

**Studien zu Ritual und Sozialgeschichte
im Alten Orient**

*Studies on Ritual and Society
in the Ancient Near East*

Tartuer Symposien 1998-2004

**Herausgegeben von
Thomas Richard Kämmerer**

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Vorwort

Nachdem im Herbstsemester 1997 und Frühjahrssemester 1998 die ersten Vorlesungen und Seminare in „Altorientalischen Sprachen und Kulturen“ sowohl bei den Kollegen der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Tartu, Estland, als auch bei den Studierenden ganz unterschiedlicher Fächer auf großes Interesse gestoßen waren, entwickelte sich die Idee, an der Theologischen Fakultät zusätzlich eine Fachtagung im Bereich der interdisziplinären Ostmittelmeerforschung durchzuführen. Es gelang im darauffolgenden Herbstsemester 1998, eine Eröffnungstagung zu organisieren, deren Erfolg dazu führte, zu dieser Tagung nun jährlich einzuladen. Seit 1999 ist dieser Kongress fester Bestandteil des akademischen Angebotes der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Tartu. 2006 beteiligte sich darüber hinaus auch die Abteilung Geschichte der Philosophischen Fakultät, und mit dem nächsten, bereits in Planung befindlichen Kongress wird sich auch die Abteilung der Klassischen Philologie der Philosophischen Fakultät anschließen, so dass nun die Organisation dieses Kongresses bei den zwei oben genannten Fakultäten mit ihren drei Fachbereichen Altorientalistik, Geschichte und Klassische Philologie liegen wird.

Für das Gelingen der Kongresse richtet sich der Dank an die Studierenden des Lehrstuhls für Altorientalische Sprachen und Kulturen der Theologischen Fakultät, die mitgeholfen haben, die Kongresse zu ermöglichen: Herr Kahrut Eller, Herr Peeter Espak, Frau Helena Liigi, Frau Ave Paulus, Frau Ave Pölenik, Herr Vladimir Sazonov, Frau Jaana Strumpe, Frau Marie Umming, Herr Raul Veede und Herr Ivo Volt. Besonderer Dank gilt Frau Aira Vösa und Herrn Dr. Amar Annus für die Übersetzung wie auch für die Zusammenstellung der Artikel und dem Verlag de Gruyter, dort besonders Frau Sabina Dabrowski, die es ermöglicht haben, die Drucklegung dieses ersten Bandes vorzunehmen. Ein ganz besonderer Dank gilt den Herausgebern von BZAW, die diesen ersten Tartuer Kongressband in ihre Reihe mit aufgenommen haben. Nicht unerwähnt bleiben darf die finanzielle Unterstützung der Universität Tartu und ihrer Theologischen Fakultät, sowie der Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Tallinn.

Einleitung

Dem Herausgeber ist es Freude und Genugtuung, nun unter dem Titel „Interdisciplinary Studies of the Ancient East-Mediterranean“ einen ersten Band vorlegen zu können. Dieser Band enthält die überarbeiteten Versionen von Vorträgen, die während der ersten fünf internationalen Symposien in den Jahren 1998 bis 2004 in Tartu gehalten wurden.

Diese Symposien wurden vom Lehrstuhl für Altorientalische Sprachen und Kulturen der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Tartu organisiert.

Der Teilnehmerkreis setzt sich vorwiegend aus Wissenschaftlern zusammen, die aus Deutschland, England, den USA und Finnland kommen. Kollegen aus Russland haben sich inzwischen ebenfalls angeschlossen. Ihnen allen gilt besonderer Dank, da sie mit ihrer Einwilligung zur Veröffentlichung ihrer Vorträge das Entstehen dieser neuen Reihe zur Ostmittelmeerforschung ermöglicht haben.

So liegt der Wert der Tartuer Symposien zusammen mit ihrem nunmehr entstandenen Publikationsorgan vor allem darin, dass sich in Tartu Kollegen vor allem aus West- und Osteuropa zusammenfinden, zum einen um über fachspezifische Probleme der Religionsgeschichte, Medizingeschichte, Linguistik des Antiken Ostmittelmeerraumes sowie der dazugehörigen Archäologie zu sprechen, zum anderen aber auch Fragen zu erörtern, die speziell in der Lage der jeweiligen Institute und Organisationen in Osteuropa begründet liegen. Die Ergebnisse dieser Forschungen der Fachwelt zugänglich zu machen, fördert ganz allgemein die Akzeptanz einer in Estland neu gegründeten, wissenschaftlichen Disziplin und erschließt nicht zuletzt gerade dadurch bei der jüngeren, estnisch-sprachigen Generation zusätzliche Interessensgebiete neu.

Es gilt grundsätzlich, dass die Artikel des vorliegenden Bandes alphabetisch nach Autorennamen sortiert sind und nicht dem tatsächlichen Ablauf der jeweiligen Symposien entsprechen. Die einzelnen Symposien hatten bis 2007 folgende Themenschwerpunkte, wobei in diesem ersten Band nur die Manuskripte Aufnahme fanden, die in der Zeit von 1999–2004 als Vorträge gehalten wurden:

1. Eröffnungssymposium: „Zur Einführung in die Altorientalistik“ (Herbst 1998),
2. Symposium: „Mesopotamien und dessen Beziehungen zu den Nachbarregionen“ (26. April – 28. April 1999),
3. Symposium: „Gesellschaftliche Beziehungen im Alten Vorderen Orient“ (24. April – 27. April 2000).

Das für das Jahr 2001 geplante Symposium wurde mit dem internationalen Assyriologenkongress (RAI), der gemeinsam von den Universitäten Helsinki (Finnland) und Tartu (Estland) organisiert wurde, zusammengelegt.

4. Symposium: „Kunst und Magie im Alten Vorderen Orient“ (22. April – 25. April 2002),
5. Symposium: „Zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften des Alten Vorderen Orients: Sektion Medizingeschichte“ (28. April – 01. Mai 2003),
6. Symposium: „Magie und Religion“ (26. April – 28. April 2004),
7. Symposium: „Mesopotamien und die Mittelmeerregionen“ (25. April – 27. April 2005),
8. Symposium: „Zur Geschichte des Transfers von Techniken im Mittelmeerraum“ (22. Mai – 24. Mai 2006),
9. Symposium: „Ideologien im Antiken Ost-Mittelmeerraum: vergleichende Annäherungen“ (04. Juni – 07. Juni 2007).

Auf Grund des Erfolges und der neuen, interdisziplinären Ausrichtung des neunten und der zukünftigen Symposien, bedingt durch die Gründung des „Baltic Branchs of the Fondazione Mediterraneo (BBFM)“ an der Universität Tartu werden die Publikationen des „International Congress for East-Mediterranean Studies (ICAEM)“ unter dem Zeitschriftennamen „Acta Mediterranea Tartuensia“ (AcMT) erscheinen.

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The Soul's Ascent and Tauroctony: On Babylonian Sediment in the Syncretic Religious Doctrines of Late Antiquity

Amar Annus, Tartu

Introduction

This paper tries to investigate some important concepts in the syncretic world of the religions of late antiquity with respect to its Mesopotamian heritage.¹ These features include the origin of Gnostic archons, the doctrines of fate, the soul's ascent and descent and its clothing, and some concepts especially pertinent to Mithraism such as grade systems, Mithras' rockbirth, and the tauroctony. Before giving an account of the Mesopotamian sediments in the religions of late antiquity perhaps a justification of the endeavour is in order. Apart from the pan-Babylonian school, there were some other scholars in the first half of the 20th century who admitted Mesopotamian influence on the late antique religions, most notably W. Anz (1897), F. Cumont (1912; 1949) and G. Widengren (1946). For example, according to the famous dictum of Franz Cumont, the mysteries of Mithras derived its origins from ancient Persia, and subsequently were deposited in Babylonia with "a thick sediment of Semitic doctrines" (*un sédiment épais de doctrines sémitiques*).²

In the second half of the 20th century, the Mesopotamian influences on the religions of late antiquity have for a quite long time been out of fashion, and the "Babylonian sediments" have never been systematically

1 The publication of this paper was supported by Estonian Science Foundation grant, number 6625. The materials used for it were gathered during 2003–2005, when I was working as the assistant of the Internet Database *Melammu* for the Intellectual Heritage of Assyria and Babylonia in East and West, under the Institute of Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, see <http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>.

2 F. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, 3rd edition, 1913, p. 27.

studied. This has led many scholars to think that Cumont's verdict was mistaken and any similar endeavour is probably based on a misapprehension. For example, a recent account of the genesis of the mysteries of Mithras, which postulates a founding group at the end of the first century AD among the dependents of the dynasty of Commagene,

looks again to Anatolia and to an Anatolian group steeped in an Iranian religious tradition. These, however, are not the Hellenized Mazdean magi, the *Magousaioi*, to whom Cumont remained so attached as Mithraism's putative ancestors. They are a less diffuse group and one whose devotion to Mithras may be inferred directly from the much heralded devotion of their dynastic patrons to that god. In an economy that is surely a desirable feature of any such account, this group also becomes the origin of another component of the Mysteries, the astrologically based cosmology, which Cumont located more distantly in space and time, in Babylon as the Semitic 'stratum' and contribution to Mithraism (Beck 1998: 125).

The present paper diverges from this stream of scholarship that refrains from recognition of any genuinely ancient elements in the syncretic religions of late antiquity, but rather tries to investigate some key concepts in these religions from a point of view of continuity of the ancient Mesopotamian ones. In the following pages, I will try first to show that the concept of Hellenistic astrology, which assumed the determination of mundane affairs from the influences of the movements of the seven planetary gods, derived quite obviously from Mesopotamian divination. Secondly, it will be my concern to show that the grade systems, so characteristic of the mystery religions, and especially of Mithraism, were also current in ancient Mesopotamia. The soul's gradual descent or genesis and its ascent or apogenesis in the late antique religions have several antecedents in the Mesopotamian myths and rituals, most prominently in the myth of the descent and ascent of the goddess Inanna/Ištar. The seven grades of the soul's ascent and descent can be shown to be related to the stations of the seven planetary gods in Mesopotamia. The investment and divestment of the soul with seven different kinds of qualities during its descent into bodily existence and ascent to the heavenly realm can be seen as parallel to the clothing and stripping metaphor in the Mesopotamian myth. Finally, I find parallels of the most important iconographic symbol of Mithraism, that of Mithras killing the bull, to the episode in the Epic of Gilgamesh, where Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the Bull of Heaven. Although I am not the first to put forward this

connection, deeper analysis has been still lacking. The Bull of Heaven as the name of the constellation Taurus in Mesopotamia may have a relevance to the astrological interpretation of the main iconographic symbol in Mithraism, and other details in the Epic of Gilgamesh can point to a possibility of later astronomical interpretation. The late antiquity evidence quoted or referred to comes from a variety of sources, assuming that these doctrines of ultimately Mesopotamian origin were syncretically represented in several schools of late antiquity, including Mandeism and Syrian Christianity.

The Seven Gods of Destinies

The gods fixing destinies for the king and his people is a pivotal theme in Mesopotamian literature. The royal fates were fixed in the assembly of the gods, and the most important decisions were made in the main temple of the religious centre of the land, in Nippur, or Babylon (see Annus 2002: 21-61). In the Sumerian composition “Enlil and Ninlil”, which can be with certainty dated to the 21st century BCE, the gods who determined the destinies in Nippur are referred to as “the fifty great gods and the seven gods who decide destinies”.³ Exactly the same configuration is mentioned in the much later composed Babylonian Creation Epic VI 80–81, in the context of decreeing Marduk’s lofty status: “The fifty great gods took their seats; the seven gods of destinies were confirmed for rendering judgement.”⁴

In the Sumerian texts, the decreeing of royal destiny appears frequently in the context of enthronement of a new king. In the first millennium BCE, an assembly of gods decrees the destinies of the king, who represents Marduk (or Bēl “the Lord”), and of the Babylonian people at the New Year festival, and the passage cited from the Creation Epic refers to this occasion. The New Year festival *akītu* was the most important

3 In Sumerian, lines 56–57: *dingir gal-gal 50-ne-ne dingir nam tar-ra 7-na-ne-ne*. See the edition of the text in the home page of the *Electronic Text Corpus of the Sumerian Literature* (ETCSL), <http://etcs.lorinst.ox.ac.uk/> under 1.2.1. From this electronic database are extracted all English translations of Sumerian texts in present paper.

4 In Akkadian: *ilāni rabūti hamšatunu ušibu-ma ilāni šimāti sebūšunu ana purussē uktinnu*. See the latest edition by Talon 2005. There is no consensus in dating the composition of this epic – the present writer opts for the middle of the second millennium BCE, see Annus 2002: 37–39.

religious festivity in Babylonia, and it continued to be celebrated until Roman times. From the Hellenistic period onwards, an *akītu* festival was celebrated in honour of these several Bēls, and not necessarily in the month of Nisan:

Cults of Bel continued to flourish during the Parthian period both within and outside areas controlled at times by Rome: at Palmyra, Dura, Apamea-on-Orontes and Hatra the cult or at least its buildings appear to be newly emerged, but at Ashur, Arbela, Harran and Babylon powerful traditions of great antiquity have survived into the Roman period. The language in which the epic of creation was recited began as Babylonian, but creeping Aramaicisation may have resulted eventually in an all-Aramaic version. (Dalley 1995: 150–51.)

The mythological concept of the seven gods forming an assembly for decreeing the destinies for the whole world and writing them down on the Tablet of Destinies formed the backbone of the later practice of horoscopy, which emerged only in the Achaemenid period. The planets were associated with the gods already in the second millennium BCE Mesopotamian celestial omen texts. The planetary gods were treated as persons, because the protases of celestial omens refer to the actions or appearances of the planets and stars not appropriate to inanimate objects, but rather as anthropomorphic beings with agency and feeling. Furthermore, the anthropomorphic references in the celestial omens are to gods. For example, instead of simply stating, that there was a lunar eclipse, normally expressed by the Babylonian term *attalû* “eclipse”, the moon, in anthropomorphic guise, is described as “mourning” or “feeling distress”. The lunar eclipse was understood in terms of the distress of the moon god (Rochberg 1996: 478). The heavenly bodies were quite often personified as gods, and the metaphorical terms of description refer in each case to the particular deity of which the heavenly body was considered to be a manifestation (Rochberg 2004: 72, 167-73).

The seven gods were associated with the planets as follows – Šamaš with Sun, Sin with Moon, Jupiter with Marduk (= Bēl), Saturn with Adad, Mercury with Nabû or Ninurta, Venus with Ištar, and Mars with Nergal. According to the canonical Babylonian texts of the first millennium BCE, listing cultic topography, the Marduk’s temple in Babylon, called Esagil, contained the Dais of Destinies where the two assemblies of the gods convened for making decisions on the 8th and 11th of Nisan, and which

was equipped with seats for the seven destiny-decreeing gods (see Annus 2002: 76-81).

An aspect of the Mesopotamian gods, who formed an assembly to determine heavenly and mundane affairs, was revealed in planetary orientations (Rochberg 2004: 187-90). The decisions of fate were read from the night sky by learned men, who composed and used compendia of celestial omens. The assembly of Mesopotamian gods was thought to rule over the society and to be represented on earth by the Assyrian or Babylonian state council. The functional relationship in Mesopotamian divination was between the deities, the givers of signs, and humankind, for whose benefit the signs were given. The predictions given for the signs, the apodoses of the omens were sometimes called *purussá*, “(divine) decisions” (Rochberg 2004: 53, 59). In the Mesopotamian system of divination, agency is placed in the gods, who decide what events will happen on earth in association with ominous celestial phenomena (*ibid.*: 266-67).

The notion of the gods’ assembly also forms the ideological background for the cuneiform horoscopes, which are based on the idea of ascribing the planetary alignment at the moment of birth to the life and fortune of an individual. Surviving Babylonian horoscopes all date to the second half of the first millennium (see Rochberg 1998). From this branch of Babylonian astrological practice developed Hellenistic Greek genethliology that is at the base of later astrological doctrines. The evidence for Babylonian influence on Greek astrology:

derives largely from the later periods of cuneiform tradition, i.e., the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods. The most fundamental tool for Greek astrology, the zodiac, is of Babylonian origin in the fifth century. Not only is the Babylonian origin of the zodiac assured on the basis of cuneiform documentation, but, as Neugebauer has demonstrated from the deviation (= 5°) between modern longitudes and those given in Greek horoscopes, the astrological literature of hellenistic and Roman period continued to use the norming point of the Babylonian zodiac (Aries 8° or 10°). In two cases, the exaltations (hypsomata) and the forerunners of trine aspect, textual evidence traces the origins of these doctrines to the seventh century and even earlier traditions in the celestial omens of Enūma Anu Enlil. The Babylonian elements which can be pinpointed as direct contributions to Greek astrology, specifically, the planetary exaltations, the dodekatemoria, and trine aspect, represent significant features of the later system.” (Rochberg-Halton 1988: 61.)

The Babylonian horoscopes represent a significant departure from the earlier Babylonian celestial divination, as represented by the omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, which always retained its concern with public matters – king and state. Babylonian horoscopy combines this with the tradition of birth omens, in which the birth had mantic significance in the way of any action occurring on a certain month and day, just as is seen in menologies and hemerologies, and finally, the personal divination such as is represented by the physiognomic omen series. In this way, the Babylonian “horoscopy” grew out from a complex foundation of interrelated mantic forms: the date of birth omen, the personal omen, the celestial omen and the nativity omen (Rochberg 1999-2000: 240–241).

Given the overwhelming evidence which we have for the influence of Babylonian celestial sciences on Hellenistic astrology and astronomy, it is not difficult to believe that the seven planetary gods involved in the late antique science of the celestial spheres were of Mesopotamian origin.⁵ Deities or angels as planets or planetary spheres were considered in late antiquity as the divine powers who rule the physical universe and as such they corresponded to gnostic archons. In a fashion characteristic to Gnosticism, both the Jewish creator god and the Mesopotamian gods were demonized as evil beings. The number of archons was seven like the number of gods, who were involved in astral fatalism. In the gnostic texts the former Mesopotamian gods were transformed into evil archons, governing the physical universe under the service of the evil creator god. The term *kosmokratores* was frequently used for planets in the Greek magical papyri, personified as rulers of the heavenly spheres, sometimes regarded as evil.⁶

Thus the Mesopotamian religion and literary works must be considered as one of many resources for the developing branches of Gnosticism. In the Nag Hammadi treatise *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (92, 4ff) there is a passage which curiously resembles the Mesopotamian account of the Flood, the only difference being that instead of the “great gods” there are “archons”, and the god Ea is represented as “the ruler of the

5 Another case is the recently published astronomical papyri from Oxyrhynchus, which show that some types of Hellenistic astronomical texts are partially very similar to those extant in cuneiform. See Jones, A. *Astronomical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus* (P. Oxy. 4133–4300a). Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 223. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1999. See also Rochberg 2004: 34–35, 237–44.

6 See D. E. Aune in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (E.J. Brill, 1996) col. 154.

forces". The passage, however, is by no means a rewording of the biblical flood story:

Then mankind began to multiply and improve. The rulers took counsel with one another and said, "Come, let us cause a deluge with our hands and obliterate all flesh, from man to beast." But when the ruler of the forces came to know of their decision, he said to Noah, "Make yourself an ark from some wood that does not rot and hide in it - you and your children and the beasts and the birds of heaven from small to large - and set it upon Mount Sir."⁷

This is a legacy of the Mesopotamian notion of the divine assembly, consisting of seven destiny-decreeing gods and their irrevocable decisions. The religions of Hellenistic and Roman periods witnessed a high point of astrological determinism, astrology was an element of general education in that period, and astronomy as a science was more developed than ever before. Also in the Hellenistic world, the planets were associated with gods:

The acceptance of astrology led to a growing belief that the dwelling place of the gods was in the realm of the stars. For example, it was during the Hellenistic period that it became the standard practice to call the planets by the names of various Greek gods, such as Zeus (Jupiter) and Ares (Mars). Astrology also encouraged a new conception of life after death, according to which the soul did not go to the underworld, as had earlier been believed, but rather rose through the planetary spheres to the sphere of the fixed stars and then to the paradise that lay beyond the outermost sphere. In time this journey came to be imagined as difficult and dangerous, with secret passwords required to cross each planetary threshold (Ulansey 1989: 133).

One may conclude that in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, stars as gods virtually formed the divine government over the events of the cosmos. While for large masses of people this was a welcome device for explaining the world, still by others, consisting of the limited number of devotees of salvation religions, this acknowledged truth was regarded as calamitous. The rule of astral bodies over the society was probably better approved by upper classes and more fortunate ones in life, while hostility to the *status quo* can be associated with lower classes and the victims of

⁷ Translation by R. A. Bullard and B. Layton, see Robinson 1996: 166. For the Babylonian Flood Story in the Epic of Gilgamesh, see George 2003: 508ff. and 700ff. The name of the mountain Sir probably derives from the name Nisir in Babylonian source, where Utnapištim's boat landed, although the name can also be read Nimuš.