitu feast was a celebration of life in all its aspects.

The Akitu festival was also adopted in the Neo-Assyrian Empire following the destruction of Babylon. King Sennacherib in 683 BCE built an "Akitu house" outside the walls of Assur. Another Akitu house was built outside Nineveh. The Akitu festival was continued throughout the Seleucid Empire and into the Roman Empire period. At the beginning of the third century, it was still celebrated in Emessa, Syria, in honor of the god Elagabal. The Roman emperor Elagabalus (r. 218-222 CE), who was of Syrian origin, even introduced the festival in Italy.

## **The Hymns Chanted During the Babylonian New Year Festival** **(By Lishtar)**

*"Through your mercies, Lord, may the months  
be for us the source of joys, the years, of delight;  
let them bequeath to us in peace, O Lord:  
Nisan has its flowers, Iyyar its lilies too,  
Haziran its sheaves, Tammuz its heaps of grain;  
let Ab and Illul bring along grape-clusters on poles,  
let the two Teshris give response to each other in the grape-pressing;  
let the two Kanuns bring rest, Shebat and Adar, the Fast.  
To you, Lord, be the praise."*

In Mesopotamia, the New Year's Festival appears as the confluence of every current of religious thought to express every shade of religious feeling. Basically, it served:

- 1) to establish harmony with nature which was indispensable to a fruitful social life;
- 2) to reaffirm the bond between the community and the gods, the community here being represented by the king in temple ritual, for the king was the one responsible for the continual tending of earthly harmony and accountable to the gods. The community participation is visibly marked in the mourning for the disappeared king in the first days, in the joys of the procession and probably at the private level in the Sacred Rite enacted in the holies of holies of everyone's homes, at the same time that the king joined with the high priestess in the Inner Sanctum of the ziggurat, and
- 3) to enact ritually the periodical changes of fortune humanity was subjected to and seek active participation in changing the fates by listening to the gods' designs and yet searching for mystical ways to attune and even interfere with destiny by acting upon omens and auguries.

Although the main actors in the festivities were the gods, the king's participation in the celebrations and the community were essential. Indeed, in Babylon, certain rites would not be performed unless the king was present in person. He was the representative of the community in a concourse of forces which sprang from beyond the range of human will or understanding. Remember that the king in Mesopotamia was a trained initiate, not perfect but a model of wholeness the subjects should emulate. Community participation was implicit, as this was Babylon's main festival.

The New Year's Festival could be held in the autumn as well as in the spring. We translate Sumerian zagmuk, which means "beginning of the year", and the Akkadian akitu, which has uncertain meaning, but basically means New Year's Festival because these feasts are essentially what the modern term indicates - festive celebrations of a new beginning in the annual cycle. However, in the Near East, Nature offers two starting points within the solar year, the one at the end of winter and the other at the end of the even more deadly summer. In Mesopotamia, the rains were important; in Babylon, the Akitu festival was celebrated in Spring, at the first New Moon after the Spring Equinox, in the month of Nisan, whereas in Ur and Uruk the festival took place in the fall as well as in the Spring, in the months of Tishri (or Teshris in the poem above) and Nisan.



The inner logic of these celebrations comes from ancient myths, i.e. the Myth of Creation, or the Enuma Elish, the Descent of Inanna/Ishtar and the Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi in the highlights of the festival celebrations, or the Sacred Marriage Rite. The Descent of Inanna/Ishtar is hardly mentioned by most scholars, but it is there in full symbolism, in the king's descent, the high priestess' and the city's wailing for the vanished/captive king. The beauty of the Courtship and the Sacred Rite is not overlooked, but it is seldom ignored that it was the most hallowed of all rites, the culmination of events that led to the following day Second Determination of Destiny. May I kindly remind you that in the Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi, the Consecration of the King happens only after the Sacred Rite. Thus, the sequence of festival events is reconstructed below. I will also include personal notes on the unfolding events, and, whenever appropriate, will establish the links with myths and the feminine presence during the rites, a fact that is overlooked by scholarship, but whose symbols are there, explicit or implicit. It is remarkable that Frankfort, the main source for this article, and Kramer in his introduction to Frankfort's work, did not overlook the goddess' presence, as it is the case of all first-rate scholarship that takes Mesopotamia in context. Here is the sequence of festival days:

### **1) Nisan 1-4: Preparations and Purifications**

During the first five days, the rites within Esagila (Marduk's temple in Babylon) reflected a somber mood, where priests and priestesses attuned to desolation, utter bereavement and grief for the uncertainties of the coming future. It is known that the people of the city also gave expression to misery and anxiety by ritual wailings, which, nevertheless, seem not to have been part of any temple service, though many temple hymns reflect this mood.

Each morning, before sunrise, the high priest, after a ritual washing, entered the temple alone and prayed to Marduk and to other gods. Afterward the other priests commenced their daily tasks. Typical of the mood of those days is the Kyrie Eleison sung before dawn on the second day and called The Secret of Esagila:

*Lord without peer in thy wrath,  
Lord, gracious king, lord of the lands,  
Who made salvation for the great gods,  
Lord, who throwest down the strong by his glance,  
Lord of kings, light of men, who dost apportion destinies,  
O Lord, Babylon is thy seat, Borsippa thy crown  
The wide heavens are they body....  
Within thine arms thou takest the strong....  
Within thy glance thou grantest them grace,  
Makest them see light so that they proclaim thy power.  
Lord of the lands, light of the Igigi, who pronouncest blessings;  
Who would not proclaim thy, yea, thy power?  
Would not speak of thy majesty, praise thy dominion?  
Lord of the lands, who livest in Eudul, who takest the fallen by the hand;  
Have pity upon thy city, Babylon  
Turn thy face towards Esagila, thy temple  
Give freedom to them that dwell in Babylon, thy wards!*

On the evening of the fourth day, the Enuma Elish, or the Epic of Creation, was recited in its entirety, for each New Year shared something with the beginning of times, when the world was created and the cycle of seasons started. A recital of that triumphant achievement increased the power of all favorable forces to overcome the hazards which had led to the incarceration of the god of natural life. In later stages of the festival, Marduk's battle with Chaos was actually represented in the ritual, but on the evening of the fourth day the recital of the Epic was only an interlude in the general preparations for the atonement.

**2) Nisan 5: Day of Atonement for the king - the people descends to the suffering god.**  
Increasing commotion of the city during the search for Marduk

In the fifth day, the king is the main participant in the ritual. In the morning, the high priest again offered prayers of appeasement, this time to Marduk as manifest in the heavenly bodies:

*The white star (Jupiter) which brings omens to the world is my lord,  
My lord be at peace!  
The star Gud (Mercury) which causes rain is my lord;  
My lord be at peace!  
The star Gena (Saturn), star of law and order, is my lord;  
My lord be at peace!*

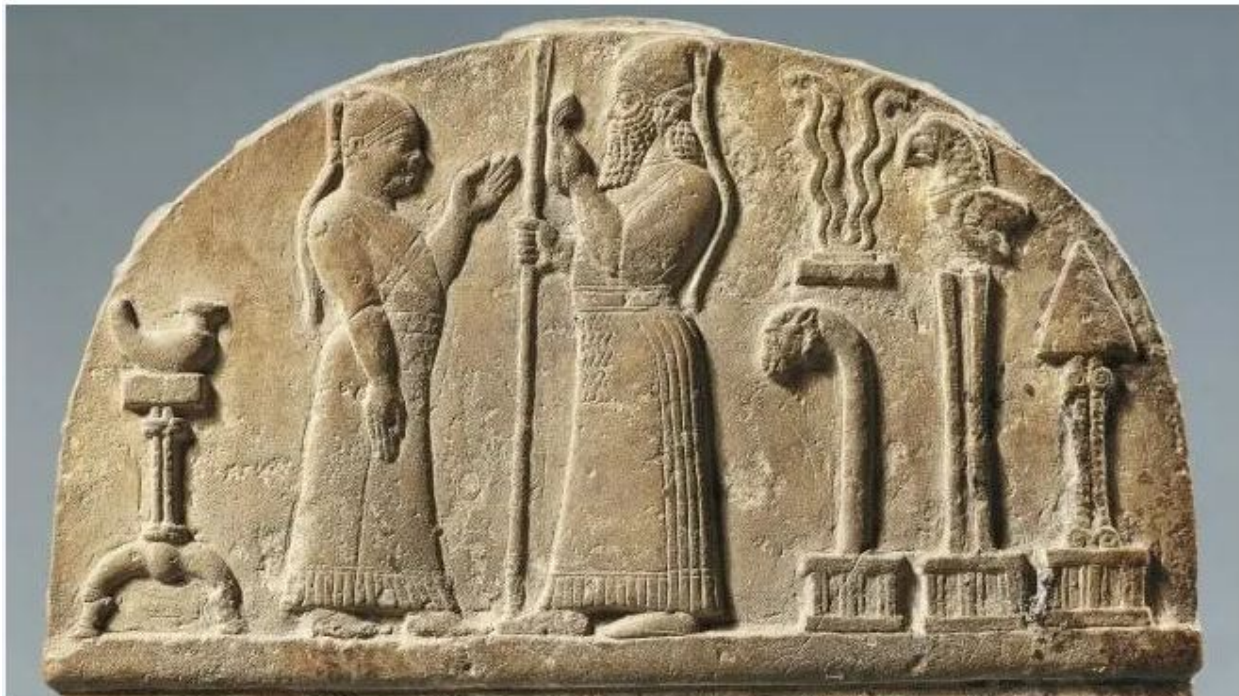
Then the temple was purified. Offerings and incantations continued. Craftspeople equipped the chapel of Nabu (Marduk's son who was to arrive on the morrow) with an offering-table and a gold canopy from the treasury of his father. While these preparations were going on, the king entered Marduk's shrine. He was escorted into the chapel by priests, who left him alone. The high priest emerged from the Holy of Holies where the statue of Marduk stood. He took the king's scepter, ring, scimitar and crown and put them upon a "seat" before the statue of the god. Again, he approached the ruler, who was standing deprived of signs of royalty, and struck his face; then, the high priest made him kneel down to pronounce a declaration of innocence:

*I have not sinned, O Lord of the Lands,  
I have not been negligent regarding thy divinity,  
I have not destroyed Babylon...  
The High Priest replied in Marduk's name:  
Do not fear... what Marduk has spoken...  
He will hear thy prayer. He will increase thy dominion  
Heighten thy royalty...*

The High Priest then took up the insignia and gave them back to the king, striking his face once more in the hope of drawing tears - which were counted a favorable omen and proof of the god's will. (*Lishtar's Note 1: tears mean emotion, i.e. the king had to display true emotion and humility of the heart during the proceedings. Not difficult to happen if he really became the part*)

It is clear that by his penance and confession, the king cleansed himself of the taint of past sins, thus cleansing also the community, becoming fit to officiate in the succeeding rites. It

is also clear that his renewed investiture with the insignia of royalty signified a renewal of kingship and the bond with the gods and the community he embodied. At the coronation, too, the insignia had been placed upon seats in front of the god. I would like to point out that the seat is also a sign for the Earth Mother or Ki, as well as a symbol of Anu, the Skyfather, or in the words of the myths "the horned crown upon a shrine". The meaning is thus very clear. It tells of the link the king has with Anu and Ki as the ruler of the land and shows the bond between the heavenly and earthly powers the king should protect and ensure through wise leadership in all levels and spheres.



Likewise, the humiliation ritual of the king brought him into harmony with the conditions under which the great ceremony of renewal started. Though communication with Marduk was still possible in the Esagila, in the outer world the god had "disappeared", as does Inanna during Her annual descent to the Underworld.

In the city, people were disturbed. The king, the shepherd of the land, had been robbed of his splendor, of the protection of the royal insignia and reduced to a minimum of power which corresponded to the low ebb in the life of nature, to the "captivity" of the god and also to the state of chaos preceding creation. Five days of sacrifice, atonement and purification culminated in the king's degradation and reinstatement.

While the measured rites occupied priests and priestesses at the great temple of Marduk, city dwellers entered a different state of mind. We learn about these popular activities from commentaries, explaining the ritual acts of the people in terms of mythology, for the benefit of a priestly school.

The commentary says that "Marduk was confined in the mountain", and it is a Mesopotamian formula for the death of a god, characterizing the point from which the festival took its start. Death here means the suffering of the god, and here we have a clear allusion to the Descents of Inanna/Ishtar, who descended, were wounded, died and were reborn. Similarly, it is

said of Marduk at the New Year's festival that "Into the house of bondage, from the sun and light, they caused him to descend".

And more: "people hasten in the streets, they seek Marduk saying, ' Where is he held captive?'" We assume then that much of the commotion centered around the temple tower, the ziggurat, the man-made mountain that links the Underworld to the Realms Above.

Now, thanks to the Dumuzi/Tammuz hymns, we recognize the goddess who in her sorrow seeks the god and, when she has found him, stays at his side. Her acts clearly represent, on the mythological level, the acts and feelings of the people! Indeed, there is a line in a commentary that says "the dazed goddess who from the city goes, wailing"...

There is an obscure text called Marduk's Ordeal, which tells of the abduction of Marduk by the enemy and who wails for him is not Sarpanitum, Marduk's wife, but Ishtar. This is another arcane reference of the relationship of Marduk and Ishtar.

Finally, community participation may also have involved the representation of fights, because commentaries state that "after Marduk went into the mountain, the city fell into a tumult because of him, and they made fighting within it". We do not know whether the fights took place in the night of the fifth of Nissan or whether they accompanied Nabu's triumphal entry into Babylon and his battle with the enemies of Marduk on the sixth or seventh days. The preparatory rites were completed; the scene was set for the arrival of the avenging son, Nabu, who would defeat the powers of death.

3) Nisan 6: The gods arrive by barge at Babylon, among them Nabu, the son and avenger, who takes up residence in Ezida, his chapel in the temple of Marduk;

Nabu, the god of the scribes, goes first to Borsippa to arrive in Babylon on the same day. Meanwhile barges carrying statues of the gods from Nippur, Uruk, Cutha and Kish converge to Babylon. The commentary is quite explicit: "That is he who comes to seek after the welfare of this father who is held captive". Possibly there was a great procession from the quays to the temple led by the king, who is mentioned as being present and pouring out a libation before the gods. In Assur, the role of the king was more impressive than it was in Babylon. There the protagonist of the gods was not Nabu but Ninurta, and the king himself represented the Divine Hero, standing in the royal chariot in the procession or being carried out of the Assur temple with a golden tiara as "Ninurta, who has avenged his father". We can assume that Nabu's/Ninurta's arrival brought back renewal and was celebrated accordingly by the people

4) Nisan 7: Nabu, assisted by other gods, liberates Marduk by force from the mountain of the Netherworld;

We do not have accounts of the actual Marduk's liberation from captivity by Nabu. We do know however that Nabu led the army of visiting gods to accomplish this task. The commentary that refers to events is the following: "The door with aperture as they call it, that means that the gods confined him; he entered into the house and before him one locked the door. They bore holes into the door and there they waged battle".

Iconography shows that on cylinder seals of the middle and third millennium the liberation of the god is from a mountain. The liberator god is Ninurta, a god with a bow, and a goddess is his attendance. Again, a reference to the presence of the Divine Feminine, and I would risk an educated guess that the goddess in the seal is Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld and Stern Judge of Souls, who is by then appeased and ready to set Marduk free. Iconography also shows the goddess kneeling with the captive god, while another god destroys the vegetation above the ground. This is a clear reference to Inanna/Ishtar and the Underworld events, or the Mysteries that took place in the Underworld, which were known, but not explicitly

mentioned, especially to the non initiates. These seals prove the antiquity, if not of the usages, then of the myths which are reflected in the ritual, but are not included in the Epic of Creation. These are not my words, but Frankfort's, a mystical insight based on his flawless scholar's view of events.

5) Nisan 8: First determination of Destiny. The gods assemble and bestow their combined powers on Marduk who thus obtains "a destiny beyond compare";

After Marduk's liberation, the statues of the gods were brought together in the Chamber of Destinies "to determine destiny". This was on the 8th day, and another determination of destiny followed on the 11th day. The two gatherings differed in significance, but both took place in a temple called Ubshu-ukkina, a name designating the place of assembly of the gods in the Epic of Creation and elsewhere. There, the gods proceed to the first Determination of Destiny, when Marduk is chosen king of all gods, according to the Enuma Elish. A text from Uruk describes how the statues of the gods were arranged in order of precedence for the assembly. The king acted as master of ceremonies. Carrying a shining wand or staff, he summoned each god in succession to leave his chapel and, taking his hand, guided the deity to the appropriate position in the great hall where the gods faced the leader. The corresponding scene in the Epic gives the meaning of this ceremony:

*"They made a princely dais for him.  
And he sat down, facing his fathers, as a councilor.  
Thou art of consequence among the elder gods,  
"Thy rank is unsurpassed and thy command is Anu's.  
Marduk, thou art of consequence among the elder gods,  
Thy rank is unequalled and thy command is Anu*

With these words, the gods put all the power of which they dispose in the hands of Marduk. Marduk's destiny is now declared to be unequalled, for he actually commands the consolidated power of all the gods. It is in the Epic that this power is given so that Marduk can command all threats of annihilation to existence, and this is also the meaning of the ceremony of First Determination of Destiny. All gods' powers are conferred to the liberated god, who then is ready to lead the battle against all powers of darkness, death and chaos that could affect Babylon in the coming year.

We know that a hush of reverence dominated the city while the gods assembled, in order that evil influences could be avoided. In connection with the New Year's festival of later times, there is an entry for the eighth of Nisan in a calendar of lucky and unlucky days that says "Show no enmity at all". Thus, there was a sort of Pax Babylonium, tacit agreement to be followed and pursued at least in attunement to the days.

6) Nisan 9: Triumphal procession to the Bit Akitu under the king's guidance. This represents the participation of the community in the victory which is taking place in Nature and renews Marduk's destruction of Chaos.

When the late Assyrian kings recorded their annual visits to Babylon, they gave as the purpose of their coming participation in the ceremony which we are now to describe. Sargon II, for example, wrote: " Into Babylon, the city of the lord of the gods, joyfully I entered, in gladness of heart and with a radiant countenance. I grasped the hand(s) of the great lord Marduk, and made pilgrimage to the House of New Year's feast, the Bit Akitu. The gods, too, came to

Babylon " to take the hands of Bel" - to lead him in the procession to Bit Akitu. The king was privileged to give the sign for departure, "Come, go forth, Lord, the king awaits thee!... By the side of Ishtar of Babylon, while her servants play the flute, Goes all Babylon exultant!".

The procession was considered so important that every detail of its start and completion was watched carefully and possessed the significance on an omen for the year which was beginning. It seems, therefore, that the procession itself, and not a mock battle, represented Marduk's victory in the cult. This view is supported by a commentary which enumerates various acts that are evident parallel to phases of the victory as related in the Epic.

Basically, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Marduk's victory over chaos was celebrated, or realized once more during the New Year's festival. The Bit Akitu was the place where the Creator's victory over Tiamat was celebrated, and the bronze figures on the door of Sennacherib appear relevant, as well as an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar in which he calls the "the temple of the sacrifices of the exalted New Year's festival of Enlil of the gods of Upper and Netherworld". Secondly, this was most probably a time for peace in the region, once high dignitaries and the gods came to Babylon for celebrations, a peace that should at least be a concerted effort to be maintained in the coming year. The gods' assembly of the Enuma Elish was re-enacted to show union and stability in the region as well.

7) Nisan 10: Marduk celebrates his victory with the gods of the Upper and Underworld at a banquet in the Bit Akitu and returns to Babylon for the Sacred Marriage Rite in the same night;

If the victory over Tiamat was achieved on the ninth of Nisan (on the eighth the gods met in the Chamber of Destinies), the great banquet may have fallen on the tenth. This is also suggested in the stela of Naboridus: " In the month of Nisan, on the tenth day, when the king of the gods, Marduk, and the gods of the Upper and Netherworld take up their abode in the House of Prayer (Bit Akribi), the House of the New Year's Festival (Bit Akitu) of the Lord of Justice".

In Babylon, the Bit Akitu was always located outside the city. It was build about two hundred meters outside the city walls, and its outstanding characteristic was the richness of the gardens which surrounded it. The courtyard was filled with regularly spaced trees and shrubs. On either side there were porticoes, an unusual feature in Mesopotamian temples. The enormous "cella", 25x100 feet, extends over the whole width at the back and may well have served as a banqueting hall. All around the building were elaborate gardens, carefully watered. They remind us of the fact that the god was not merely a conqueror of Chaos, but also the personification of the life in nature. It is this aspect of the complex figure of Marduk or Assur that is especially stressed by the Sacred Marriage Rite, or the following phase of celebration. Of Marduk, it is said that "he hastened to the wedding".

Indeed, the renewal of nature in Spring, at the New Year's festival, was conceived as the marriage of the Goddess with the liberated god. Their union took place in the temples, and the change in nature and the temple ritual constituted the Divine Union, being the two events inseparable and equivalent. The king was then made the Divine Bridegroom, and the High Priestess as his Divine Consort, the Goddess incarnate. For your delight, below follows a poem called The Joy of Sumer - The Sacred Marriage Rite found in Kramer's and Wolkstein's Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: her hymns and stories from Sumer (1983):

*The people of Sumer assemble in the palace,  
The house which guides the land.  
The king builds a throne for the queen of the palace.  
He sits beside her on the throne.*

*In order to care for the life of all the lands,  
The exact first day of the month is closely examined,  
And on the day of the disappearance of the moon,  
On the day of the sleeping of the moon,  
The Sacred Measures, the Me, are perfectly carried out,  
So that the New Year's Day, the day of rites,  
May be properly determined,  
And a sleeping place be set up for Inanna.  
The people cleanse the rushes with sweet-smelling cedar oil  
They arrange the rushes for the bed.  
They spread a bridal sheet over the bed.  
A bridal sheet to rejoice the heart,  
A bridal sheet to sweeten the loins,  
A bridal sheet for Inanna and Dumuzi.  
The queen bathes her holy loins,  
Inanna bathes for the holy loins of Dumuzi,  
She washes herself with soap,  
She sprinkles sweet-smelling cedar oil on the ground.  
The king goes with lifted head to the holy loins,  
Dumuzi goes with lifted head to the holy loins of Inanna.  
He lies down beside her on the bed.  
Tenderly he caresses her, murmuring words of love:  
"O my holy jewel! O my wondrous Inanna!"  
After he enters the holy vulva, causing the queen to rejoice,  
After he enters the holy vulva, causing Inanna to rejoice,  
Inanna holds him to her and murmurs:  
"O Dumuzi, you are truly my love!"  
The king bids the people to enter the great hall,  
The people bring food offerings and bowls,  
They burn juniper resin, perform laving rites,  
And pile up sweet-smelling incense.  
The king embraces his beloved bride,  
Dumuzi embraces Inanna.  
Inanna, seated on the royal throne, shines like daylight.  
The king, like the sun, shines radiantly by her side.  
He arranges abundance, lushness and plenty before her.  
He assembles the people of Sumer.  
The musicians play for the queen,  
They play the loud instruments which drown out the Southern storm,  
They play the sweet algar-instruments, the ornament of the palace,*

*They play the stringed instrument that brings joy to all people,  
They play songs for Inanna to rejoice the heart.  
The king reaches out his hand for food and drink,  
Dumuzi reaches out his hand for food and drink,  
The palace is festive, the king is joyous  
In the pure clean place they celebrate Inanna in song.  
She is the ornament of the assembly, the joy of Sumer!  
The people spend the day in plenty.  
The king stands before the assembly in great joy.  
He hails Inanna with the praises of the gods and the assembly:  
"Holy Priestess! Created with the heavens and earth,  
Inanna, first daughter of the Moon, Lady of the Evening!  
I sing you praises!"*

It is likely that during the Akitu the Sacred Marriage took place in the Esagila, Marduk's temple in Babylon, and not in the Bit Akitu. We know that Nabu, Ningirsu and Inanna of Isin celebrated their weddings in the temple. The poem above shows full participation of the community in the preparation to the events, before and after the joining of the king with the high priestess. Also, according to our knowledge of Mesopotamian religion, it makes sense to place the Sacred Marriage on the tenth day, because only when harmony and order is restored love and fertility can return to the land in all levels and spheres. Remember that kingship should be acknowledged by the Goddess, from Ninhursag-Ki to Inanna/Ishtar in Mesopotamia.

8) Nisan 11: The Second Determination of Destiny. The gods assemble once more in the Chamber of Destinies to determine the destiny of society in the ensuing year. This was the last act of deities, bringing auguries and omens for the prosperity of the land.

It is extremely meaningful that the Second determination of Destiny is now concerned with the microcosmic scale, and so the gods meet again on the 12th of Nisan in the Chamber of Destinies. Also, remember that in Mesopotamia, by the bond of Heaven and Earth, or Duranki, humankind had been created as a result of the gods' wish to humanity to continue the workings of existence for Them. Thus, humankind's destiny and happiness was possible only if man and women lived out their destinies carrying out the deeds of existence for the gods. Basically, the auguries for the coming year were aimed at attuning to the future and once again reaffirm that the gods' designs were of relevance to humankind who lived to celebrate the gods and Their creation in everyday life.

9) Nisan 12: The visiting gods return to their temples, and life returned to its everyday normalcy, and the business of plowing and sowing and trading for the new crops was taken at hand.

Finally, it is constantly said in the literature that Mesopotamians view life as a burden to be carried by humankind. The picture that emerges when we look at their rituals and meditate on the significance of their values by listening to the words ancient Mesopotamians left inscribed in clay differs from the bleak scenario of more recent times. Think of the cycle of events we have just seen together: there was chaos, there was wailing, but there was also joy, justice and reasons to be happy about, ensured by the right divination procedures, which would aid the king and the



land to choose the best courses of actions and guide the requests of help and assistance to the Powers Above and Below when there was a need.

As for myself, the Akitu festival reaffirmed my personal view of Mesopotamian religion and worldview as faith in life, faith in the world, faith in what will be and become, because most of it will be the fruit of our deeds in the world, and guided by the Light of the Tradition, we will try to make it better... again and again, for as many times as it takes, this lifetime, another time.

## **Bring Back the Akitu (By: Erik Brown)**

Some may say that climbing the ladder of society may be one of the hardest things for a person to achieve. However, remaining humble while you're on top of the mountain may be the most difficult point of that journey.

I'm sure many self-help gurus have their methods for dealing with this. But, the ancient Mesopotamians may have come up with the greatest idea of all to keep their leaders humble. They combined this method with their New Year festival and it was done annually

The king would actually be slapped in the face once a year. The strike would ideally be so hard it would bring tears to the king's eyes. If it didn't, this was considered a bad omen. Being part of the New Year celebration, the year began with the king being humiliated purposefully.

People of ancient times are often thought to be primitive. But, think of the symbolism and meaning in an act such as this. What a novel and simple way to instantly remind someone they're a regular human being. You may be surrounded by gold, wealth, and servants, but you're susceptible to pain and consequences like us all.

It makes you wonder what the world would be like today if we continued this tradition.

The year is 590 BC and the great festival of Akitu is being celebrated across Mesopotamia. The great "King Of Kings" Nebuchadnezzar II, one of the greatest conquerors of the era has arrived at the temple. The festival has reached its fourth day, being celebrated across the land.

The New Year festival recognizes the victory of the Mesopotamian chief god Marduk's defeat of Tiamat, which pulled the world out of chaos and made the existing order. In order to prevent the world from falling back into darkness, this festival would be repeated every new year.

The chief priest comes out of the temple to greet the king. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar willingly gives up his sceptre, crown, and insignia to the priest. As onlookers watch, the king is pulled roughly by his ears in front of a statue of the chief god and made to kneel.

The king is interrogated by the chief priest, asking if he's faithfully fulfilled his duties as Marduk's representative on earth. The priest goes through a list of prepared questions about the king's duties. The king repeats that he has observed these tasks. The list is long and covers many duties to the religion, country, and the common people. At points he asks for forgiveness for any slights or failures.

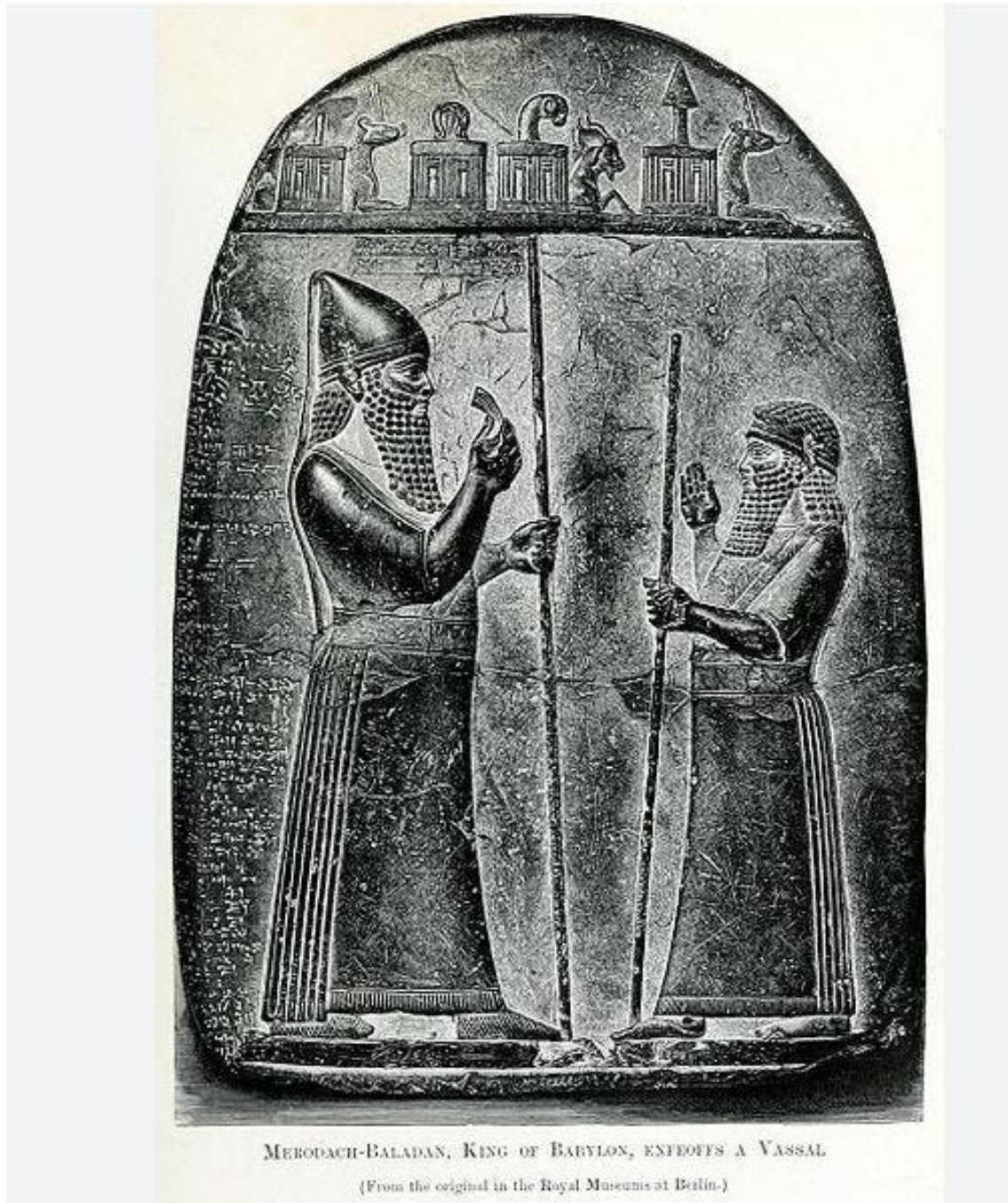
At the end of the interrogation, the priest conducts the last rights of this section of Akitu. This one will hint at the future successes of the king and will show if the chief god is pleased with Nebuchadnezzar. The priest opens his hand and twists his body backwards.

In a quick and stunning blow given to the king's cheek this particular ritual is ended. The king's head jerks to the side. The chief priest observes the king's face with great attention. The blow landed sharply and caused tears to stream down the great king's face.

The chief priest smiles. Marduk is happy. The kingdom will prosper and so will the king. At least for this year, the tidings appear fortunate. Next year the same process will begin again. As

the priest walks out of the temple with the king, he prays in his mind for good fortune for the next Akitu festival.

The chief priest hands the king back his sceptre, insignia, and crown. The festival continues.



**Merodach-Baladan, King Of Babylon – Wikipedia Creative Commons  
Bring in The New Year Slapping the King**

## Humiliation of The King

*“...The humiliation of the king during the New Year ritual served a double purpose: It demonstrated to the king that without his crown, sword and sceptre he was just another ordinary mortal, whose fate depended on the mighty gods and their humble servants. He might have been all-powerful, ruling over the entire world, but the pain of being hit in the face in this manner was meant to make him humble, more aware of his duties and obligations, inspiring him to take care of his promises, or face consequences.”*

— Alexander Zvielli, *Jerusalem Post*

The description in the last segment was a recreation of the Akitu festival that was celebrated throughout Mesopotamia every new year. As the *Jerusalem Post* reports, we know of this celebration from tablets found in temples in Babylon and Assyria, which were written in cuneiform. Many of these are very well preserved and go into depth about the celebration.

The ancient festival is dated back thousands of years. It may be primarily associated with Babylon, but evidence has shown it was also celebrated in many other cities in the region.

The festival coincided with the barley harvest, in a way signaling a new birth or rebirth. The *Enuma Elish*, the ancient creation myth, was celebrated in which the world came to be in its current form. The king was also renewed in this process — having his symbols of power removed, then returned. The monarch was also returned to the state of a commoner in order to humble him, before becoming a king again.

The festival is actually experiencing a rebirth itself in current times. Factions in the Syrian conflict areas are recreating the festival as a method to get in touch with their roots and bring unity to people in the area.

## Imagine Our Own Akitu Festival

This ancient idea seems like a brilliant stroke of genius. As everyone knows, many seem to lose a grip on reality when they achieve a certain amount of success. It's not hard to start believing your own hype and forget your common mortality.

Imagine having our own festival where a President Trump or Obama was brought before the Constitution and slapped. They could be asked repeatedly if they kept the promises within the document and to seek forgiveness.

Stretch that concept out a little further. What about the CEOs of companies being brought before their employees in much the same way? What about the pope and religious leaders? They could be asked if they were a good representative of God on earth.

Then again, what about you? If you were brought before your family and community and asked similar questions, what would your reply be? Are you a good representative of your community and family? Have you done the necessary things to improve your own life and the lives of those around you?

Perhaps the greatest thing we could all receive for the upcoming New Year would be a good slap in the face and a piece of humility. The ancients may not be as primitive as we all

believe them to be. Perhaps an answer to many of our problems is written in cuneiform on ancient tablets. **Bring back the Akitu festival!**

## Legacy

The festival was also adopted in the Neo-Assyrian Empire following the destruction of Babylon. King Sennacherib in 683 BC built an "Akitu house" outside the walls of Assur. Another Akitu house was built outside Nineveh. The Akitu festival was continued throughout the Seleucid Empire and into the Roman Empire period. At the beginning of the 3rd century, it was still celebrated in Emessa, Syria, in honour of the god Elagabal. The Roman emperor Elagabalus (r. 218-222), who was of Syrian origin, even introduced the festival in Italy.

The new moon of Aviv, the month of barley ripening, marks the beginning of the Jewish ecclesiastical year. (Exodus 13:4, 23:15) Since the Babylonian times, this month has mainly been called Nisan. (Nehemiah 2:1, Esther 3:7)

Kha b-Nissan is the name of the spring festival among the Assyrians. The festival is celebrated on April 1, corresponding to the start of the Assyrian calendar.

The Assyrian and Babylonian Akitu festival has played a pivotal role in the development of theories of religious myth and ritual. While the purpose of the festival remains a point of contention among both historians of religion and Assyriologists, it is certain to have played a pivotal role in the regular setting of an agenda, priorities, and in the overall advancement of Western Civilization as being one of the first regularly occurring forums where proposals for social maintenance or change could consistently be made and crucial issues readily addressed.

## Modern Observance: Celebration of Akitu Today

The modern observance of Akitu began in the 1960s during the Assyrian intellectual renaissance. Due to political repression and oppression, however, the celebrations were largely private until the 1990s. It is interchangeably referred to as Akitu and Assyrian New Year, and unlike the historical festival it is only celebrated for one day, the first of April.

Today Akitu is the symbol of the resurrection and the beginning of the New Year. It is brought together with the Christian Easter. It was celebrated in Rojava after a long time again.

The representative of the Syrian Cultural Association of Qamişlo Hena Hine stated that the celebrations are now taking place after a long break. She described the festival as a common cultural heritage of the peoples of the region, which brings people together. "That did not please the dictators and they tried to wipe out this feast," she explained, continuing, "There are many civilizations on this earth. The most beautiful thing is that these civilizations can live together in one place."

The Initiative for Unity and Solidarity among the Nations (SYPG) said the following in their message to Akitu: "We congratulate on the resurrection festival of the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia, the Syrians, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans. Our people, who have experienced a history full of massacres, expulsions and assimilation, have never given up their hope for the resurrection of a life of freedom, justice and humanity."



**Akitu, the colors of Babylon by Paul Batou**



### **Image of the Akitu Festival in ancient Babylon on Crayon**

Assyrians and Chaldeans continue to observe and celebrate Akitu with parades, picnics, and parties both in Iraq and in the diaspora. Those celebrating will wear traditional Assyrian Clothing and poppies and use the greetings *Reesh Shato Brikhto*, *Reesha D'Sheeta Brikhta* or *Akitu Breekha*. Some people will dress up as ancient Assyrian royalty. Due to its modern alignment with April Fool's Day, the festival is often more lighthearted than its historical counterpart.

One tradition, *Deqna d'Nissan* or "The Beard of April", involves Assyrian women gathering plants and flowers and fashioning them into a garland for a home's front door. Newer traditions have also arisen in diaspora communities. The Assyrian community in Yonkers, New York has a tradition of raising the Assyrian flag in front of City Hall on April 1.



Assyrians celebrating Akitu year 6769 Nisanu (April) 1st 2019) in Nohadra (Duhok), Iraq





**The procession of the King and Queen Source: AANF.jpg**



**Modern Assyrians continuing the tradition Source: Ajannc.jpg**





Assyrian festivals costume Source: AANF.jpg



Assyrians in Duhok have a cheerful Akitu celebration



The party is on, the return of Akitu festival on 28/03/2021 | SBS Assyrian



How the festival is celebrated today. Source: AANF.jpg

## Get Inspired: The Akitu Table Display

You can create your own Akitu Table at home this coming spring. Here are a few suggestions and ideas. Below is a mantel piece at the home of a friend who prefers to remain anonymous. She has researched documents and suggests the following ingredients that are authentic and symbolize different aspects of Akitu.



## Items displayed on the Mantel Piece of a Friend

Seven was supposedly a holy number so seven or multiples of seven items should be displayed that had symbolic significance in ancient Assyria. On the Mantel piece there are fourteen items:

- **Vinegar** for purification: Kings purified to have new beginning, a rebirth.
- **Frankincense**: Symbol for purification
- **Myrrh**: Purification
- **Bulgur wheat**
- **Emmer Wheat**
- **Barley**
- **Wheat grass**: Akitu was about the wheat harvest; moreover it adds to the aesthetic of the display and as another form of wheat.
- **Crown**: Royalty: Kings gave up their crown for humility.
- **Gold**: Kings gave up their jewels
- **Eggs**: symbolism of rebirth
- **The purple iris flowers** were present then. Purple; the color of royalty
- **Fleur de Lis** was a symbol that was created from the iris. If you look at how the flower blossoms, it's very similar to fleur de Lis. In fact, this symbol is found on the ends of Assyrian swords and helmets. This symbol has always been associated with the French but it's much older.
- **Lilies** were also present at that time
- **Cypress** trees were present in Mesopotamia at that time.

## Akitu Display by TEE/KOFFEE



Akitu 6772

## How to Set Up an Akitu Table Suggested by TEE/KOFFEE

- **The Holy Bible:** To recognize and honor the religion of modern-day Assyrians and to show continuity as a living culture, start with a Holy Bible or a cross on the table.
- **Tree of Life:** Acquire a young tree in a small pot; add it to your table spread. After the 12 days Akitu Festival, the family may plant the tree together to honor a departed loved one.
- **Fire/Flame:** Lite a fire/candle to symbolize the lengthening of days. The candle shall be kept alight until the wee hours of dawn.
- **Water Bowl and Flowers:** Place frozen flowers in a bowl and let them melt; when the flowers are released from their icy enclosure, it could symbolize the change of the seasons.
- **Nisan's Beard:** Gather herbs and tie them in a red handkerchief into a bundle; call it diqna d-Nisan or Nisan's Beard. Either hang the bundle upside down from the front door or display it on the Akitu table.
- **Fruit:** Display seven types of fruits (such as apples, oranges, pears, figs, grapes, dates, and pomegranates).
- **Nuts:** Display seven types of seeds and nuts (such as pistachios, cashews, walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and chickpeas).
- **Eggs:** Dye 7 eggs red and display them on the table.
- **Wine, Oil, and Honey:** Were served at ancient Assyrian king's palace banquets; these items could be added to the Akitu table display.
- **Multigrain bread:** Represents the ancient agricultural roots. Barley Cookies: Barley was the main crop in ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Baklava:** Originated by ancient Assyrians.



## Akitu Displays by the Assyrian Art Institute

Use the instruction guide! <https://t.co/QHSAO9M6r4> / X



Assyrian New Year, Kha b Nisan... - Assyrian Arts Institute | Facebook



**\* The following Sources were used for this article:**

- **“Akitu Festival: A Celebration of New Beginnings in Ancient Mesopotamia” by Indrajit Roy Choudhury published in “Ancient Middle East” on 01 April 2023**
- **“Ancient Akitu Festival” by Erik Brown published in “Lessons from History”**
- **ANF News**
- **“Akitu: The Babylonian New Year” by Lishtar**

# 4,000-Year-Old Artifacts Reveal Locations Of the 11 Lost Cities of Assyria

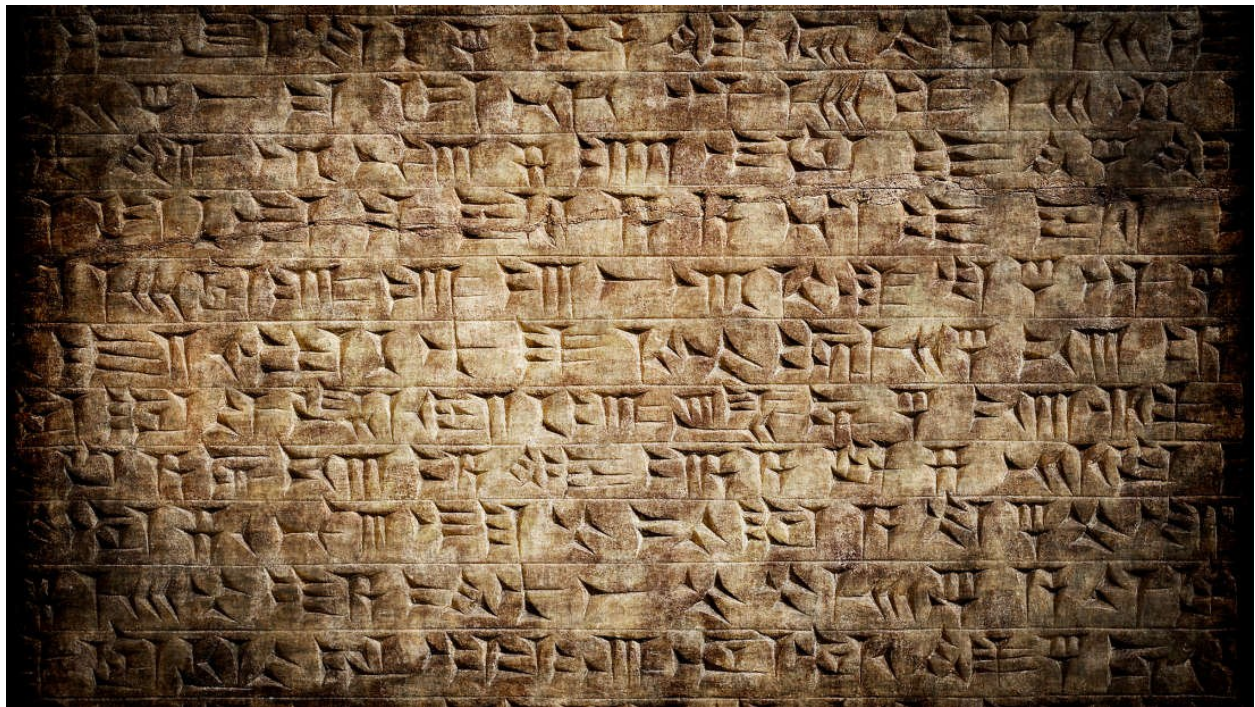
**By: Robin Andrews**

**Compiled By: Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan**

It was reported in 2017, to the delight of many, that a 4,000-year-old Assyrian baked clay tablet was likely a marriage contract. This, however, isn't the only tablet of its kind – there are tens of thousands of others.

Now, as revealed in a new working paper, a careful translation of many of them has revealed something utterly remarkable: The locations of ancient metropolises that have been long lost to the sands of time.

Authored by Harvard University's senior lecturer on Assyriology, Gojko Barjamovic, and an international team of economists, it has the potential to change how the Assyrian Empire is understood.



**THE ASSYRIAN STATE EXISTED AS EARLY AS THE 25TH CENTURY BCE, AND  
PREVAILED IN MANY FORMS UNTIL THE 7TH CENTURY BCE.**

**KAMRIA/SHUTTERSTOCK**

These tablets have all been excavated from the ancient city of Kanesh, located in modern-day Turkey. Written in the cuneiform script developed by the Sumerians of Mesopotamia, they



are a mishmash of business transactions, accounts, seals, contracts, and so on – yes, even marriage certificates.

The tablets sound rather uninteresting to the layperson, but not to those with a trained eye. Business dealings always mention where they are taking place and perhaps where the trade is heading to or being received from. This means that the names and potentially the locations of cities that have yet to be found, those still buried beneath the Turkish soil, could be found within the texts.

After painstakingly going through 12,000 of these clay tablets, the team think that they've identified 26 of them; 15 have been found already, but 11 of them still elude capture.

The precise coordinates of the cities aren't given though, but thanks to a now-defunct method of trading, the team thinks they know where most of them are regardless.



**A bas relief from the palace of Nimrud. Andrea Izzotti/Shutterstock**

Kanesh, once a small trading settlement, became a major trading post for the entire region. The tablets are so detailed that the authors describe the city in their paper as a “flourishing market economy, based on free enterprise and private initiative, profit-seeking and risk-taking merchants, backed by elaborate financial contracts and a well-functioning judicial system.”

It's this comprehensive record of accounts that revealed that Kanesh traded most with cities closer to it and less with those further away. Taking all this data and properly quantifying it, the team managed to essentially create a system of distance based on the frequency of trade between cities.

This system, which they call a “structural gravity model”, gives robust estimates as to where these lost cities might be. They note that for many of them, their approximations “come remarkably close to the qualitative conjectures produced by historians.”

Although they need to be found to confirm the accuracy of their system, this paper provides a remarkable tool for archaeologists. It’s a gateway to a kingdom that, for all intents and purposes, was the world’s first superpower.

**\* This article was compiled from two separate articles by Robin Andrews published in Washington Post on 14 November 2017 and on Facebook around the same time.**

# Enheduanna: The Mesopotamian Princess, Priestess and Poet \*

Compiled by: Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan



**A little-known Mesopotamian poet and priestess, Enheduanna, is the subject of a new exhibition in New York.**

**Diane Cole explores her influence – and looks at how she helped create a common system of beliefs throughout the ancient empire.**

**She was the first author to be named in all recorded history: the Mesopotamian poet, princess, and priestess Enheduanna. Surprised? "When people ask who is the first author, they never guess anyone in Mesopotamia, and it's never a woman," says Sidney Babcock, curator of the recently opened exhibition at New York City's Morgan Library: "She Who Wrote: Enheduanna and Women of Mesopotamia, ca 3400-2000 BC". Usually, he says, they suggest a figure from ancient Greece; if they do mention a female author at all, it's Sappho, who lived a millennium later, and less of whose work survives than that of Enheduanna.**

Enheduanna, lived in the 23rd century BCE in ancient Mesopotamia (approximately 2285 – 2250 BCE). Enheduanna is a remarkable figure: an ancient “triple treat”, she was a princess and a priestess as well as a writer and poet.

The third millennium BCE was a time of upheaval in Mesopotamia. The conquest of Sargon the Great saw the development of the world’s first great empire.. The city of Akkad become one of the largest in the world, and northern and southern Mesopotamia were united for the first time in history.

In this extraordinary historical setting, we find the fascinating character of Enheduanna, Sargon’s daughter. She worked as the high priestess of the moon deity Nanna-Suen at his temple in Ur (in modern-day Southern Iraq). The celestial nature of her occupation is reflected in her name, meaning “Ornament of Heaven”.

Enheduanna composed several works of literature, including two hymns to the Mesopotamian love goddess Inanna (Semitic Ishtar). She wrote the myth of Inanna and Ebih, and a collection of 42 temple hymns. Scribal traditions in the ancient world are often considered an area of male authority, but Enheduanna's works form an important part of Mesopotamia's rich history.



**Ancient Akkadian cylindrical seal depicting Mesopotamian love goddess Inanna  
(Wikipedia Commons)**

Enheduanna's status as a named poet is significant given the anonymity surrounding works of even earlier authors. Yet she is almost entirely unknown in the modern day, and her achievements have been largely overlooked (a notable exception is the work of Jungian analyst Betty De Shong Meador). Her written works are deeply personal in subject, containing numerous biographical features.

Enheduanna's *Cycle of Temple Hymns* concludes with an assertion of the work's originality and its authorship:

***The compiler of the tablets was En-hedu-ana. My king, something has been created that no one has created before.***

While clearly asserting ownership over the creative property of her work, Enheduanna also comments on the difficulties of the creative process — apparently, writer's block was a problem even in ancient Mesopotamia.

In her hymns, Enheduanna comments on the challenge of encapsulating divine wonders through the written word. She describes spending long hours labouring over her compositions by night, for them then to be performed in the day. The fruits of her work are dedicated to the goddess of love.

Enheduanna's poetry has a reflective quality that emphasises the superlative qualities of its divine muse, while also highlighting the artistic skill required for written compositions.

Her written praise of celestial deities has been recognised in the field of modern astronomy. Her descriptions of stellar measurements and movements have been described as possibly early scientific observations. Indeed, a crater on Mercury was named in her honour in 2015.

Enheduanna's works were written in cuneiform, an ancient form of writing using clay tablets but have only survived in the form of much later copies from around 1800 BCE, from the Old Babylonian period and later. The lack of earlier sources has raised doubts for some over Enheduanna's identification as the author of myths and hymns and her status as a religious official of high rank. However, the historical record clearly identifies Enheduanna as the composer of ancient literary works, and this is undoubtedly an important aspect of the traditions surrounding her.

Aside from poetry, other sources for Enheduanna's life have been discovered by archaeologists. These include cylinder seals belonging to her servants, and an alabaster relief inscribed with her dedication. **The Disc of Enheduanna** was discovered by British archaeologist Sir Charles Leonard Woolley and his team of excavators in 1927.



**The Limestone Disc of Enheduanna**, dating to approximately 2300 BC, and excavated by Woolley in 1927 ( Zunkir/Mefman00/Wikimedia Commona, CC BY) A scene of sacrifice is carved on to one side of this calcite disc. She is the second figure from the left; an inscription of Enheduanna appears on the other (Credit: The Penn Museum)

The carved scene depicts Enheduanna accompanied by three simply-dressed attendants carrying ritual objects, all marching solemnly in line outside a stepped, ziggurat-like temple. She is identifiable by her elaborate circular headdress and her tiered, flounced robe. Enheduanna's face is shown in profile, as she raises her eyes to Inanna, goddess of love and war.

## **The Disc of Enheduanna**

This calcite disk is 25 cm across and 7 cm thick, resembling a cheese wheel. Its shape was probably meant to represent the full moon, as it features the high priestess of the moon god, Nanna. It was found in the temple of Nanna's consort, Nin-gal (Great Lady), and dates to around 2300 BCE. The disk was broken in antiquity, but most of the pieces were recovered on excavation and the whole has been restored.

Four figures adorn the front of the disk, all facing left and approaching an altar or ceremonial basin. Behind the basin is a stepped construction that resembles a wedding cake. This is probably meant to represent the ziggurat itself, on top of which would be the all-important temple to the moon god. Only the edge of this stepped object was preserved, the rest has been restored making it perhaps too rounded and wedding-cake-like. The first (left-most) of the approaching figures is a shaven-headed male priest whose outstretched arm holds forth a jug from which he pours libations (liquid offerings) into the basin or onto the altar. Behind him stands a figure a bit taller than the others and resplendent in her flounced robes, long braided hair, and hat. This is the high-priestess Enheduanna herself, overseeing the ceremony with raised hand. Behind her stands another priest, again shaven as was the practice of priests, waving something that Woolley believes is a fly whisk to keep the great lady comfortable. Just behind him is another priest. The only preserved part was his right hand, which is in the same position as the priest with the ‘fly whisk,’ thus that figure has been repeated in the restoration. A small vase is restored in his left hand found on a fragment that does not appear in the original photo.



**Field photograph of U.6612 after gathering pieces together (Left)  
And Photo of Restored Disc U.6612 / B16665 (Right)**

The back of the disk bears an inscription, a dedication from Enheduanna to the moon god. This is what makes the object so important — we can identify the person who dedicated it and her position as high priestess. We can also match her name with other occurrences. Two cylinder seals or seal impressions of her steward and her scribe have been found at Ur, both mentioning her name. We also have her writings, a collection of temple hymns that were passed down continuously, and in an Old Babylonian version we have this note: “the editor of the tablet is Enheduanna; my lord, what has been created no one else has created.” The word ‘editor’ is somewhat loose here; it is unclear whether she only gathered them together in one place, but there is a strong indication that she wrote or rewrote them as well. This statement has often been taken to place her as the first identifiable author in history; someone who composed, compiled, and took credit for her writings.

Her lunar disk dedicated to the deity she served at Ur was later defaced and broken to pieces in antiquity. We are lucky that the chip containing the face of Enheduanna herself flew off intact and was found in excavations. The other faces have all been mutilated and Woolley clearly noted pick marks where the stone had been intentionally split. Why it was defaced is likely due to later political machinations rather than a dislike of Enheduanna herself. It was probably a reaction to Akkadian rule near the dawn of the Neo-Sumerian period.



**Back of restored disk showing inscribed dedication to the moon god and the name of Enheduanna herself.**

It is fortunate that the pieces were recovered through excavations and the scene featuring the writer successfully restored. The scene depicts the priestess at work: along with three male attendants, she observes a libation offering being poured from a jug.

Enheduanna is situated in the centre of the image, with her gaze focused on the religious offering, and her hand raised in a gesture of piety. The image on the Disk emphasises the religious and social status of the priestess, who is wearing a cap and flounced garment.

Sargon of Akkad had taken control of southern Mesopotamia after the long Early Dynastic period and set up his daughter as high priestess at Ur, showing the importance of the city and its deity. Enheduanna's post was vital and she took it seriously indeed. She wrote and gathered together temple hymns in praise of her patron, helping to secure her father's position as King of the Four Quarters and securing her own position as the first identifiable author/editor in the world, 4300 years ago.

Enheduanna was daughter of a king, sister to two more, aunt and great aunt to yet another two. Her long career spanned a period that saw the formation of the first great empire of antiquity. It was a time of radical social change, enormous prosperity, exceptional violence and cruelty, expanded horizons, and artistic, intellectual, and conceptual innovation, presided over by a royal family whose names were to remain legendary in Mesopotamian historical consciousness for two thousand years.

Proud, highly educated, strikingly original in her thought and expression, Enheduanna grew up in the tumultuous formative years of this great human enterprise, known as the Sargonic Empire after her father, its founding ruler, Sargon of Akkad. Enheduanna witnessed her father's and brothers' conquests and their efforts to transform Mesopotamian society. She saw, with anger, her father's conquests challenged by his restive subjects, especially in Sumer, and was to learn of both her brothers' deaths in court conspiracies.

While new styles of sculpture, clothing, adornment were familiar to her, and though her mother tongue was Akkadian, a Semitic language related to Arabic and Hebrew, as a member of the ruling elite she had mastered the idiom of Old Sumerian culture and belonged to a generation that considered Sumerian the standard medium for formal expression and the language of the gods.

King Sargon appointed her high priestess of the moon-god, Nanna-Suen, at his great Sumerian sanctuary at Ur. She maintained her position for 40 years, until her death. Nanna-Suen was one of the eight leading deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon of this period. As high priestess of the god, Enheduanna lived in a special compound within the temple complex. Further, Enheduanna is the only royal woman identifiable by name in third-millennium Mesopotamian art. A badly damaged plaque found at Ur shows her clad in the elaborate garb of a priestess in the course of making an offering to her god. Her face, stance, and physical presence suggest a woman of dignity, presence, confidence, and strength of character, used to authority and presiding over ceremonies, and these traits emerge in her writings as well.

## **Art imitates life**

Enheduanna's poetry contains what are thought to be autobiographical elements, such as description of her struggle against a usurper, Lugalanne. In her composition: "The Exaltation of Inanna", she describes Lugalanne's attempts to force her from her role at the temple. This piece is the most famous of Enheduanna's works in which she praises Inanna, goddess of procreation, fertility, and warfare, and a patron deity of her dynasty. Noteworthy for its difficult language and unusual expressions, it is set in a moment of crisis in Enheduanna's life, when rebellions had broken out against her family's rule, including one at Ur in which Enheduanna herself felt threatened:

Yes, I took up my place in the sanctuary dwelling,  
I was the high priestess,  
I, Enheduanna.  
Though I bore the offering basket,  
though I chanted the hymns,  
A death offering was ready,  
was I no longer living?  
If daylight approached,  
it lit up something vile beside me,  
If shade approached,  
it shrouded me in swirling dust.  
A slobbered hand was laid across my honeyed mouth,  
What was fairest in my nature was turned to dirt.



She prayed to the Moon-god, whom she had served for her entire adult life, but he did nothing to help her:

Am I to die for my sacral song?  
Me?  
My moonlight has no care for me!  
He lets me perish in this place of hopes deceived.  
He, the silver nighttime orb, has spoken no judgment for me.  
If he spoke it, what then?  
If he spoke it not, what then?

Enheduanna's pleas to the moon god were apparently met with silence. She then turned and prayed to Inanna, who is praised for restoring her to office.

My lady!  
This country will bow down again at your battle cry!  
When the trembling human race has found its rightful place before you,  
Midst your awe-inspiring, overwhelming splendor,  
—For of all the cosmic powers you hold those most terrible,  
And at your behest the storage house of tears is opened wide—  
They will have walked the pathway to the house of deepest mourning,  
Defeated, ere the battle had begun.



**Tablet YBC 7169, inscribed with lines 102  
through 153 of a poetic work  
by Enheduanna:  
The Exaltation of Enheduanna.  
Reproduced with the permission of the  
Yale Babylonian Collection.  
Photo by Elizabeth Payne.**

In her time of trial, Enheduanna was horrified to discover that her powers of creativity had forsaken her and she was no longer able to express herself as she knew she could. But, with the goddess's intervention on her behalf, her fortunes were restored and, once again, she felt a poem stirring deep inside her, like a child in her womb. In a deeply private struggle, she gives agonized birth to her poem, then sees her creation as something public, no longer hers alone.

This fills me, this overflows from me,  
Exalted Lady, as I give birth for you!  
What I confided to you in the dark of night,  
a singer shall perform for you in the bright of day!

The poem then changes to the third person, depicting Enheduanna as redeemed:

Inanna's sublime will was for her restoration.  
It was a sweet moment for her,  
she was arrayed in her finest,  
she was beautiful beyond compare,  
She was lovely as a moonbeam streaming down.

The challenge to Enheduanna's authority, and her praise of her divine helper, are echoed in her other work, such as in the myth known as Inanna and Ebih.

In this narrative, the goddess Inanna comes into conflict with a haughty mountain, Ebih. The mountain offends the deity by standing tall and refusing to bow low to her. Inanna seeks help from her father, the deity Anu. He (understandably) advises her against going to war with the fearsome mountain range.

Inanna, in typically bold form, ignores this instruction and annihilates the mountain, before praising the god Enlil for his assistance. The myth contains intriguing parallels with the conflict described in Enheduanna's poetry.

In the figure of Enheduanna, we see a powerful figure of great creativity, whose passionate praise of the goddess of love continues to echo through time, 4000 years after first being carved into a clay tablet.

If you've never heard of her, you're not alone. Enheduanna was unknown to modernity altogether until 1927, when the archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley excavated objects that bear her name. We now know that her name, in Sumerian, means "Ornament of Heaven", and as the high priestess of the moon deity Nanna-Suen, she composed 42 temple hymns and three stand-alone poems that, like the Epic of Gilgamesh (which is not credited to a named author), scholars consider an important part of Mesopotamia's literary legacy.

In conjunction with her status as a religious figure and priestess, Enheduanna wielded political power as the daughter of Sargon the Great – a figure credited by some historians as the founder of the world's first empire. In particular, she played an essential role helping bind together the northern Mesopotamian region of Akkad, where Sargon first rose to power, before he went on to capture the Sumerian city-states in the south. She did so by helping meld the beliefs and rituals associated with the Sumerian goddess Inanna with those of the Akkadian goddess Ishtar, and by emphasising those links in her literary and religious hymns and poems, thereby creating a common system of beliefs throughout the empire.

Each of the hymns Enheduanna wrote for 42 temples in the southern half of Mesopotamia highlighted the unique character of the patron goddess to the worshippers in those cities; the hymns were copied by scribes in the temples for hundreds of years after her death.



The Yale Babylonian

**Enheduanna's writings are inscribed on to clay in cuneiform  
(Credit: The Yale Babylonian Collection/ Photo by Klaus Wagenonner)**

"The voice we hear in the hymns is that of a gifted poet," writes Jungian analyst and Enheduanna translator Betty De Shong Meador in her 2009 book *Princess, Priestess, Poet*. "She describes with candour the everyday lives, cares, and inherent nature of the deities and their temples. She populates the entire surrounding cosmos with active, engaging, uncontrollable divine beings."

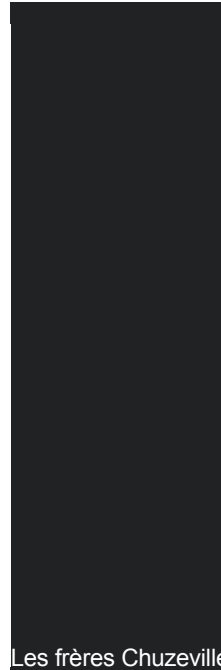
Those poems further could hint at Enheduanna's solid grasp of mathematics – perhaps not so surprising when you remember that historians trace maths' origins to Mesopotamia, right alongside the development of cuneiform and other early writing systems. Both writing and counting were probably developed by necessity in Mesopotamia's active agricultural and textile economy, where the systems became intertwined as farmers and merchants counted what was produced, and recorded what was being sold and traded.

## **Ancient feminism**

As a society, Mesopotamia was in that era less patriarchal than elsewhere and women participated in many ways in various aspects of Mesopotamian society. Indeed women enjoyed greater visibility in the third millennium. In that era women could own property, and it could be inherited through the female line.

This period, starting in approximately 3400 BC, saw a vast growth in Mesopotamia's urban centres and a continuing expansion in producing and trading goods throughout the country and the region. Increased business orders meant a need for more workers – many of whom were women. Going beyond their traditional roles at home or taking on religious duties, these women took on roles in a wide variety of trades, including ceramics, weaving, baking, animal husbandry, brewing, and artisan work. One image on display captures a group of women at the loom, weaving, with one

figure in full motion, her hair flying behind her. Another shows women at what looks like a pottery wheel; in others, women sit and dine with men, apparently as equals. They are also seen playing musical instruments, in groups or solo, as depicted in an exquisite shell inlay in which a woman holds a flute to her mouth, delicate ribbons wound around her curly hair.



Les frères Chuzeville

**The artefacts reveal a variety of Mesopotamian women engaged in different activities  
(Credit: Les frères Chuzeville)**

And this is just one example in what can be viewed as a fashion show highlighting the changing and often elaborate hair and clothing styles favoured by the women of Mesopotamia. Statuettes, some as small as Barbie dolls, sport thick hair braids wound around the head like a coil; crossed headbands hold long, flowing wavy hair in place; ankle-length robes with tiered rows of hanging loops give the appearance of bird feathers; one particularly notable robe has a geometrically intertwined pattern that echoes thatched leaves or reeds. Most of these female figures stand in place, in bare feet, with clasped hands and subdued smiles, as if in prayer.

## **Royal splendour**

Then there is the show's visual centrepiece: the stunningly colourful funerary ensemble of Queen Puabi, who lived approximately 150 years before Enheduanna. As befitting a queen, Puabi's splendiferous headdress is made up of hammered leaves and ribbons of gold as well as circular beads composed of lapis lazuli and carnelian. On top of those ornaments further sits an intricate crown-like comb adorned with star-like flowers – all in gold, just like the series of hair coils and accompanying set of large moon-shaped earrings. Equally majestic are the colourful strands of beads of gold and semi-precious stones that reach from neck to waist, around which winds a belt fringed with gold ringlets. These were all also uncovered by excavations led by Woolley, and made as big a splash in the late 1920s as the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt had done in 1922.



The Penn Museum

**Queen Puabi's funerary ensemble was made up of gold and semi-precious stones  
(Credit: The Penn Museum)**

Even so, "We know very little about Queen Puabi," who lived around 2500 BC, says Babcock, explaining that we only know her name because it appears on a lapis lazuli cylinder seal found on her body. Babcock explains that cylinder seals – most no larger than a spool of thread – proliferated throughout Mesopotamian society, serving as both a personal ID and a way to authenticate a communication or the contents of, say, a jar. Most significant for those trying to reconstruct Mesopotamian life today, intricate designs and images were often carved onto the seals, their impressions yielding a wealth of detailed information about all strata of society.

In addition to mortal women, these cylinder seals show the changing nature of the two major female deities Inanna and Ishtar, whose different profiles Enheduanna helped merge into one interchangeable goddess. Before Sargon's conquest of Sumer, Inanna represented the divine feminine principle who was the nurturing mother and the queen of heaven overseeing and preserving the cycle of life. Her face was generally not shown but her presence symbolised by rings of bundled reeds.

In her poems, Enheduanna portrays Inanna/Ishtar as a powerful goddess of combat and conquest as well as of love and abundance

But change was under way, and by 2400 BC, a vessel fragment shows a female deity visualised in human form. Wearing a horned crown with leafy, vegetable-like material protruding from her shoulders and holding a cluster of dates, she has the aspects of fertility and fecundity associated with Inanna, but the animal-like crown also suggests fierceness.

With the reign of Sargon and through Eneheduanna's hymns, an ever-more war-like female deity begins to be depicted: Ishtar, seen portrayed in the exhibition with weapons coming out of her shoulders and her foot atop a lion whose leash she wields. In her poems, Enheduanna similarly portrays Inanna/Ishtar as a powerful goddess of combat and conquest as well as of love and abundance. And, according to Babcock, cylinder seals in the exhibition actually illustrate scenes from her poem, Inanna and Ebih.

The text pits an embattled, enraged Inanna against her enemy, a mountain range that refuses to bow down or cede to her. We see the goddess, armed with knife and axes, cause the mountain's stones to cascade downward, and kill the mountain's male god. "She sharpened both edges of her dagger. She took Ebih's neck as if tearing up grass. She presented the blade into its heart," and "yelled like thunder" so that "the stones making up Ebih crashed down its back." She then celebrates her conquest by triumphantly placing her foot atop the fallen stones. "This is the first time you have illustrations for a text, ever," Babcock comments – another first for Enheduanna's literary legacy.

Which is another way to say that Enheduanna not only wrote, but she continues to endure in many realms: as a significant figure in ancient Sumer, in the history of women and feminism and not least, in literature, as well.

**\* This article was compiled from an article by Chris Calimlim, entitled: “Hidden women of history: Enheduanna, princess, priestess and the world’s first known author” that was published in the Conversation website, and from the article “Enheduanna: The world's first named author” published on 26th October 2022, 01:00 PDT on BBC Website, and from the Blog entitled Ur Digitization Project: Item of the Month, June 2012 by Brad Hafford published 25 June 2012. The poem by Enheduanna was taken from the article: “The First Author” by: Benjamin R. Forester, Published in “The Guild of Book Workers Journal 2010-2011. Translations of the Temple Hymns are taken from Black, J.A., Cunningham, G., Fluckiger-Hawker, E, Robson, E., and Zólyomi, G., The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, Oxford 1998**

# God's Language

## By: Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan

**Note: Some parts of this article were taken from the introductory notes of my two Assyrian Speech books\*.**

For many centuries, based on the stories of the Bible, people believed that ancient Assyrians and Babylonians were pagans, warlike and bloodthirsty people; and unfortunately many Assyrians still believe that their ancestors were sinners and deserved to be punished by the god of Hebrews. However, the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform tablets have unveiled their secrets and the modern discoveries and the translations of many of these tablets have revealed a different picture. In this article I would like to show with two simple examples that even Soureth, modern Assyrian language, has certain characteristics that in my opinion point to the belief in one god and a certain philosophy and way of thinking. Let's elaborate

### **The Verb "To Have"**

Unlike certain nations with materialistic gods, who promise their chosen people the wealth of all the nations and riches beyond measure, which in fact may reflect the greedy nature of those who invented those religions, the Assyrian language conveys the idea of altruistic living as it does not have the verb "To Have"! This is rather congruous and consistent with our present state, because in fact we Assyrians have nothing left to us in this world: our motherland, our houses and properties have been taken away from us. Our churches, our ancient monuments and even the graveyards where our loved ones were buried have been destroyed, burnt and levelled by bulldozers. So, why would we need the verb To Have?

I will leave it to you to dwell on the philosophy of not having! How nice it would be if everyone lived without wanting to possess more and more, without trying to obtain that which belongs to others. This reminds me of the song by John Lennon: Imagine, where he says: "Imagine no possessions, I wonder if you can..."

It's true that we have this language, but then Assyrians were forced to migrate to foreign countries due to wars in Iran, Iraq and Syria. And in these foreign countries, they are under psychological pressure to assimilate. Therefore, most of them are losing this precious language. We also have our church. But then our church and clergy are constantly under attack by people who for unspeakable reasons are aiming to weaken and destroy this last possession we have!

But then you may say: "Even if a person is stark naked with no possessions, he must have a mother and a father, otherwise he could not have come to this world!" So how would this person say in Assyrian language that he has a mother and a father?" Or "How would he say he does not have money?" The answer is that we use the verb "There is"!

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\*Assyrian Speech Lessons Book 1 Foundation Level, Student Manual, Ed 2, October 2015, Lulu Press  
Assyrian Speech Lessons Book 2 Foundation Level, Student Manual, Ed 2, June 2020, Lulu Press.

ܐܘܠ (pronounced **eet** and sometimes **it**) is the verb “**there is**”; and to say “**there is not**”, we use ܐܘܠܐ (pronounced **lite**. Some people say **leet or lit**).

In order to form the verb “To Have”, the object pronouns are added to the verb “There Is”. For example “**I Have**” is ܐܘܠܐ ܕܝܐܘܠ (pronounced **eetlee**), which translates to: “**there is for me**”. This sentence suggests that there are a number of possessions made available to me, to use in this world while I am in this body. It’s like occupying a furnished hotel suite. Therefore, the notion of possession is not tangible and evokes a philosophical idea: that we are guests in this world and nothing is really ours and possessions don’t mean anything because we come naked and leave this world empty handed.

If we could develop such a mind-set and lived with this philosophy and were prepared to share everything we have with others, what a wonderful world it would be! We would be more content with what is made available to us, caring for it, trying to make most of it without envying and coveting what has been lent to others, knowing that possession is transitory and momentary; and does not really matter. Is this an indication that the Assyrian language is the language of God as some people claim? I will just say that this idea is very close to the fundamental Christian teachings about possessions. “Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it.” (Luke 3: 11). Moreover, didn’t Jesus say to the wealthy young man: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” (Matthew 19:21). And didn’t Jesus also say: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Mark:10:25)?

## Roots

Most words in Assyrian are derived from simple words called roots. In Assyrian, the roots do not have tense, as they are timeless, but they have gender, which you have guessed correctly to be masculine. But it is neither “I” masculine nor “You” masculine; it is rather the third singular masculine person: “He”.

Unlike some philosophers and schools of thought or psychologists who believe that the centre of the universe is “I”, in this language everything revolves around “He”. It is interesting to ponder about the philosophical significance this may have. Who is this mysterious “He”, who is the origin and the source of every thought, belief, emotion, feeling, action, knowledge and objects, and from whom everything is derived, even words? Is he God?

Most roots are comprised of 3 or 4 letters. There are some 5-letter roots, too, but they are rare. Many 4-letter roots are also derived from the 3-letter roots. Therefore the 3-letter roots are at the heart of this language. Roots are important in grammar because they help us spell and identify the derivatives correctly. Sometimes it is not just the three letters that are used to identify the derivatives and their meaning, the vowels are also important.

I will give you an example to see how vowels play their role. The two roots **Bâshel** ܒܫܠ and **Bushil** ܒܫܝܠ have exactly the same three letters but their vowels are different, so they have different meanings. **Bâshel** means “**he get cooked**”, whereas **Bushil** means “**he cook**”. The derivatives of each class must be spelled with their correct vowel to avoid ambiguity. Note that



these words do not have a tense, in other words, **Bâshel** does not mean “**he gets cooked**”. For example the root **ܘܫܝܕ** appears in the present, future and past tenses:

**ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ** “He cooks”. **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ** “He will cook”.

**ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ** “He used to cook”. **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ** “He would have cooked”.

Some people complain about vowels and insist that we must omit them because they are difficult to learn and memorize; and some other people insist we must spell words as they pronounce them in their dialect. However, omitting the vowels will lead to confusion; and if each group of people try to spell words as they pronounce them it will lead to total chaos. I will use this example to illustrate the importance of vowels. Using these two roots I could say:

**The meat will be cooked.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

**The cook will cook.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

Here I can remove the vowels and there will be no ambiguity. Of course, we exclude the possibility that the cook may fall into his cauldron and get cooked! However, suppose we want to use pronouns, which we often do. So if we omit the vowels we will have this:

**ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

**ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

Can you distinguish the meaning of these two identical sentences? Now if I place the vowels you will understand immediately:

**He (It) will be cooked.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

**He will cook.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

Note that we don’t have the equivalent to “it” because all objects have gender. In this case meat is masculine, so is the cook. A female cook would be **ܘܫܝܕܝܗ**.

Moreover, in some dialects, as in the dialect of Urmia, which I speak at home, both words are pronounced identically as:

**He (It) will be cooked.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

**He will cook.** **ܘܫܝܕ ܗܝܫܝܕܝܗ**

We tend to understand each other by context, but confusions do arise, which require further explanation by the speaker. But if we tried to write our ideas with this incorrect system of spelling, as some people insist that we must, who would clarify the confusion in the absence of the writer?!

I hope I have convinced you that we do indeed need the “correct” vowels to facilitate reading and comprehension, and that they are indispensable in many cases.

There are some roots that have adjectives derived from them. I will give another example, however, I should give a word of warning, some words in Assyrian may sound like rude words in other languages; I apologize beforehand and hope that you will not mind. The root in question is **Bâger** **ܘܫܝܕ**, which means ‘**He lose weight**’, that has past participles as well as adjectives:

Past participle masculine ( <b>Bgeera</b> )	كَبَّرَ
Past participle feminine ( <b>Bgeerta</b> )	كَبَّرَتْ
Thin (masculine adjective) ( <b>Bâgeera</b> )	كَبَّرٌ
Thin (feminine adjective) ( <b>Bâgeerta</b> )	كَبَّرَاتٌ

And here is another example where you certainly need vowels.

He has lost weight      هَهُ كَبَّرَ كِي

He is thin                      هَهُ كَبَّرَ كِي

Without vowels you would not be able to distinguish between the adjective and the past participle, nor comprehend that these two sentences have different meaning.

An example of a five letter root is:

He make or become smaller, or he diminish (**Z'Artin**, some dialects say **Sertin**)

وَكَبَّرَ

From this root we have two adjectives:

Small masculine (**Z' Aora**, in our dialect we say **Soora**)

وَكَبَّرَ

Small feminine (**Z' Aorta**, in our dialect we say **Soorta**)

وَكَبَّرَاتٌ

Note that if in this example we write as we speak in our dialect: **وَكَبَّرَ** , **وَكَبَّرَاتٌ** ,

for the adjective **small**, we would not know where this word originated from. Actually most illiterate Assyrians, who can only speak the language but cannot read or write it, don't know the correct root of the two adjectives they pronounce as **Soora** and **Soorta**.

I'll give you one more example of a three-letter root with some of its derivatives, so that you will see how this language is developed.

The root **Kânesh** كَيْت basically means “**He sweep**”. It has a more subtle meaning as well, which is used in some derivatives as we shall see. From this root we derive the following words:

The **infinitive**, to sweep is **Knâshâ** كَيْتَ ,

The **noun**, sweeping is **Knâshtâ** كَيْتَاتُ ,

The **masculine sweeper** is **Kânâshâ** كَيْتَانُ ,

The **feminine sweeper** is **Kânâshtâ** كَيْتَاتَانُ ,

The **masculine past participle**, swept is **Kneeshâ** كَيْتَانُ ,

The **feminine past participle**, swept is **Kneeshtâ** كَيْتَاتَانُ ,

The broom is Kânoshtâ كَنُوشْتَا .

Now since sweeping is a kind of assembling and bringing objects together, some other words can be derived from “He assemble”.

A congregation or assembly is Kinshâ كِنِشَا ,

A synod is Knooshyâ كَنُوشْيَا ,

A synagogue is Knooshtâ كَنُوشْتَا ,

A dictionary, where all words are assembled is Koonâsh – Milé كُونِيش - مِيلَ (which literally means **assembly of words**).

Note that the same three letters K (ك), N (ن) and SH (ش) that comprise the root are found in all these derivatives. This is why knowing the root of words is important to understand their meaning and to remember their correct spelling.

Most four-letter roots are also derived from three-letter roots. For example, the root كُنِيش which means “He make to sweep” is derived from كِيش . Usually the letter م with the vowel ا in the beginning of a verb, indicates making someone or something do something.

For example, the root كُنِيش means “He read” or “He study” while the root كُنِيش means “He teach”. It literally means “He make to read or to study”.

In the case of sweeping and assembling, the two past participles can be used as adjectives, as there are no adjectives derived from this root. For example, we may say:

Swept street كُنِيشَا كُنِيشَا

Swept courtyard كُنِيشَا كُنِيشَا

The Assyrian language has short sentences because it is well structured and rich in communicating ideas in few words. For example it has a pronoun system, which makes the verb self-sufficient because the pronouns attach to the verb, and thus with one word you can express ideas that are equivalent to one sentence. There are other languages that have this feature to a certain extent, such as Farsi. For example, suppose the gardener has swept the leaves in the garden. We can say:

He swept. كُنِيشَا

She swept. كُنِيشَا

He swept them. كُنِيشَا

She swept them. كُنِيشَا

Here we see the root in a form that conveys simple past tense كِيش . The masculine pronoun كِيش and the feminine pronoun كِيشَا serve as the subject. In the last two examples we also have the third person plural pronoun in the object form: كِيشَا .

It is interesting to emphasize that in all these words we see the presence of the root, as if “He” is ever present in everything and everyone. It seems as if there is an invisible hand that assembles people and objects together. People with diverse backgrounds and from all over the world are swept together in a synod to discuss common ideas and make decisions. And all the words spoken in a language, reflecting the culture, history, knowledge, ideologies, thoughts, feelings, actions and the life of the people who speak it are assembled in a dictionary. I suppose that’s why some people call this language “The Language of God” because it constantly reminds us of the presence of a mysterious invisible “He” at the root of everything, and the source of all thought, feeling, motion and action. It is interesting to note that Sumerians considered their language ‘the language of God’.

## Whose Language?

Of course, many people are not happy to call Sumerian the language of God for various reasons, and actually it may appear absurd to say God has a human language. What seems certain to me is that the Assyrian language, or Sumerian, was created by people who worshiped God very earnestly and that God was the centre of their universe. Thus, their language reflects their belief that God Ashur was at the beginning and that he named everything he created. In truth, the Assyrians were zealously religious and very deep in theology and religious studies and many of their books were copied directly to the Old Testament with minor modifications, such as the Books of Psalms, The story of Noah and the Flood, Job, Lamentations, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, which are, in my opinion, the best parts of the Old Testament. For example, according to Joshua J. Mark, A freelance writer and former part-time Professor of Philosophy at Marist College, New York, who has authored numerous articles in the World History Encyclopaedia, the poem of *Enlil in the E-Kur* is “highly regarded as an important work of Mesopotamian literature as well as for **its influence on books of the Bible.**” And “Today it is among the most popular works of ancient Mesopotamian literature for its detailed description of the E-Kur (temple), its depiction of Enlil as the source of all creation, and **the influence it is thought to have had on the later books of the Bible, especially the Book of Psalms.**”

Apart from the copied texts into the Old Testament, some of the philosophical ideas of the Ancient Assyrians are reflected in the New Testament. For example, the idea of a dying and resurrecting god comes from the Assyrian god Thammuz who dies every summer causing the whole nature to die with him; and is resurrected in spring, thus restoring nature back to life. It is probably not amazing that the sign of Thammuz is a cross just like the sign used by Christians to denote Christ and Christianity. Some of the attributes of Virgin Mary, such as being the Virgin Mother, doves and the eight-winged star, were copied from those of Ishtar, the Assyrian Goddess of love, and the loving Virgin Mother of Tammuz who restores her beloved son back to life by sacrificing herself and descending to the world of death every year.

Thus it is not surprising that Assyrians embraced Christianity quickly and easily as it taught many ideas that were already their accepted and venerated beliefs. It’s for this reason that I find it quite amazing and amusing if not pathetic that some staunch religious Assyrians today, who accept and believe in the cruel, blood-thirsty and racist god of the old scriptures, despise and accuse ancient Assyrians of paganism, while at the same time they read fervently the original Assyrian philosophical and religious texts copied to these religious books, admiring and believing in them. They don’t realize that the true authors of those texts were the Ancient Assyrians, whom they consider pagans! This shows how little modern Assyrians know about

their ancestors and that most of their knowledge is limited to biblical scriptures. Many Assyrians still believe that the ancient Hebrews were much superior to Assyrians because they believed in one God whereas Assyrians had a pantheon of gods and goddesses. For example they say: “The reason God chose the ancient Hebrews to be His nation was because they believed in only one true God, while He cursed the Assyrians because they were pagans!” Or some Assyrians say: “It’s wrong to believe in God Ashur because he is a pagan god. We must believe only in Jehovah because he is the only true God”!

This is the price we pay for ignorance because in truth and according to, for example, the book: **“God, an Anatomy”** by Francesca Stevrakopoulou, the British Biblical scholar, the ancient Hebrews also had a large Pantheon of gods and goddesses and in fact, Jehovah was a minor god and not the supreme ruler of that pantheon. Every Hebrew city-state or province worshiped a different god. Only when the province where Jehovah was venerated became more affluent economically did he manage to step higher in the hierarchy of gods and became the absolute ruler of the world of Hebrew gods. In fact, Israelites were simple tribal people and thought of their god as a fierce warrior who went to battle with his people. They would be victorious if they were on good terms with the deity but would suffer defeat if not.

Some Assyrians, under the influence of Biblical stories, argue that Assyrians used to make statues of their gods and pray to them. But don’t Christians make statues of Jesus, Mary, the apostles and of various saints and pray to them? When you enter a cathedral don’t you find in every nook and corner a shrine built for a saint with his / her statue in the middle, and with rows of benches where believers sit or kneel and pray? Does that mean they are pagans who worship statues? Some staunch believers claim that because ancient Assyrians used to carry statues of their gods from one temple to another, it proves they were pagans. Don’t Catholics today carry statues of Mary and Jesus and other saints from one church to another followed by long procession of priests, monks and nuns during special religious festivals? Does that make them pagans, too? In fact, Hebrews made statues of their gods and placed food in front of them believing that gods had the same needs as humans.

Prof. Simoe Parpola has published numerous books and papers about ancient Assyrians, among which his paper entitled: **“The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy”**, Published in Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Vol. 52, No. 3, July 1993, shows that Assyrians believed in one God, Ashur and were not pagans. According to Prof. Parpola, the Jewish Cabala Tree, with its nine symbolic numbers, is a translation of the Assyrian Tree of Life. Moreover, the Assyrian King was considered one of the emanations of the one God Ashur; and it was believed that the King rose to Heaven three days after his death just like Jesus. Prof. Simoe Parpola explains that various Assyrian “gods”, such as Enki, Ea, Bel, were in fact, manifestations of the one God Ashur; and some of the other deities were similar to the saints venerated by Christians today. In fact, some non-Christians who do not understand the idea of the Holy Trinity think that Christians have three gods, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But in fact the Holy Trinity defines one God existing in three coequal, coeternal, consubstantial divine and distinct persons (hypostases). It appears that ancient Assyrians had similar philosophical ideas about their God Ashur. Accusing them of paganism because we don’t know or understand anything about their religion is equally wrong as accusing Christians of worshipping three gods and praying to statues of Saints.

Actually, the drastic change in the nature and character of god as depicted in the Old Testament to the god described in the New Testament reveals another important point. This radical change is probably due to the fact that Israelites lived in Assyria and Babylonia for many

years and were influenced by the advanced culture and learning of the ancient Assyrians. The Israelites naturally learned about the Assyrian god of mercy and compassion. While the god of the Old Testament is racist and cruel, the god of the New Testament is kind and forgiving to all mankind and free from racism and grudge against other nations. This may be another reason why Assyrians found Christian thought so appealing and close to their inner thoughts and beliefs.

Sadly all the original writings of Assyrians / Babylonians, which were on parchment, wood or papyrus, were destroyed by our hateful enemies and we have no proof of the facts. Early Christians, under the influence of the first disciples, like Paul (Acts:19), burnt all the books that Assyrian / Babylonian scholars had written before Christianity under the pretext that those were pagan writings, whereas now we are told that our ancient ancestors were monotheists, not pagan. Most of the Middle East, including Turkey, became Christian territories, where science and theology flourished and Assyrians made many advances in medicine and chemistry. But then the barbaric, brutal and savage followers of a certain religion invaded the Middle East. They not only committed atrocities against Assyrians, the like of which we have witnessed or heard of in our own life time; and continue to learn about in certain African countries where Christians are being inhumanly and ruthlessly persecuted; they also wiped out everything, while burning down Assyrian churches and monuments. During their cruel reign all the Assyrian books and documents containing all the knowledge of the great Assyrians were translated into another language and then the originals were burnt. That is why many inventions, discoveries and scientific or mathematical theories are now attributed to other nations, whereas their true origins were Assyrian / Babylonian.

Fortunately there are honest people who confess connections to ancient Assyrians. For example certain religions pride themselves for having invented Sufism, whereas the origins of this type of philosophy are Assyrian, as confirmed by Prof. Parpola. I learned from someone that their grandfather who was a Sufi would chant in Aramaic (classical Assyrian), when he was in an ecstatic state. Here are his exact words:

*"My interest in Aramaic isn't just a language love. Let me tell you Madeleine...Last night maybe for an hour with my brother we listened to Aramaic Bible again. Believe it or not, My grandfather was speaking this language on some occasion. You may ask: 'what kind of occasion". We were calling it (Lisan al Hal). My grandfather was a Sufi, a Darvish. He was speaking this language in an ecstatic state. However he couldn't remember anything when he was coming to his senses. I heard these sounds, voices throughout my childhood. Strangely enough I understand it! But this language doesn't operate conventionally. I mean in a normal language the 'word' (Lafz) and "Ma'na" (meaning) are separate; but not in Aramaic. They are the same. We listed the words and checked them with my brother. They all were aramaic. I can't explain it; but modern aramaic lacks some sounds. The sounds that don't emerge from the mouth...Anyways..."*

The only texts that give testimony to the glorious past of Assyrian are now found on cuneiform tablets; but those, too, are limited to what archaeologists would allow the outside world know about. All that the people at large are exposed to are the untrue stories found in the Bible and the scholastic history books written and published by those, who for one reason or another are afraid of the name "Assyrian". As a result of this fear, the name "Assyrian" has been avoided rigorously throughout ages. For example, our language and alphabet have been called Aramean, Aramaic, Syriaque, etc. Our churches have been called: Nestorian, Chaldean, Jacobite, etc. The majority of Assyrians call themselves Chaldean, Arab, Turk, Kurd, or anything but

Assyrian! Therefore, we are truly indebted to Prof. Parpola, who is the first scholar to acknowledge the fact that we are, indeed, descendants of the ancient Assyrians.

Regrettably, European scholars, in previous centuries, under the wrong influence of the Bible, called the Assyrian language Aramaic (Isaiah 36:11)! But Arameans were uncivilized nomads that caused much trouble by attacking and stealing from Assyrian villages. How could the much more advanced and progressive people like Assyrians and Babylonians adopt the primitive language of tent dweller tribes? It's more than likely that Assyrians / Babylonians invented the 22-letter alphabet we use today, because primitive wild Arameans were not cultured and could never invent anything no matter how basic and elementary, let alone something so sophisticated as a system of writing! We don't know how the ancient Assyrians called the more modern version of their language, but the truth is that writers of the Bible have misspelled and mispronounced the names of all the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. It is very probable that they mispronounced the name of their language, too. For example Ashurbanipal or Tiglath Pileser, as written in the Old Testament, are wrong names. Their real names were Aššur-bāni-apli and Tukultī-apil-Ešarra, but those ancient writers of scriptures could not even pronounce those famous names correctly. It is more than probable that they misspelled the name of the language in (Isaiah 36:11). It's interesting that Ktav Ashuri which means "Assyrian script"; or Ashurit is the traditional Hebrew language name of the Hebrew alphabet, used to write both Hebrew and Jewish Babylonian languages, which the Hebrews learnt and adopted when they were in Babylon. Nevertheless modern day linguists and Assyriologists still insist to call our alphabet and language Aramaic or Aramean; and some knowledgeable scholars of today still base their conclusions on the false writings of the scriptures. Unfortunately, since Assyrian / Babylonian writings were maliciously destroyed the connection between the ancient Akkadian language and our classical language is lost. Hopefully, soon this connection will be unearthed.

Another consequence of the meaningless fear of the name "Assyrian" is that Assyrians have been subjected to the most cruel genocides and multiple massacres and forced migrations throughout the ages. Assyrian women have been brutally raped; men beheaded; children indiscriminately slaughtered, old folk driven out of their homes and villages, naked, forbidden to ever return, while all their possessions have been taken away from them. Even today in our so-called modern age Assyrians were subjected to atrocities and forced migration a couple of years ago. Nowadays there are scarcely any Assyrians left in the Middle East, another proof of mass murders and forced migrations and conversions. Does this meaningless and absurd "fear" of Assyrians also originate from a certain ridiculous "prophecy" in the Bible? Is the Bible the reason we the Assyrians are despised, discriminated and destroyed today? When will this senseless and illogical malice and prejudice against Assyrians finally end? All I can say is that if there were a god, how would he judge those who kill innocent people to avoid an invented ridiculous prophecy? If the prophecy is true, can it be avoided by mass killings? How can it be avoided? If it's really the will of God, can anyone oppose it? How does God judge those who oppose his will and try to avoid it by murdering others?

Dr. Thomas, an American missionary who held a doctorate in theology and was teaching us the Old Testament in Tehran, Iran, would explain that these incredibly childish stories were told and written by ancient "wise" men for religious and philosophical purposes and had no historical value or significance; and that based on discoveries of the old manuscripts and the dates they were written, it has been proved and shown that all the so-called "prophecies" were actually written **after** the events had taken place! Therefore, why is this meaningless and groundless fear because of a senseless and absurd prophecy still haunting some people?

# The Ancient Secrets Revealed by Deciphered Tablets \*

**By: Dr. Selena Wisnom, Dr. Christina Tsouparopoulou,  
and Dr. Irving Finkel**



Holding a tablet that was written thousands of years ago and being able to read what it says, is an amazing feeling. If you see a cuneiform tablet for the first time, you are not likely to identify it as writing. And you certainly would not know which way up it went. It's a form of time travel; it catapults you back in time, thousands of years and puts you directly into the shoes of somebody who lived so many years before us.







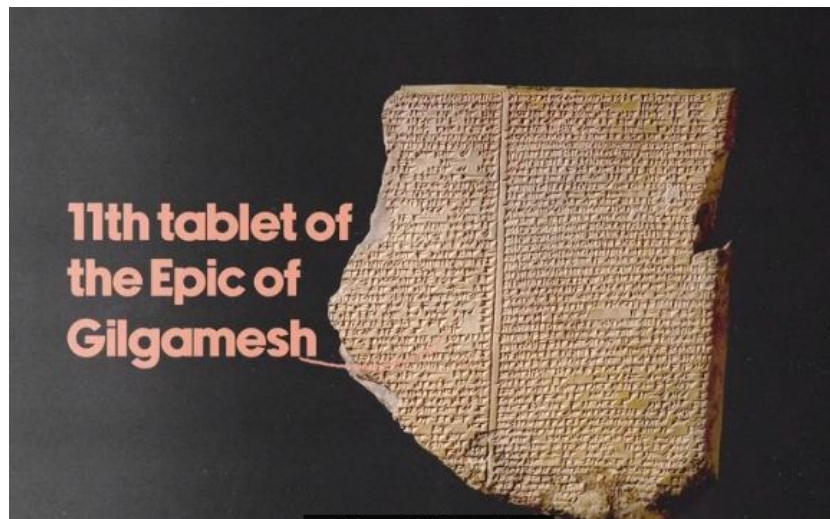
The earliest form of writing is called cuneiform, first used over 5000 years ago. It is believed to predate the Egyptian Hieroglyphs by more than a thousand years, since the hieroglyphic script originated shortly before 3100 B.C. Cuneiform was used by civilizations that lived in Mesopotamia. Several societies used cuneiform as their writing system, including Sumerians and Akkadians.



Pressed into clay, cuneiform tablets are incredibly durable; they are literally fireproof, but for thousands of years, no one was able to translate them. After much trial and error, cuneiform script was finally deciphered in the Victorian era. What they revealed was extraordinary.

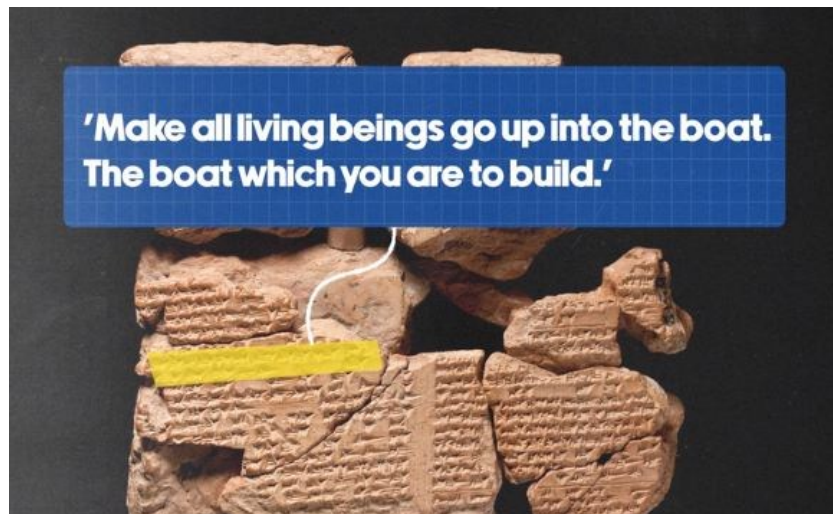


Once Cuneiform was deciphered, lots of unexpected things came to light, but probably none which had greater impact than the discovery of George Smith in 1872, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh in which he encountered for the first time, the Flood Story.



When cuneiform was cracked, it gave us some astonishing insight into the ancient world. **Four incredible secrets were uncovered when ancient tablets were deciphered.**

### **Secret I: The Story of Noah's Ark predates the Bible**



Finding an ancient tablet with the story of Noah's Ark, written hundreds of years before the Bible shattered the Victorian understanding of the world. When it arrived, it was a huge bang. It was a very explosive matter. And the parallel was much more than a sort of general similarity with a boat and water and animals. It was in the same order and there were many close prints that compellingly showed that this same story had been current in Mesopotamia a millennium before the earliest date when the Hebrew text is likely to have come to existence.

## Secret II: The first known author in history was a woman

It wasn't easy being a woman in Mesopotamia, but women in wealthy families were treated fairly well. The first known author in all of recorded history is actually a woman: the Akkadian priestess, Enheduanna. The case of Enheduanna shows us that women could reach extremely high and important positions in Mesopotamian religion.

We learn a lot about society, about beliefs, relations between husband and wife, business transactions going wrong. We know from cuneiform tablets that women had agency. We have contracts where they are allowed to buy houses and they retain control of their dowry. They can run and manage businesses in their own right, as long as alongside their husbands.



The Penn Museum

**A little-known Mesopotamian poet and priestess, Enheduanna, is the subject of a new exhibition in New York City's Morgan Library, She Who Wrote: Enheduanna and Women of Mesopotamia, ca 3400-2000 BC.**

**Diane Cole explores her influence – and looks at how she helped create a common system of beliefs throughout the ancient empire.**

**She was the first author to be named in all recorded history. Surprised? "When people ask who is the first author, they never guess anyone in Mesopotamia, and it's never a woman," says Sidney Babcock, curator of the recently opened exhibition. "Usually, he says, they suggest a figure from ancient Greece; if they do mention a female author at all, it's Sappho, who lived a millennium later, and less of whose work survives than that of Enheduanna."**

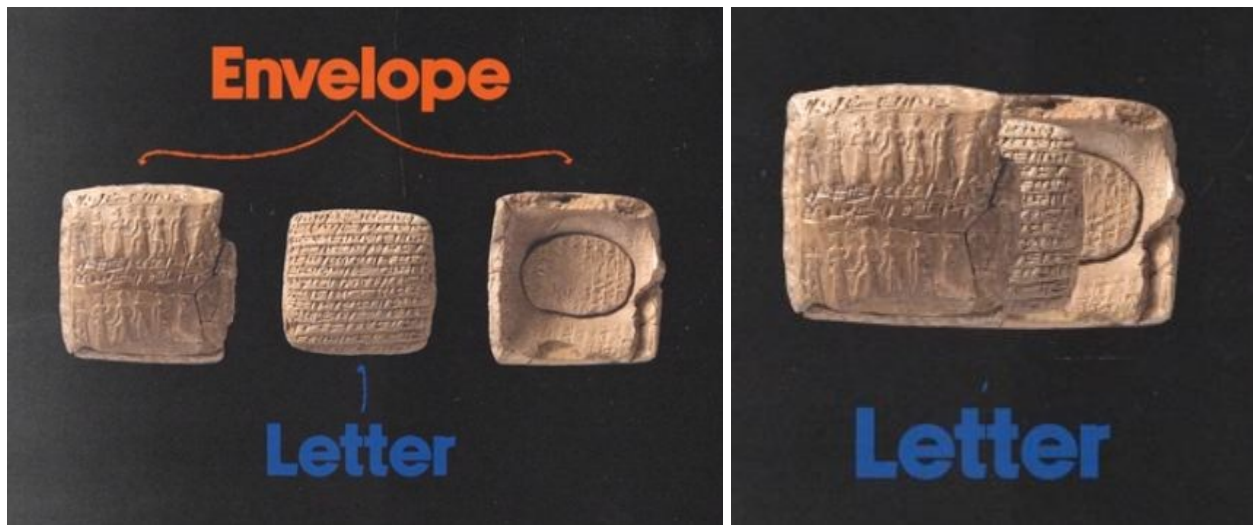
## Secret III: We Count Time in an Ancient Way

If you have ever wondered why there are sixty seconds in a minute or three hundred sixty degrees in a circle, it's because the Sumerians and Akkadians used a numbering system that was sexagesimal, which means that they counted on a base of sixty. They divided by sixty and multiplied by sixty, where we tend to use the decimal system. Our own time measurement into sixty seconds in a minute and sixty minutes in an hour is a direct inheritance from Mesopotamian

scholarly tradition. It's amazing how many concepts we take for granted in our modern society can actually be found for the first time in ancient Mesopotamia.

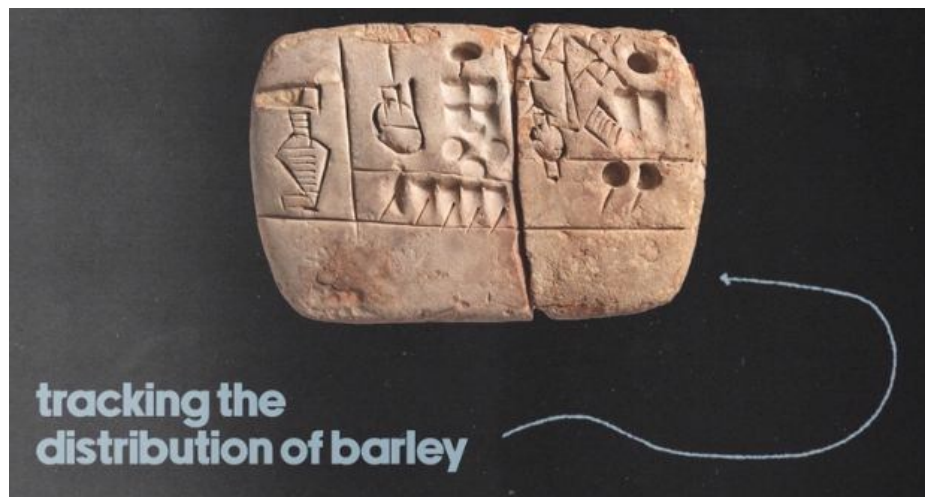
The whole concept of mathematical models, the very idea that you can use data to predict things happening in the future, which is foundational to all modern science, were established for the first time in Mesopotamia.

## Secret IV: They Wrote Letters Like We Write Emails



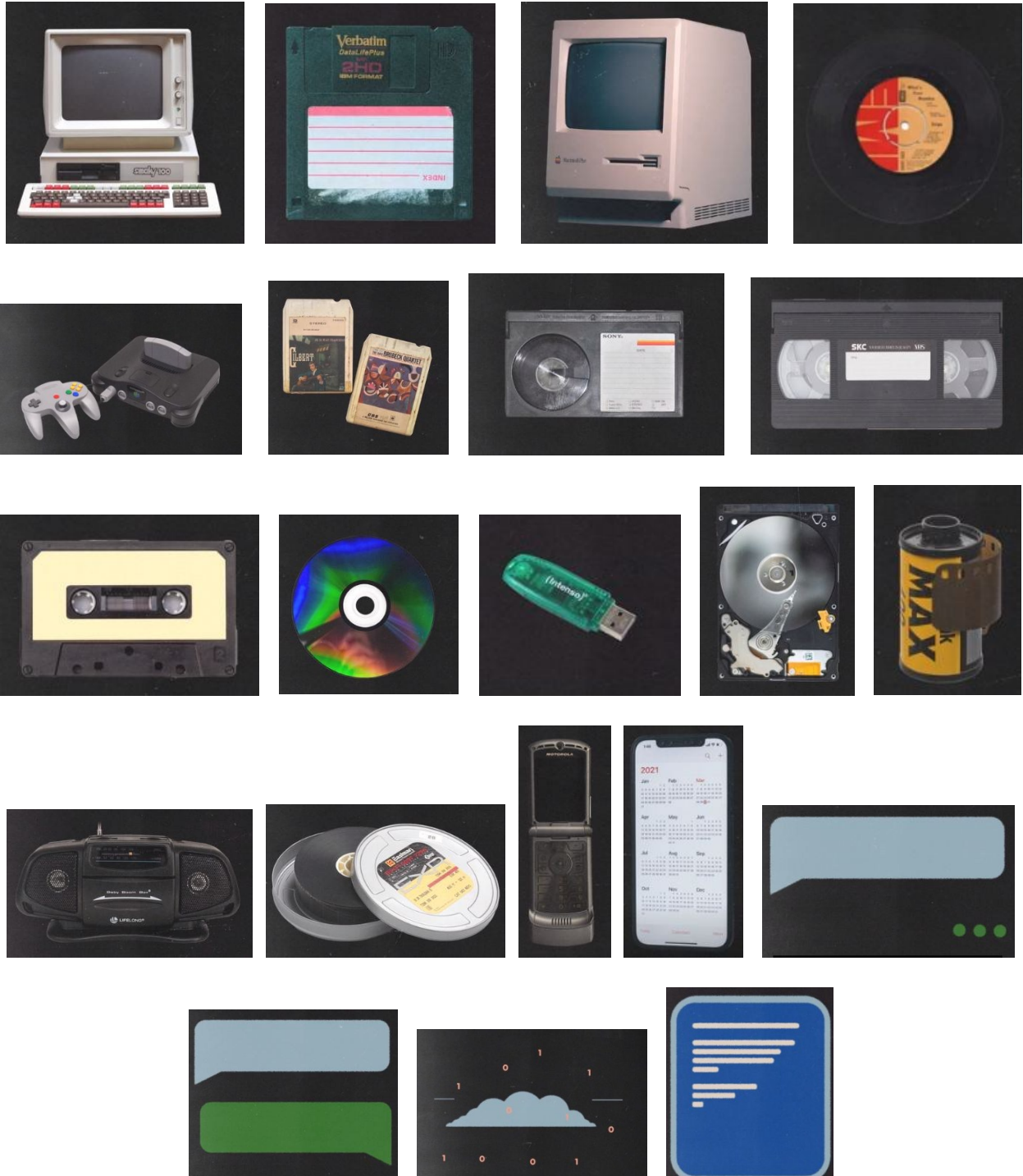
The Mesopotamians were keen letter writers, and they sent sealed messages with traders and travellers. Reading these letters today, you realize that in many ways not much has changed. We can see that there were specific formulae in their correspondence. As we start an email today by: "I hope all is well", they also started with specific formulae. But when they were angry they forgot about this formulaic convention, and they just started the letter very matter-of-factly.

As well as writing about stock levels, taxes and receipts on their tablets, cuneiform writers loved to gossip. We do have letters from some women complaining that their men are not sending enough money home. We have a certain sense of keeping up with the Joneses.

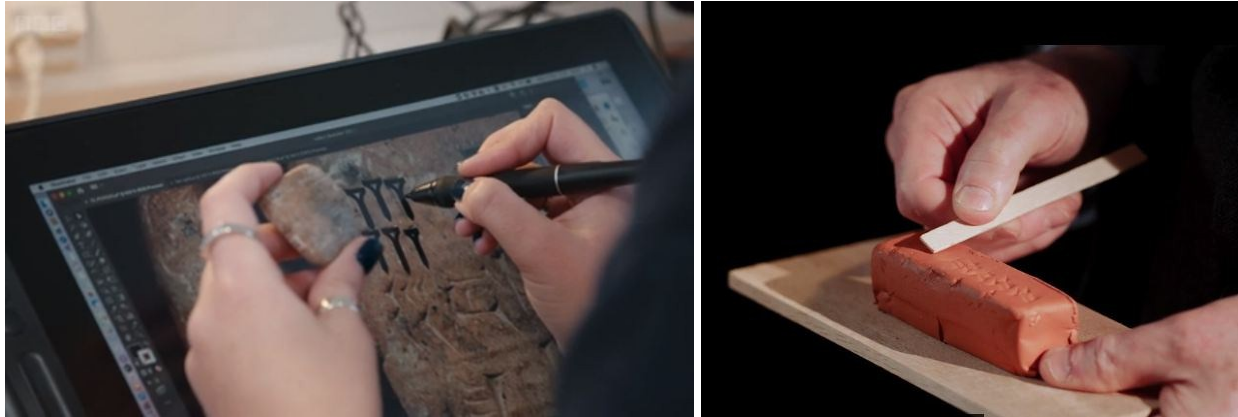


## Is It Time to Get More Cuneiform?

By studying the past, we learn so much about ourselves and the world that we live in. But the secrets revealed in cuneiform tablets are only known to us today because of clay's durability. The way that we record things is constantly evolving. Technological progress means that things become obsolete very quickly.



The messages we send every day are stored in the cloud. How likely is it that anyone will be able to read that in twenty years, let alone in a few thousand years? There is a project in Austria which is inscribing one thousand of the most important books of our era onto ceramic tablets.



So humanity has really come full circle from writing on clay at the very beginning of history to writing on clay again in a different way to preserve our information now.

There are many initiatives trying to prevent digital data from being lost. Could it be that despite all the incredible technologies we have at our fingertips, ancient methods of recording information are the best way of preserving our secrets for generations to come?

## **Conclusion by Dr. Madeleine Davis Moradkhan**

Our ancestors, the Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians had indeed fantastic methods in every aspect of life. They were the most civilized peoples of their time. Every day, archaeologists reveal amazing truths about them. Isn't it time for us, the Assyrians of today to open our minds about our ancestors and stop judging them from the eyes of the Bible and the lies that were written there about them? Even compared to today's so-called advanced and civilized societies, the Sumerian/Assyrian/Babylonian society seemed to be far more advanced.

For example, women had agency, and could reach extremely high and important positions in the Mesopotamian society and religion, something that is still not possible in many countries and in almost all religions in the world today! Is a female Pope or a female Imam or a female Rabbi ever possible? There are contracts showing that Mesopotamian women were allowed to buy houses and retain control of their dowry, they could run and manage businesses in their own right. In the United States it was only in **1988** when President Reagan signed the Women's Business Ownership Act into law, that government support for women business owners was created and the requirement of male co-signers on loans for female entrepreneurs was eliminated.

Even from the nutritional point of view ancient Mesopotamians were far more advanced, as they invented the kind of cuisine that constitutes what is termed today: "The Mediterranean Diet" and considered the healthiest of all, whereas the most progressive country in the world today invented hamburger, fries and coke, which are considered the unhealthiest diet of all!

It is discovered that in truth our ancestors were not the uncivilized barbarians as depicted in the Bible; on the contrary they were far more advanced and civilized than the Israelites

themselves, and even more civilized than many nations today! Indeed many unbiased people of today are trying to learn the Mesopotamian ways and imitate their methods.

We have to set the prejudices that have formed in our minds against our ancestors aside and open our minds to the truth that our forefathers had established the most civilized society in the world that has contributed greatly to the world's advancement in various fields of knowledge such as: Mathematics, Medicine, Astronomy, Chemistry, Art, Architecture, Philosophy, Religion, Writing, and Literature. Perhaps the most precious and valuable gift that Sumerians / Assyrians / Babylonians have given to humankind is language and writing.



**\* This article was prepared from a video, made by the Jist Studio in partnership with the Open University on 23 Dec. 2021. It may be accessed from this link:**

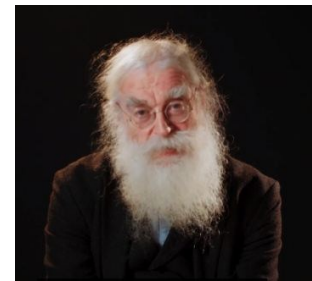
**<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/the-ancient-secrets-revealed-by-deciphered-tablets/p0bcq7gs>**



**Dr. Selena Wisnom,  
Department of  
Archaeology and  
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University of Leicester**



**Dr. Christina Tsouparopoulou,  
Department of Archaeology,  
University of Cambridge**



**Dr. Irving Finkel,  
Curator,  
Department of  
the Middle East,  
British Museum**

# Few of many cultural achievements of Rev. Fr. Qasha Yosip d'Beith Qillaita

By: Rabi Michael A. Younan

*The renowned Rev. Fr. Qasha Yosip d'Beith Qillaita, as educator and his great passion to preserve the Assyrian language and literature prompted me to write this article. The chain of Assyrian intellectuals and teachers has not ceased to produce publications to teach the Assyrian language despite the lack of financial resources due to the tragedies of persecutions, massacres, starvations and displacement from one region to another, and from our ancestral homeland to the countries of diaspora.*

This article is devoted to the renowned scholar and educator Qasha Yosip d'Beith Qillaita (1869 – 1952). He is a symbol of literary passion and a pioneer in preserving our Assyrian language in his time! He studied at the Episcopal missionary school in Urmia and later taught at that school. He was a distinguished scholar and writer. He excelled in Assyrian, English and Arabic languages. He also, translated several literary books into the Assyrian language.

In 1917, the Martyr H.H. Patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun XXI appointed Qasha Yosip to edit and print the old books and manuscripts that had survived. Qasha Yosip acquired an Assyrian printing press in Urmia and devoted himself to that purpose.

In 1920, He traveled to Malabar in India, where he received great assistance from the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East and acquired Assyrian letters (fonts) He returned to Mosul in 1921, where he founded an Assyrian printing press.

In 1927, Qasha Yosip founded his first Assyrian school in Mosul. He was entrusted by the administration and the community of the Church of the East to establish an Assyrian school. He made every effort and founded an Assyrian private school, which he managed and where he taught for several years with other teachers. From that school, many students and teachers graduated who became qualified teachers and followed in the footsteps of Qasha Yosip d'Beith Qillaita.

In 1934, a second Assyrian school in Mosul city was founded by Qasha Yosip. This time, the school was at his place of residence. He used a section of his residence as a boarding place for students and a printing shop.

From those schools, a new cultural renaissance began, even though limited, by talented writers who began publishing literary books and publications.





Teachers of the First School: Aprin Qasha Yosip, Barbwa Qasha Yosip, Shamasha Dawid d' Ashita, Shamasha KhYzaqya and Ludiya Qasha

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The following are a few of many Assyrian books printed by Qasha Yosip:

+ Book: “Marganitha” (the Pearl) on “The Truth of Christianity” written by Mar Odisho,

Metropolitan of Suwa and Armenia (1908), included the table of the tree of life of “Apostolic succession of the Catholicos Patriarchs of the Church of the East”.

ܠܗܘܢ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ  
 ܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ (1908)  
 ܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ

ܕܩܘܕܫܬܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܬܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܬܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܬܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܬܐ.

+ “The Holy Bible” the simple translation known as Psheeta version.

ܠܗܘܢ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܘܬܐ.



Teachers faculty of the second school: Shamasha Mando, Shamasha Menasheh, Shamasha Sheem Michael, Qasha Touma, Shamasha Warda and Malpana Yosip.

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+ The Old Testament, in Aramaic (1911, London).

ܬܝܘܢ ܢܘܫܬܐ, ܬܝܠܬܐ ܢܘܫܬܐ (1911)

+ Book, “the Council of the Holy Synode” (Sunhados) written by Mar Odisho (1917)

ܡܫܘܚܐ, ܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ (ܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ) ܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ  
 .(1917)

+ Book, “Pirdaisa d’ehdeen” written by Mar Odisho, in Aramaic (1918)

ܡܫܘܚܐ, ܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ, ܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܘܚܐ  
 (1918)

+ Book, “Assyrian Lexicon of verbs” in Swadaya dialect (Neo-Assyrian) written by Qasha Yosip, translated into English (1924)

ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ) ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (1924).

+ Book: “Rules of Grammar” in Swadaya dialect (Neo-Assyrian) written by Qasha Yosip (1929).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ) ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (1929).

+ Book: “the Fables of kaleila w’dimna” (1936).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (1936).  
+ “Teaching book two” for religious schools with rules of grammar (1947).  
"ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ" ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ  
(1947)

+ “Ktawa d’Ganee” book ONE of Alphabet (1949).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (1949)

+ Book: “Homily sentences of Regation of the Ninevites (in Aramaic).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ).

+ History of Holy books with question and answer from Genesis to Moses.  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ.

+ Hymn and sacred lyric on rogation of the Ninevites and Pentecost (in Aramaic).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ  
(ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ).

+ Book: “Fore Part and Later part” (in Aramaic).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ).

+ Book: “Mark/token of Lections and Apostles and Gospel.  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ.

+ Book: “Methodical/order of the priests” (in Aramaic).  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ).

+ Book: “Interpretation ahead of the Gospel: Hymns of the Liturgies and order of Deacons (in Aramaic).

ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ  
ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ (ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ ܡܘܨܪܝܢܐ).

+ Grammar in English and Assyrian. **ܘܗܘܐ ܕܘܫܘܒܐ ܕܘܫܘܒܐ (ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ) ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ**  
**(ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ)**

+ A brief explanation: “Keynotes on English Language”.

**ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ, ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ.**

+ Book: “Explanation of Mar Narsai’s Liturgies (in Aramaic and Neo-Assyrian) by Qasha Yosip.

**ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ (ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ) ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ**  
**ܘܫܘܒܐ.**

+ Book: “Assyrian history during the Sasanites rulers”.

**ܘܫܘܒܐ, ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ.**

+ A Quire/Pamphlet of Alqoshe writings. **ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ ܘܫܘܒܐ**

It is believed that the Cultural and linguistic works by Qasha Yosip d’Beith Qillaita benefited 500+ students as well as the esteemed teachers and writers who learned and graduated from those schools in 52 years.

I hope I have briefly introduced the long quest and hard work of Qasha Yosip d’Beith Qillaita to preserve the Assyrian language, literature and culture.

# Where is Our Homeland?

**By: Dr. Shubert Yousef, M.D.**

The Assyrian National Convention has always been inspirational for me. The 2023 Convention in Anaheim, CA was no exception. I attended almost all the lectures except two, which I had to skip in order to have lunch. Unfortunately the organizers had forgotten that the attendees need to eat something because they are not humanoid robots, at least not yet.

One of the inspirational lectures included a forecast of the number of Assyrians living in Diaspora versus those living in “Homeland” in the near future. And “Homeland” was defined to include countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran.

I was born in one of these countries and lived there until I was 19, then I left for my university education in USA; and returned to find a job and live close to my parents and extended family, but then I left for good since I could not stand the social injustices I witnessed. During all those years I never felt that the Islamic country, where I was born, was my “Homeland”. How could a dirty and filthy country full of stupid backward Islamic fanatics be my Homeland? How could I consider those holier-than-thou, sanctimonious Muslims, who hated us Christians and treated us as dirt because we didn’t perform some stupid meaningless ritual, as my countrymen? How could I feel that I was a citizen of that country when I was treated as a second class subject and denied rights that only the privileged Muslims enjoyed? How could I trust my class mates or colleagues, who pretended to be my friends but were ready to stab me in the back at the first opportunity? In fact my best friends, who used to pretend to be open-minded, progressive and modern during the former more democratic regime showed their true colors after the establishment of a more religious government. In short how can a country that discriminates against minorities like us, favoring Muslims to us, reserving governmental jobs and positions to Muslims only, prohibiting us from having bakeries, groceries and any food outlets because we are considered “Filthy” be my Homeland? How can I expect the unfortunate Assyrians, who have to live in such deploring conditions, to continue to preserve our Assyrian identity and our precious language, while we who live in free countries try our best to lose both?

In fact, during the Convention meetings, it was deplorable to see and watch how the so-called Assyrian leaders were encouraging each other to speak only in English, to be proud for being able to speak in flawless English. Why is it that our fellow Assyrians forget who they are as soon as they step in a free country? Who obliges us to be Assyrian in Muslim countries and preserve our identity, culture and language? Who is obliging us to forget ourselves and our past as soon as we find ourselves outside those despotic horrifying countries? Is this the price we feel we have to pay in order to breathe freely? Is this the price Assyrian women have to pay in order to be able to dress as they please and be rid of ridiculous scarves and Islamic dress code? What gets inside our heads that changes us suddenly from being proud devoted Assyrians to being proud traitors to our true nation?

In truth, we are under more pressure in those despotic countries to renounce our identity and religion, while in the free world we are free to be who we are.

Indeed, I feel more at “Home” here in California, where my wife and I can work in top International companies without feeling discriminated and my son enjoys a comfortable position in a governmental agency, jobs that we would have never been allowed to have in those Islamic countries mentioned above. And my teenage daughter enjoys a perfect education in a progressive

high school, where all are respected regardless of their religion, gender or origin. What kind of life my daughter would have in those backwards countries and what education would she receive if any at all? In some of those countries all females are obliged to stay at home and little girls are not allowed to go to school. And even where they do have schools for girls, what do those people who believe that all the knowledge of the world is contained in their religious book written about 1.5 thousand years ago, teach the girls? Don't they tell them that they are not as smart as men are because physically they have less brain? Actually they even teach doctors at universities that women possess less brain than men do. No wonder that someone I used to know who had just graduated from the Medical school in one of those countries and travelled to California, congratulated my wife for having a high forehead and said that she possessed more brain than an average woman! In such schools wouldn't they teach my daughter that women were created only to serve men and give them pleasure? That men are entitled to marry four wives and have as many concubines as they wish? Wouldn't they tell her that a man can divorce his wife and take her children, sending her away without a farthing? Don't they teach that a husband is entitled to beat his wife and do whatever he likes to her within the limits of his conscience? And what if he is bereft of a conscience? Wouldn't they teach my daughter, who aspires to become a judge, that women are without the faculty of judgment and that it is a sin for a woman to judge, denying her the possibility of ever achieving her goal? Wouldn't they tell her that the testimony of one man is equivalent to the testimony of four women, with all the horrifying implications this may have? For example if three women testify that a man has committed a crime, it's sufficient that one man testifies to the contrary and that criminal would walk free! What effects would that kind of teaching have on the sensitive mind of my adolescent daughter who is trying to break free from the old stupid traditions and ridiculous religious superstitions? Wouldn't they drive her to deep depression and melancholy to live a life of deprivation and constant discrimination? Is it her fault that she was born into the body of a girl that she would have to be tortured in this manner?

Yes, I certainly feel more at "Home" here where my daughter is free and happy and can choose the subjects she wants to study without restrictions and discriminations.

Indeed I feel more at "Home" here where we can publish books, journals, and other publications, without having to take them to the Ministry of Religious Education for permission, where we would be denied permission if there are drawings in our publications depicting little girls without Islamic head cover! Yes, I am more at "Home" here in California where according to new laws many legal documents are being printed and made available in various languages apart from English, showing how open minded and liberal the government is, respecting all the inhabitants of the state equally without prejudice and discrimination, thus making me feel that I am free to speak in my mother tongue without feeling shame or inferiority.

So what gets into the heads of our people over here? In California, I have noticed that most Assyrians, especially the younger generations, look down on those who speak in Assyrian in public or private. They think that only villagers, or old or uneducated Assyrians or new refugees speak in Assyrian, whereas educated, well-established and modern Assyrians must speak in flawless English without accent. To them speaking in Assyrian is shameful!! Yet they come to Conventions, pretending that they are devoted Assyrians who are trying to work very hard to preserve our identity, language and culture. They even shed tears when they remember our fellow Assyrians in "Homeland"! These people remind me of my two-faced, hypocrite Muslim school friends. Surprisingly they all repeat the same empty words in their speeches as if they have been fed a formula that they feel they must echo. But unfortunately they sound like empty drums that make a lot of noise but do not have real substance as they are not backed by

anything tangible. Their unsubstantiated words are lost like echoes that perhaps resonate well only for a few moments, but are forgotten even by themselves. These people attend these meetings to show off, to be clapped, admired or even envied. But there's no substance in their claims. As soon as the Convention is over, they return to their homes, to their jobs or their university courses and to their "American" life as Americans and never as true Assyrians. They forget the Assyrian spirit until the next convention, where they will be given the chance once again to parade their duplicity and treason.

So really, what forces us to renounce our true identity outside that terrible "Homeland? Is it religion? Probably! It's true that we would feel ashamed if our son in law and daughter in law were called Hassan and Fatima; but we are more than proud if they are called Bob and Jane. Many parents boast of their non-Assyrian in-laws and how devoted they are to Christianity; and how 'better' they are than any possible Assyrian in-laws they could ever have. Yes, religion is one factor that gets into our heads. I have heard from many Assyrians that we are first of all Christians then Assyrians. Being Assyrian is a secondary and unimportant factor. In fact many Assyrians think that Assyrians are inferior to most Americans, Australians, Canadians and Europeans. In their eyes, any non-Assyrian Christian is far better than all Assyrians put together. I wonder where this self-hate and inferiority complex comes from! We are the same people, who in Islamic countries are proud to be Assyrian and would never give in to any pressure to forget our identity and convert in order to save ourselves from poverty and get lucrative jobs as Muslims do.

These 'Christian' lovers forget that no one is born "Christian", because then there wouldn't be Jews, Muslims, Hindus and followers of other religions. If God created people with their religion tagged on them, why would He create non-Christians? Wouldn't He in His love for humans create them all with the 'Christian' tag to be saved? It seems that when we are born, we are first given our DNAs through our parents, who are chosen for us. We don't choose our parents. If we were true Christians we would love and respect our parents. This is one of the first commandments and one mentioned by Christ. Loving and respecting our parents includes loving and respecting our forefathers, their identity, their culture, their language. When we claim that Christianity is more important to us because in fact, we are just too lazy to learn our own mother tongue, then our devotion to Christ becomes void. Christ knows our hearts and knows that we use Him for our own convenience. 'True' Assyrian Christians would first and foremost learn to speak, read and write in our mother tongue and would encourage everyone around them to speak and practice it all the time; and would teach it to those who don't know it. Making such silly excuses and saying 'Because our religion is more important to us, therefore we will renounce the identity that God has chosen for us, we will forget the language and the culture that God has trusted in our care and we will forsake the people that God has hand-picked and selected as our friends and relatives', makes our religion a mockery and presents us as Pharisees. Such people run away from their true 'calling', from the mission and purpose God has envisaged for them. What reply do they have for God when they meet him face to face? Don't Assyrians boast that Jesus spoke in our language? Then what would they say if He asks them why they didn't teach His language to their children?

The end result for Assyrians appears to be the same whether we live in Islamic countries or in the Free world: it is the Death of our nation. While in Islamic world they have been cutting our throats with swords, in the free world our throats are being cut with cotton wool (This is a famous Assyrian Saying: 'Cutting someone's throat with cotton wool'). Destroying a nation's language, culture, national pride and identity is equivalent to genocide. But we can change this.

Why cannot we change our definition of “Homeland”? Why isn’t “Homeland” the free countries where we are free to be who we are? Why isn’t “Homeland” the free countries where we can speak our language anywhere and everywhere? Why isn’t “Homeland” the free countries where we can publish books and journals in our own language without restrictions? All we have to do is to change our attitude towards ourselves. Why is it that being an Assyrian who can speak fluently in Assyrian is not ‘cool’? In fact, it’s the opposite that isn’t ‘cool’! Yes, it’s really ‘cool’ to speak Assyrian in Assyrian gatherings and it’s not ‘cool’ to speak in English or any other foreign language in Assyrian gatherings. Consider a British or American individual who cannot read or write in English. What would you think of this person? You would probably think he/she is either mentally retarded or crazy. Now consider a British or American individual who cannot even speak in English. It’s not even possible to think of or imagine such an individual, right? You would say it is an impossible joke and the guy is either an imbecile or fraud. Yet most Assyrian young individuals cannot read, write or even speak in Assyrian!! Isn’t that the most shameful and dishonorable thing in the world? Isn’t it utterly unacceptable not to be able to speak your own language? In particular it’s most deplorable when such young individuals give lectures about Assyrianism, while they cannot utter two complete sentences in Assyrian! It shows they are either sworn hypocrites or just traitors. Yes, traitors because they give a bad example to others and make it look ‘cool’ not to speak your language and not to care about preserving and strengthening it. This is how ‘cutting the neck with cotton wool’ works. These traitors are working hard to kill our youth with this image they impose on everyone. Many ask: ‘Who are these traitors?’ Yet, they put on a superior air and pride themselves for not speaking in Assyrian! They are proud for being imbeciles and frauds! Personally I think these people are either mentally retarded since they cannot see the image they project of themselves in the eyes of the world or have very grave psychological problems. In either case, they should consult specialists to get a cure.

Of course some complain that their parents have not taught them to speak. This is true in many instances and the young people are the real victims in such cases. I have noticed that when a group of Assyrian adults meet and greet each other in Assyrian language, as soon as children show up, the adults turn and address them in a foreign language like English as if those poor souls are some sort of aliens that have emerged from outer space. The children are denied the privilege of being considered like ordinary Assyrians. An acquaintance, born and raised in England, confided in me saying that he didn’t fit anywhere for when he was with the English he felt he was Assyrian but when he was among the Assyrians he found he was different and didn’t really belong. He couldn’t understand the Assyrian language well and when he tried to speak two words with his accent, the Assyrian listeners, even his parents and relatives, mocked him instead of encouraging and coaxing him to speak more. He was completely a lost soul and it was hard for him to find good friends. That’s what negligent parents, who are the true traitors, do to our future generations.

The other important point the speaker mentioned that left an impression on me was that he was advising the Assyrian youth in USA to create bonds with other Assyrian youth groups in other countries in order to establish an international leadership for Assyrians. That sounds very good, but my question is: “How are these illiterate young Assyrians of USA going to establish ties with other Assyrians?” I suppose the speaker, who in a former talk some years ago was claiming that English is lingua franca, thinks or expects that all other people in the world must speak in English, without exception. This expectation is completely false because although perhaps the most famous scientific journals and articles are printed in English, but English is



very far from being lingua franca and most people including Assyrians living in non-English-speaking countries cannot understand or speak in English. Nowadays all nations in the world are striving to promote their own national language. In International meetings, each participant can listen to another's speech which may be delivered in any non-English language and understand it because it is simultaneously translated to his/her mother tongue in real time. Even a website such as The World History Encyclopedia has the following advertisement:

## Translations

We want people all over the world to learn about history. Help us and **translate this article** into another language!

It is a myth to think of English as the sole international language that all the people are supposed to know. That myth was dead and gone long ago. Perhaps one day with the help of AI, it will not be necessary to learn any foreign language because by means of AI people will be able to speak in their own mother tongue and be understood; and simultaneously understand in real time others who are speaking in other languages. But for the time being, the Assyrian language is the only language that can be used to communicate within the Assyrian community and with other Assyrians in the world. And since the Assyrian youth of USA are completely illiterate and retarded (retarded because it seems they are just unable to learn to speak Assyrian), they cannot establish any ties with anyone across the borders. But I'm certain that among themselves they are thinking of going out there and ordering all other Assyrian young people what they should do and expect complete loyalty and obedience! This false and unshakable pride the Assyrian leadership in USA has established about itself, considering themselves above everybody else, and the rulers of the Assyrian world (!! ) is completely comical and despicable. This view of the Assyrian world and the place of the Assyrians of USA in it seems incredibly naive and limited. No other Assyrian youth will accept to be bulldozed by the Assyrian youth of USA especially if none of these "American" Assyrians can even speak decently in Assyrian. To be the leader of a people you must first know to speak the language of those people fluently, and be able to understand what they have to say, otherwise it's all a mockery and self deception.

We need to get this fact into the heads of our Assyrian leaders in the world that Assyrian is the only language of this nation and not English, or French or German, or any other foreign language. And that they must organize the national and international meetings of Assyrians in Assyrian language and not in any foreign language if they claim that their mission is to preserve our nation, its culture and language. I wonder if this fact will ever penetrate their heads!