

The Shape of Stories: Narrative Structures in Cuneiform Literature. Edited by SOPHUS HELLE and GINA KONSTANTOPOLOS. Cuneiform Monographs, vol. 54. BRILL, 2023. Pp. xi + 354. \$155.

This volume opens with an outstanding introduction (penned by Helle and Konstantopoulos) notable for its succinctness, clarity, and breadth. Its comprehensive bibliographical overview of narratological studies in Assyriology is especially welcome and will greatly aid scholars embarking on their own narratologically focused Assyriological research.

In “Recurrent Structures in the Sumerian Gilgamesh Cycle,” Alhena Gadotti goes against the generally held view that the five known Sumerian poems centered around Gilgamesh are separate compositions. Gadotti argues—as also more fully elsewhere (2014)—that they form a “Gilgamesh Cycle,” opening with *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* and ending with *The Death of Gilgamesh* (pp. 33–34). While this proposal is not without its difficulties (see discussion in Gadotti 2014: 88–90), Gadotti’s analysis, which centers on patterns and resonances in the hypothesized cycle, is compelling. Particularly notable is the observation that the Netherworld’s role in the cycle’s first and last compositions creates a ring structure, paralleling the wall-bounded ring structure of the Standard Babylonian version (p. 36). The argument that the Euphrates River fulfills a similar function in the cycle by “winding through” the separate compositions (pp. 39–42) is less convincing: While the river is invoked by name and plays a major role in *The Death of Gilgamesh*, it is less clear that it plays such a role in *Gilgamesh and Huwawa A*, and much less in *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* (see Gadotti 2014: 18–19). Other themes and motifs tying the texts together are reviewed: the transition between the human and divine worlds (pp. 42–44), recurring characters (pp. 45–47), and common phraseology concerning Gilgamesh’s weapons (pp. 47–48).

After laying out the formal characteristics of literary narratives as formulated by a selection of literary theorists, the most important being a blend of transition and cohesion (pp. 53–58), Robert Marineau (“Transition and Cohesion in the Tale of Zalpa”) persuasively demonstrates that the Hittite *Tale of Zalpa* combines change and continuity in a way that matches modern theories of narrative. This is done by identifying and citing three types of links in the text: phrases used to transition between different units of the story (pp. 60–61); resonances between nearby passages (pp. 61–62); and two links, both involving recurring verbs, between the story’s beginning and much later events (pp. 69–70). The links of the third kind are especially intriguing: To take the example of the second, which involves the verb *dā-*, “to take,” the gods rescue infant princes by “taking” them into their care, and these princes later “take” their sisters after failing, through divine intervention, to recognize them as their siblings.

In a welcome addition to the study of the inner dynamics of Mesopotamian literary works, Louise Pryke (“Unreliable Foreshadowing in Divine Predictions”) analyzes instances of a type of textual foreshadowing whereby “major events are preceded by a speech from a divine character outlining the shape of things to come” (p. 76). Pryke discusses the implications of this kind of foreshadowing, which often proves imperfect or outright inaccurate in anticipating the future, for Mesopotamian conceptions of divine omniscience or the lack thereof (pp. 77–79). Pryke then moves through four Mesopotamian compositions—*Gilgamesh*, *Inanna and Ebiḫ*, *Inanna’s Descent*, and *Adapa*—while investigating divine foreshadowing in each case. Two especially compelling observations can be singled out. First, the (human) Šamḫat’s warning to Enkidu in Tablet I that he should refrain from confronting Gilgamesh in view of the god’s favor for the latter foreshadows the divine council’s decision in Tablet VII to favor Gilgamesh over Enkidu by dooming the latter rather than the former to death (p. 77). Second, *Inanna and Ebiḫ* inverts the expected hierarchy of knowledge between the deliverer of foreshadowing and its recipient: The god An cautions Inanna not to fight the deified mountain Ebiḫ, speaking of its fearsomeness, but Inanna attacks the mountain and prevails over it, with her triumph indicating the limitations of An’s knowledge and her own superior judgment (pp. 81–82).

In “Tablets as Narrative Episodes in Akkadian Poetry,” Sophus Helle begins by pointing out that “[p]erhaps the best-known fact about Babylonian epics is that they were told on clay tablets, but the narratological consequences of that fact remain unstudied” (p. 93). Helle endeavors to fill this lacuna when it comes to *Gilgamesh* and *Enūma eliš*, eloquently showing that the narrative structures of the individual tablets of *Gilgamesh* evince the same meticulous deliberation as that of the poem as a whole,

and demonstrating how investigating these structures adds to our grasp of the poem (pp. 96–100, 108). This discussion of *Enūma eliš* centers on Marduk's birth and his subsequent toying with the winds given to him by his grandfather Anu. After noting (pp. 102–3) that these events result both in Tiamat's decision to kill her children later in Tablet I (negative) and Marduk's eventual ascendance to divine kingship (positive), Helle writes, "Tablet I and the epic thus use Marduk's birth to tell two entirely different stories" (p. 103), and argues that the former, negative, "story" may imply subtle criticism of Marduk (pp. 104–5). However, that Marduk's birth and youthful play create problems that he himself is destined to solve—one is reminded of the tales of Moses and of Perseus—is more readily interpreted as a means to create dramatic effect, an interpretation Helle also puts forward as a possibility (p. 103).

In "Dynamics of Repetition in Akkadian Literature" Selena Wisnom offers the reader a host of interpretive strategies focused on the understudied topic of repetition in Akkadian literature. These strategies, which draw inspiration from musical theory, may be divided into two main groups: structural and affective-cognitive. While employing those of the former group, Wisnom takes a bird's-eye view, delineating units of repeated text ("motifs") within separate compositions—here *Enūma eliš*, *Anzū*, and *Gilgamesh*—and then mapping out and analyzing the possible significance of patterns in their repetition (pp. 118–32). While utilizing those of the latter group, Wisnom hypothesizes as to the affective and cognitive effects of repetition in different cases—for instance, the creation of tension or trance, or the speeding up or slowing down of time (pp. 132–38). Wisnom's insights are innovative and compelling, and this rich essay, like Helle's, showcases the utility of investigating precisely those aspects of Mesopotamian literary texts that diverge from contemporary literary practice and preference.

Gina Konstantopoulos ("Charting Emotional Structure in Cuneiform Literature") applies Kurt Vonnegut's emotional patterning of stories—a method of narrative analysis whereby the emotional arc of the protagonist(s) is sketched out a like mathematical function—to Sumerian and Akkadian texts. She begins with two compositions centering on the hero Lugalbanda, *Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave* and *Lugalbanda and Anzu* (pp. 149–61). These, Konstantopoulos argues, form a cohesive "duology," which the author terms *Lugalbanda in the Wilderness*. Konstantopoulos convincingly maps out the emotional journey undergone by Lugalbanda across these two texts, providing a Vonnegut-style visualization (p. 155), and insightfully analyzes how Lugalbanda is transformed by his adventures. These discussions persuasively demonstrate that the "full arc" of Lugalbanda's transformation "is only coherently expressed if and when the two texts are considered as one narrative whole" (p. 159), thereby lending support to Konstantopoulos's construal of them as a duology. The analysis of the "emotional shape" of *Gilgamesh and Huwawa A* (pp. 161–69) is likewise persuasive, as is that of Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* (pp. 169–76)—with the visualization of the latter (p. 174) effectively bringing home the point that *Gilgamesh* ends the poem's eleventh tablet having returned "to where he started: wiser but, as in the beginning, alone" (p. 174).

Beatrice Baragli ("Representing Time in the Kiutu Incantation Prayers") undertakes a narratological analysis of Kiutu-incantations—texts addressed to the sun god Utu on behalf of a patient and meant, along with accompanying ritual actions, to effect recovery. Paying careful attention to the narratological choices involved in the composition of one especially important Kiutu ("Kiutu A"), Baragli analyses how the text presents the mythological events it describes. This Baragli does while focusing on *order* (pp. 196–99)—that is, the order in which the text opts to speak of events, whether confirmed or potential, from the past, present, and future (that is, vis-à-vis its dawn-time ritual recitation); *rhythm* (pp. 199–200)—the alternation between descriptions of action and timeless nonaction (enumeration of epithets, for example); *duration* (pp. 200–201)—the relationship between the length of described events and the number of lines the text devotes to them; and *frequency* (p. 201)—the relationship between the number of times events happen and how many times the text refers to them. The essay's narratological terminology, adapted from Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, is sometimes hard to follow, yet Baragli's insights are well considered and do much to illuminate Kiutu A, thus indicating the general utility of narratologically analyzing magical-ritual texts.

Near the beginning of "Historical Explanations in the Babylonian Chronicles," Ben Dewar notes that scholars have traditionally regarded the so-called Babylonian Chronicles as objective and accurate but Assyrian royal inscriptions as heavily biased (p. 211). By comparing one Babylonian chronicle

(ABC 1) with Assyrian royal inscriptions describing the same events, Dewar draws this assessment into question, astutely showing (pp. 215–17) how the author(s) of ABC 1 actively molded historical events to fit their Elam-centric interpretive agenda. After a theoretical interlude (pp. 218–23), Dewar discusses the role played by Elamite kings in the text. Earlier, Dewar had cited Caroline Waerzeggers' argument (2021) that ABC 1 creates a "profile" of the Elamite king as "a victor over Assyria" (p. 215). Later (pp. 223–28) it is argued that since some Elamite kings never come to Babylonia's aid in the text, and other, more active Elamite monarchs help win the day for Babylonia only to be felled by illness or death, this characterization is not uniformly applicable, and the Elamite king's profile rather "alternates between active and passive" (p. 226). Yet one may argue that this is no contradiction, for Dewar's observation that in ABC 1 the Assyrians are defeated whenever the Elamite king takes the field but are victorious when he is unwilling or unable to do so is consistent with Waerzeggers' aforementioned textual "profile."

The earliest known copy of the Sumerian King List (SKL), a text long known only—and still known chiefly—from Old Babylonian copies, was written during the reign of the Ur III king Shulgi. Gösta Gabriel ("The 'Prehistory' of the Sumerian King List and Its Narrative Residue"), reasoning chiefly according to political *qui bono*, infers (pp. 241–45) a developmental history for the text up to the point of the Ur III manuscript, thus positing a specific "prehistory" for it: 1) an initial, pre-Akkadian recension listing only the kings of Kish, the city into which "kingship descended from heaven"; 2) an Akkadian version, which added to the Kishite one the reigns of the kings of Uruk and Agade, cities to which kingship was transferred from Kish, and thus transforming SKL's conception of history from one of stability into one of change; and 3) the addition of the kings of Gutium and of one ruler of Uruk, Utu-hegal, during the reign of Utu-hegal himself. Gabriel then analyzes the historical outlook of each of these hypothetical recensions (pp. 246–50). These analyses are compelling, and especially noteworthy is the formulation of a textual strategy of "subordination through inclusion" (p. 249), whereby Akkadian scribes, for instance, might have added to SKL accounts of Uruk's past hegemony in order to highlight Agade's contemporaneous dominance over it.

Claudio Sansone's "Blank Space: Akkadian Metapoetics in the Bel-etir Narrative," innovative in argumentation and broad in intellectual outlook, discusses with diligence and imagination the meaning of a blank space left in a highly unusual text, likely composed during the reign of Ashurbanipal and known from a single manuscript, which lambasts a man by the name of Bel-etir in ways both highly colorful and hard to understand. After lucidly outlining the text's complex structure (pp. 267–68), Sansone discusses how the text satirizes, and thus implicitly calls into question, Assyrian royal inscriptions (pp. 270–72); reflects on various possible ramifications, affective and intellectual, of the blank space itself (pp. 273–75); and dissects the anxieties that may have motivated the composition of the text and its subversion of contemporaneous poetic and political discourse (pp. 276–79).

Finally, "In Search of Dumuzi: An Introduction to Hylistic Narratology," by Annette Zgoll, Bénédicte Cuperley, and Annika Cöster-Gilbert, serves to introduce the field of "hylistics, i.e., the study of narrative materials or *Erzählstoff-Forschung*" (p. 285; from Greek ὕλη, "raw material, stuff"). This "theoretical-methodological framework," writes Zgoll, "allows us to reconstruct narrative raw materials for the first time" (p. 308). The "narrative materials" in question are, in this case, mythological, with the "fabrics weaved" from them being mythological texts. Zgoll gives a preliminary overview of this approach and discusses how we can "analyze the shape of texts through the reconstruction of narrative material." As case studies, Cuperley presents an analysis of the "long" and "short" versions of "The Fly Reveals Dumuzi's Whereabouts to Innana" in *Innana's Descent*, while Cöster-Gilbert considers "Ershema no. 165." This contribution will be especially useful for readers more comfortable with English than German. It should be said, however, that its length of fifty-six pages (not including appendices and bibliography), along with its density of terminology, detail, and argumentation, may be challenging for those unfamiliar with the field.

The Shape of Stories is a rich and fascinating contribution to the study of the structure of cuneiform texts, one offering considerable value to scholars and students of cuneiform literature as well as Classics, biblical studies, and comparative literature.

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