otherwise fixed social and political classes, in both formal and informal ways. Viewed from an imperial capital like Babylon, Susa, or Persepolis, Marduk-rēmanni was probably not all that unique. Rather, he was one of any number of locals who leveraged their local standing and connections into work with an imperial power (it is therefore not surprising that, as Waerzeggers shows, his trips to Susa afforded networking opportunities). The view from Sippar shifts the focus, and Waerzeggers' social network analysis exposes the untidiness of navigating the worlds of aristocratic politics and upstart commerce at the same time. With his extended family network, peripatetic life, and diverse contacts, I wonder if Marduk-rēmanni would have even identified as a Sipparean. As I understand Waerzeggers' argument, the Ṣāhit-ginê's were *Babylonian*—they belonged to a discrete class of people, created by empire, whose transmunicipal reach rose above the particularistic tendencies in southern Mesopotamian political life.

On the other hand, Waerzeggers' careful and influential work on the end of archives calls into question whether we actually have the ability to evaluate ancient personal ambition or business acumen. She is correct, I think, to assume that that imperial policy could end the careers of people like the Ṣāhit-ginê's by fiat, and that a new king might opt to steer resources and influence from one sphere of Babylonian society to another. She also makes a strong case that Ṣāhit-ginê's success, along with the success of others like them, came to an orderly end in 484 BC following the suppression of a political revolt.

But our sources will never divulge whether families like the Ṣāhit-ginê initially capitalized on economic trends or simply had the correct lineage and good contacts, as they only start writing texts after achieving a level of status and influence. My inclination is to assume that Marduk-rēmanni's career began and prospered where that of his son ended—connected, however indirectly, to opportunities which ruling authorities could create and retract. If nothing else, his documented life seems to be a consequence of empire, so questions of social ambition and business acumen can never be considered in isolation, or only measured against our rough (albeit improving) understanding of the ancient economy. Waerzeggers states that "in a number of cases, Marduk-rēmanni was the right man in the right place at the right time" (p. 10), but this strikes me as a kind of selection bias: by putting one private archive at the center of a social network analysis, how could he be anything but the right man at the right place in the right time? Indeed, the abrupt but orderly end of the archive could justify skepticism about the acumen of the Ṣāhit-ginê family. Despite many influential contacts and generations of capital accumulation, they failed to organize their assets and negotiate the politics to survive a short period of instability (or, perhaps, a royal debt cancellation). It seems to me that one could join two of Waerzeggers' points and argue that, when it mattered most, the archive ended because the son of Marduk-rēmanni was precisely the wrong man at the right time.

Ultimately, the book is a real gem. As with all her work, Waerzeggers digs deep into Babylonian society in the mid-first millennium BC, grappling with questions in a way which truly propels the field forward. Indeed, she has convinced me that in her hands social network and cuneiform archival studies will have a productive future together. More important, however, is her analysis. This field needs to take risks and search for answers in methods of inquiry in addition to publishing new texts. We have a fairly good grasp of Babylonian imperial politics in terms of titles, terminology, and formalities, while the exploration of the social dynamics of empire remains too focused on structure to generate new lines of inquiry. I hope we run with the momentum of this book.

Current Research in Cuneiform Palaeography. Proceedings of the Workshop organised and the 60th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Warsaw 2014. Edited by Elena Devecchi, Gerfrid G. W. Müller, and Jana Mynářová. Gladbeck: PeWe-Verlag, 2015. Pp. xiii + 198. €29.80 (cloth).
Reviewed by Mark Weeden, *SOAS, University of London*

With the exception of Hittite Anatolia, where palaeography has a special status due to the broad absence of dated texts, the study of the palaeographies of the cuneiform world, particularly Mesopotamia, has been slow to develop, with the exception of the model of rigor that is Catherine Mittermayer's *Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der literarisch-Sumerischen Texte* (Fribourg, 2006). Online database projects have proved difficult to sustain, although it is hoped that the *Birmingham Cuneiform Digital Palaeography*

Project (still offline as of November, 2017) will soon become operational again, and the Vienna-based *Late Babylonian Signs* (*LaBaSi*) website looks set to fill an important gap and enable further research.[1]

A previous edited volume addressed palaeographical issues mainly in the peripheral areas of cuneiform use.[2] The volume under review now is the result of a workshop held within the framework of the 60th RAI in Warsaw in 2014. As such, the book still has a page for page bias towards the peripheral areas of the cuneiform world, as this is currently where the most work is being done on cuneiform palaeography, but it documents a growing commitment to palaeographic studies also among scholars of its Mesopotamian centre. As is to be expected given the enormity of the task facing cuneiform palaeographers, most of the chapters represent a glimpse into various open building sites rather than full treatments of individual topics, and the texts sometimes read like conference presentations rather than rounded articles.

Jon Taylor of the British Museum presents a study with significant implications. It follows on from a study conducted during 2013–14 as part of the AHRC-funded project "Nimrud: Materialities of Assyrian Knowledge Production," which concentrates on Neo-Assyrian tablets and tries to expand the observations won there to other cuneiform corpora, albeit based on small samples. It also forms a preliminary study to three further more in-depth planned investigations based on specific corpora, including the Neo-Assyrian material as well as a handbook-style publication on the diachronic "sign dynamics of cuneiform" (publications still forthcoming as of November, 2017). Taylor is able to demonstrate that the order of wedge-impression over the history of cuneiform during at least the second and first millennia BC was by and large standardized, and can be formulated in eight rules which Taylor refers to as "Standard Mesopotamian Wedge Order" (SMWO). A few examples can suffice to illustrate these principles: wedges were written from left to right, stacked wedges are written from bottom to top with the exception of verticals, which are written top to bottom, ascending strokes are written before descending ones when diagonals cross, and more or less square shaped signs such as KU and LU are written with the verticals being impressed before the

horizontals, but with more elongated signs such as É it is the other way around.

The data is presented rigorously with tablet museum numbers and line numbers as well as being verifiable on photos posted on the British Museum website. If validated on larger sample sizes, this study will have achieved no less than a fundamental re-definition of what cuneiform actually is. Not only does a sign have a particular shape that needed to be learn, but the mechanics of producing that shape imply an operational learning procedure based on repetition, which appears to have been transmitted over wide areas and long periods. Taylor hypothesizes that this wedge-order principle would have come into being at some point during the Ur III period, as seems to be reflected in his preliminary data. The article ends with a note on the use of reed as a stylus and the consequences that reed-impressions can have for investigating wedge order. There is doubtless a great deal that needs to be refined here, but the author has opened new vistas in cuneiform research. Further publications by him and others on this theme are eagerly awaited.

Armando Bramanti also pursues the question of wedge order, but for Early Dynastic texts, which Taylor's article had indicated were prior to SMWO. The chapter presents some principles of investigation for the research of wedge order in a dossier of texts from the reign of Lugalzagesi on the basis of experimentation, collation of the tablets, and a form of categorization of the spatial characteristics of cuneiform signs. The investigation is welcome and promises to be enlightening. However, the principles for establishing wedge order rely on the displacement of clay over already impressed wedges. This is sometimes very difficult to see on the basis of the illustrations; particularly the photograph of KASKAL does not clearly illustrate the wedge order, and its description in the text does not correspond to the photo (p. 38, fig. 6a–c). Taylor (p. 2, n. 3) points out that only roughly one-third of the tablets he looked at yielded examples that were clear enough to be taken into the investigation. Experience suggests that these might be tablets whose clay was particularly wet when inscribed, with corresponding ease of displacement, something that can usually be easily seen on a tablet. It is unclear that the photographs provided of these Early Dynastic Texts display this characteristic and one should not assume that every tablet will supply clear evidence. This should be taken into account and made explicit. Further developments in research on the theme authored by

[1] https://labasi.acdh.oeaw.ac.at, accessed December 2017.

[2] E. Devecchi, ed., *Palaeography and Scribal Practices in Syro-Palestine and Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age* (Leiden, 2012).

Bramanti can now be found in the 2016 work of P. Notizia and G. Visicato.[3]

Paola Paoletti's contribution on the palaeography of the lexical lists at Ebla can now be read in conjunction with her recent chapter on similar issues from 2016.[4] Similarly to that longer chapter, the present investigation concentrates on signs that are distinguished at Ebla, Fara, and Abu Ṣalābīkh, but not in later cuneiform traditions, although the focus is on other signs: BA vs. IGI; KI vs. DU$_6$; KU vs. DUR$_2$; TUG$_2$ vs. NAM$_2$; DIB vs. LU. Also similarly to that longer contribution, this work builds on and expands conclusions reached for the administrative texts by Walther Sallaberger in 2001,[5] as well as complementing with palaeographical observations the conclusions reached by A. Archi on quite different grounds for the chronological order of the lexical and literary texts from Ebla.[6] Paoletti's chapter outlines the continuation of cuneiform sign-forms known at Fara and particularly Abu-Ṣalābīkh in the lexical texts from Ebla, and highlights the homogeneous nature of this process, as clearly reflected in manuscripts authored by two scribes: Tira-il and Azi. As a slight editorial critique, one observes that the text of nn. 5 and 11 concerning these two scribes is verbally identical, but the chapter allows us to hope for solid results from the further investigation of the sign-forms of the Ebla lexical corpus.

Paoletti is working on a complete sign-list for the corpus of the lexical tablets from Ebla, as is Massimo Maiocchi for the Sargonic period (p. 71). He now provides us with a sketch of Old Akkadian palaeography. Maiocchi refers to an online Chicago Old Akkadian Palaeography Project (p. 71), which could not be found online as of December, 2017, but would doubtless be a huge advantage. The chapter provides a very useful introduction to and overview of the criteria for the dating of Old Akkadian tablets, including reflections on the types of photographs that are most useful.

It is recommended reading to anyone who wishes to approach Old Akkadian palaeography without first being thoroughly immersed in the material.

Jana Mynářová looks at cuneiform in Egypt on the basis of the Amarna tablets in order to re-evaluate the hypothesis that Egyptian cuneiform was essentially transmitted from the Hittite world. Petrographic clay analyses, an earlier attestation of Babylonian cuneiform than previously available, as well as linguistic assessments of the Amarna documents, make this a promising enterprise. She includes the cuneiform letters of Egyptian origin and scholarly texts in her dataset, and presents an overview of the distribution of sign-forms of NI with and without two small inscribed verticals. The form with the verticals she refers to as "standard" while the forms without are referred to as "Egyptian." These latter are by the way identical with the typical Hittite form of NI. The employment of this simple research expedient, which forms part of a larger research project on Amarna palaeography, leads Mynářová to suppose that Babylonian traditions of writing cuneiform may have been in use in Egypt prior to the introduction of the Hittite cuneiform writing style. The most important tablet used here is EA 1, the letter of Amenhotep III to Kadašman-Enlil I of Babylon, which uses the "standard" sign-form. One wonders whether this might not have been an archive copy (Mynářová tentatively considers it may have been a model text, p. 99) produced by a Babylonian scribe who was involved in the exchange of correspondence with the Babylonian king. At any rate, Mynárová successfully demonstrates that the situation is likely to be more complicated than we have assumed, and her systematic approach based on painstaking data collection as well as collation of original tablets promises solid results.

Françoise Ernst-Pradal presents an article looking at the palaeography of multi-lingual vocabularies with a Hurrian column from Ugarit. This follows on from a study of the palaeography of the Hurrian musical tablets from Ugarit,[7] and also forms part of a larger project to publish the different cuneiform sign-repertoires of Ugarit. Ernst-Pradal does not find evidence to demonstrate that the musical tablets were written by the same scribes as those who wrote the multi-lingual vocabularies with Hurrian columns, but alleges some influence from alphabetic script on the

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[3] *Early Dynastic and Early Sargonic Administrative Texts Mainly from the Umma Region*, ed. P. Notizia and G. Visicato, CUSAS 33 (Bethesda, MD, 2016), esp. 295ff.

[4] "Die Paläographie der lexikalischen Texte aus Ebla: einige erste Betrachtungen," pp. 183–221 in Th. Balke and Tsouparopoulou, eds., *The Materiality of Writing in Early Mesopotamia* (Heidelberg, 2016).

[5] "Die Entwicklung der Keilschrift in Ebla," in J.-W. Meyer, M. Nowák, and A. Pruss, eds., *Beiträge zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie Winfred Orthmann gewidmet* (Frankfurt, 2001), 436–45.

[6] "Transmission of the Mesopotamian Lexical and Literary Texts from Ebla," pp. 1–40 in P. Fronzaroli, ed., *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla* (Florence, 1992).

[7] Now available in *Études Ougaritiques* IV, ed. V. Matoïan and M. Al-Maqdissi, Ras Shamra – Ougarit XXIV (Leuven, 2016), 73–94.

writing of the scribe of RS 2.[023]+3.360 (=ḪAR-ra-ḫubullu 2) specifically in the writing of the sign GAR. This form consisting of a broken vertical (= Z in the alphabetic script) is, one should note, common in later Neo-Babylonian manuscripts. Could this simplifying development in the sign-form have been anticipated here at Ugarit rather than assuming a difficult to motivate influence of alphabetic Z on logo-syllabic GAR? The article looks forward to a further work on Hurrian letters and a wisdom text from Ugarit.

Fifty-seven pages—over a quarter of the whole book—are taken up with two contributions relating to the results of the Würzburg-Dortmund Project "3-D Joins und Schriftmetrologie," now completed. Gerfrid Müller and Dennis Fiseler present the technical aspects of the project, concentrating on the development of the "Cuneiform Analyser" software, which allows the researcher of cuneiform writing to explore 3-D images of cuneiform signs and for the first time collect quantitative data on such aspects as depth of impression, angle of aperture, or relations of angles of wedges to each other. This approach, a pilot project for which was financed by the British Academy (although not mentioned here), holds out the prospect of assessing cuneiform palaeography from a perspective that is not based on subjective impressions and instinct gained from experience. With specific reference to the problematic features of the Hittite collections, it offers the possibility of grouping and joining up fragments of tablets automatically.

An example of the use of statistical geometry to isolate distinctive features of scribal hands using cuneiform analyser is given in Michele Cammarosano's chapter. Far from particular sign-forms being distinctive to individual Hittite scribal hands, it is much deeper relationships frequently not at all visible to the human eye that turn out to be significant, such as the ratio between the apertural angles of the two Winkelhaken on the sign NA when measured against the upright. These are things that can only be measured by means of 3-D scans, and the progress made here, although seemingly slight at first view, is in fact very significant. Similarly some of the most frequent and most subjectively based observations on the palaeographic dating of Hittite tablets, based on what is traditionally referred to incorrectly as ductus, more correctly as equilibrium (as here) or aspect,[8] are also explored to demonstrate the use of statistically

evaluated geometrical features in order to obtain a "ranking" of older vs later tablets according to scores achieved through the statistical process. Again, this corresponds to a logical extension of palaeographic method corresponding to desiderata already expressed in the field[9] using the capacities of Information Technology. As the chapter concludes, however, there is still a long road ahead.

Finally, M. Jursa's chapter on Neo-Babylonian considers how palaeography can complement datings reached through other means, taking as a case-study a copy of an Assur-etel-ilani inscription he had earlier demonstrated to have been made by an Urukean scribe in the late 6th century BC.[10] On the one hand, diagnostic sign-forms are isolated from dated texts: MEŠ and KI, along with the arrangement of the 'ŠE–element' on the signs TU, LI, BU, and MUŠ. They confirm a dating to the later 6th century BC. On the other hand, the general uniformity of the script does not permit the identification of the particular scribe Nādin, who had been established as responsible for the copy of the inscription by non-palaeographic means, by comparison with other texts written by the same scribe. The advantage of palaeography based on observations made using the unaided eye is thus limited in this corpus for the identification of individual scribal hands. Here compare the albeit thus far limited progress made above in the use of 3-D photogrammetry to achieve such comparisons from the Würzburg-Dortmund project.

Thus all of these contributions present snapshots of work in progress. There is clearly a lot going on in the world of cuneiform palaeography. The volume could perhaps have benefited from an introduction summing up some of the main trends in research, but is short enough for the readers to do this themselves. The main ways forward seem to be connected with larger scale web-based projects, which will allow more detailed partial research in the future. The exploitation of 3-D computer-aided analysis will help the process immeasurably and remove it (although not entirely) from the exclusive domain of only those who have spent years working in museums on original tablets. And finally, the observation of wedge order has become a firmly established part of the way we conceptualize cuneiform, but clearer methods for ascertaining wedge order need to be outlined and made available.

[8] Shai Gordin, *Hittite Scribal Circles. Scholarly Tradition and Writing Habits*, StBoT 59 (Wiesbaden, 2015), 15.

[9] Explicitly M. Weeden, *Hittite Logograms and Hittite Scholarship*, StBoT 54 (Wiesbaden, 2011), 46, 48, cited here p. 171.

[10] M. Jursa, "Eine Kambyses-zeitliche Kopie einer Aššur-etel-ilāni-Inschrift," *N.A.B.U.* 2013/13.

Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia. By Marc Van De Mieroop. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 312. $24.95 (paper).
Reviewed by Xianhua Wang, *Shanghai International Studies University*

Marc Van De Mieroop has done a great service to the intellectual world by producing a text tackling meta-cultural questions related to the ancient Near East. Despite the fact that Van De Mieroop's book is focused on ancient Mesopotamia, where the Babylonians flourished, it is perhaps the only full-length work which attempts to present an integrated theory of culture for this ancient Near Eastern world in a sophisticated and ambitious manner, comparable to that of the famous "Intellectual Adventure of the Ancient Man" published over seventy years ago.[1] Written by an Assyriologist, *Philosophy before the Greeks* will likely interest all students of the ancient Near East with its far-reaching ideas. The book argues that the ancient Babylonians presented "the only well-documented system of philosophy before the Greeks known to us" (p. viii). This straightforward appreciation of Babylonian intellectual achievement is likely to provoke heated debates, but as the no-nonsense style of the book makes clear, such debates are already expected by the author.

Van De Mieroop opens his book quoting Socrates— "for you will have the wisdom not to think you know that which you do not know"—which sets the tone for his investigations into how the Babylonians approached knowledge. Based on his analysis, he makes the point of labelling the Babylonian approach to knowledge as an epistemology. According to Van De Mieroop, Babylonian epistemology may be discerned through the use of three structurally related corpora, namely Babylonian writings on language, on the future, and on law. It is thus logical to see the text starting with "An Essay in Babylonian Epistemology" (Part I), to go through "The Order of Things (*Les Mots et les Choses*)" (Part II, on language), "Writings of the Gods" (Part III, on divination), "The World of the Law" (Part IV, on law), and then coming back to "A Babylonian Epistemology" (Part V). In order to grasp the spirit of the book before going through the pages, I suggest that the reader start reading from the last chapter, entitled "The Conceptual Autonomy of Babylonian Epistemol-ogy" which provides a brief summary of the central thesis as well as some contextualization.

The Assyriologist Benno Landsberger had advocated an approach to the Babylonians that stressed the study of the characteristics of their language in order to recover the inner form of Babylonian thought.[2] Landsberger's student Wolfram von Soden additionally maintained that vocabulary shaped the mind, elaborating his teacher's theory. The Babylonian world, for Van De Mieroop, presents a challenge to this kind of linguistic determinism. To begin with, ancient Babylonia's literate culture was fundamentally bilingual. Linguistic determinism would amount to absurdity if ascribing the linguistically dissimilar Sumerian and Akkadian languages a mindset for each. Instead, he suggests, "we need to look for the individuality of Babylonian intellectual history in another area than language" (p. 219), i.e., writing. The individuality of the Babylonians, once the new point of departure is recognized, is the distinctive epistemology and philosophy documented in their writing.

Van De Mieroop meant something different when speaking of writing here. While most treatments of writing attempt to compare Babylonian cuneiform tradition with other historical writing systems, Van De Mieroop stresses "reading the written" rather than on writing as a system of signs. It is in this sense that for the ancient Babylonians, "the written sign was not the signifier of something else, it shaped its own meaning" (p. 219), and furthermore that "writing was not imitative of thought and secondary to the presentation of knowledge, it was central to it; it created knowledge by adding unsuspected levels and nuances" (p. 219). It was the centrality of writing, or the written, for the Babylonians in its bilingual or multilingual contexts which brought about the true significance of reading; and by the Babylonian hermeneutic tradition of reading, we may then appreciate the Babylonian exercise of philosophy.

Babylonian philosophy was grounded on exercises of reading, which can be showcased by *The Babylonian Creation Myth*, known to the Babylonians as *Enūma*

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[1] Peter Machinist, "*The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*: Revisiting a Classic," in Kurt A. Raaflaub, *The Adventure of the Human Intellect: Self, Society, and the Divine in Ancient World Cultures* (Malden, MA, 2016), 29.

[2] Benno Landsberger, *The Conceptual Autonomy of the Babylonian World* (Malibu, CA, 1976).

eliš.[3] As referenced by Van De Mieroop, "The final two hundred lines of the [*Enūma eliš*] were not an afterthought or a mere liturgical recitation of a god's attributes through abstruse names. They presented the culmination of creation: everything was made according to a divine plan" (p. 9). Through the Babylonian system of readings and equivalences of cuneiform signs, these titles of Marduk can be decoded and true knowledge of the divine plan achieved. The five signs of the thirty-sixth name of Marduk, for instance, ^{d}LU-GAL.AB$_2$.DU$_{10}$.BUR$_3$, would finally reveal its true meaning as "The king (LUGAL) who thwarted (BUR$_3$) the maneuvers (DU$_{10}$) of Tiamat (AB$_2$), uprooted (BUR$_3$) her weapons (DU$_{10}$), whose (LUGAL) support (DU$_{10}$.BUR$_3$) was firm (DU$_{10}$?) in front (^{d}) and rear" (p. 9). For Van De Mieroop, such readings as found in the Babylonian commentaries to *Enūma eliš* were "exercises in epistemology" (p. 9). Although sophisticated reading as such to properly understand *Enūma eliš* was limited to the well-educated, the underlying principle remains that "[t]he science of reading was the basis for all understanding and was thus the foundation of Babylonian philosophy" (p. 10).

The Babylonians, from their writing-based philosophical point of view, and equipped with the science of reading which constituted their epistemology, must have had their own philosophy. In fact, this different but equally valid philosophy is extremely rich and productive, as seen in the three major corpora dealt with in this volume, among which the lexical lists are the most typical and most foundational. As reiterated by Van De Mieroop, "Babylonian lexicography was a scientific activity intended to foster understanding of the world. Its practitioners gave structure to reality. They did not just record vocabulary but aimed to clarify the relationship between the realities words signified" (p. 41). Moreover, "they dealt with written reality, not with physical reality" (p. 42). This goes against the view that the Babylonian lists provided an encyclopedic classification of physical reality, as von Soden encapsulated in the concept he titled *Listenwissenschaft* (p. 65). The fact is, following the Babylonian philosophical understanding of reality, that lexicography served as the primary field of inquiry for the Babylonians to construct the world, and to acquire knowledge of it.

In its fullest form, a Babylonian lexical entry may read (0) I - (1) tak- tak - (2) TAK$_4$.TAK$_4$ - (3) tak minnabi - (4) *ezēbu* - (5) *arḫa dalumar*. In English, the entry can be translated as "(0) entry: if (2) the Sumerian logogram TAK$_4$.TAK$_4$, is (1) read tak-tak—it is (3) called 'double (minnabi) tak' and means in (4) Akkadian *ezēbu*, 'to abandon,' and in (5) Hittite *arḫa dalumar*, 'forsaking'" (pp. 61–62). This is the syntagm of the lexical format, each of which is a statement. The more creative method to construct the world is the paradigm, namely the order of the entries in a sequence, which easily stretches into the thousands and is thus a powerful tool when applied to the words. The paradigm was not based solely or even primarily on the nature of each concept, "be it physical resemblance or otherwise, but also on its aural and especially its written form" (p. 70). This general principle is termed "pointillism" (pp. 72–73, with examples), following which the paradigm presents itself as the most flexible but "rigidly rational" method of coming to terms with reality. Of course, for the Babylonians it was writing that "created its own reality independent from speech and manifest to the reader alone" (pp. 79–80).

Parts III and IV of the book deal with omen literature and law, respectively. The basic observation is that both omen literature and law made use of the syntagm and paradigm formats. In the case of omens, the syntagm consists of the parts known as the *protasis* and *apodosis*, while the paradigm again serves as the generative device to expand the omen series (pp. 114–25). In the case of law, the famous "if. . . , then . . ." structure is the syntagm, while the paradigm organizes entries following a similar pointillism (pp. 158–70). The flexibility of the syntagm and the paradigm, as manifest in the developments of the lexical lists as well as the omen literature and law, evidence the creativity of the Babylonian philosophical tradition: "reality did not precede the text; the text preceded reality" (p. 132). It is in this light that one can appreciate that for the ancient Babylonians, reading the universe was the same as reading the text, while the just king was the wise one who had the true insight into knowledge (pp. 140, 175).

In Parts II, III, and IV, Van De Mieroop provides the reader with a history of the genre for each of the three corpora he discusses. Regardless of how one accepts his thesis arguing for a Babylonian epistemology and philosophy, the book is valuable in itself as a brief history for the developments of the three corpora in ancient Babylonia, and is full of sparkling insights.[4]

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[3] Wilfred Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake, IN, 2013).

[4] Niek Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Tradition* (München, 2014) was yet unavailable to the author.

To this reviewer, the use of the term "philosophy" in the title does not pose any particular question. Dunhua Zhao, a Leuven-educated Chinese historian of medieval European philosophy, had remarked that "[t]he history of philosophy is the thought of the history of thought. It is also the interpretative effect of modern construction."[5] So far as the construction of Babylonian philosophy aims at its "universal applicability," paraphrasing Zhao's comments on Chinese philosophy, the use of the term "philosophy" for the ancient Babylonians should not be a problem. In any case, "no single standard definition or set model exists for philosophy or the history of philosophy, either in the West or in China."[6] The issue is not the terminology, but rather "universal applicability."

This distinction has to do with the strong link Van De Mieroop maintains between epistemology and philosophy. The problem is, however, that for the Babylonians "text precedes reality," and so their "exercises in epistemology" would lose relevance if such an epistemology led to a dead end. French thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, among others, feature heavily in the book. For instance, Michel Foucault is quoted at length when introducing the Babylonian lexical lists. Foucault's thesis in his *Les mots et les choses*, that "scientific classifications are entrenched in ephemeral discourses and that other systems can and do exist, rooted in other discourses and equally valid in their contexts," (p. 35) is endorsed as accepted truth. The book's emphasis on writing and reading clearly bears

out influences from Jacques Derrida (pp. 78–79). But the Derridian grammatology is far from being accepted as a universally applicable epistemology. The ancient Babylonians, looked at favorably through the Derridian lens here, would still have to decide whether to hold on to their yet-unproven epistemology or to concede that their philosophy was not universally applicable.

It is admirable that Van De Mieroop borrows from modern theoretical insights and makes use of a philosophical reconstruction that potentially has extremely important consequences for cuneiform studies. But since Jacques Derrida had openly stated once, "China has no philosophy, only thought,"[7] I am hesitant to accept an entire thesis that relies on the documentation of a Babylonian epistemology in order to argue for that it attains to a philosophy. The Chinese historian of philosophy Youlan Feng had early on observed that epistemology was less than well-documented in ancient China.[8] Certainly Youlan Feng was comparing ancient China with Europe when acknowledging the poverty of Chinese epistemological tradition. On the other hand, however, as Chinese characters are still in use today, proposing a definition of epistemology based on Derridian grammatology—thus suggesting an alternative definition of Chinese philosophy—would go too far. In Zhao's words, Derrida's relegation of philosophy to the status of "writing" was "nothing less than a negation of the legitimacy of philosophical thinking."[9] Is this only a matter of opinion?

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[5] Dunhua Zhao, "Modern Construction and Explanatory Models of the History of Philosophy," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 37/3 (2006): 9.

[6] Ibid.: 6.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Youlan Fung. *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Beijing, 1937), 3.

[9] Zhao, "Modern Construction and Explanatory Models of the History of Philosophy," p. 7.

The Gods Rich in Praise: Early Greek and Mesopotamian Religious Poetry. By Christopher Metcalf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv + 288. £69.00.
Reviewed by Ilya Yakubovich, *Russian State University for the Humanities*

Questions regarding the relationship between European and Oriental cultures have an established place in Western intellectual tradition, despite the fact that the answers provided are not always scientific. Between Goethe's "Wer sich selbst und andere kennt, wird auch hier erkennen: Orient und Okzident sind nicht mehr zu trennen" and Kipling's "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," there is a

continuum of agenda-driven assessments. An equally broad range of opinions is present in academic literature with regard to the more specific problem of cultural connections between Ancient Near Eastern and Early Greek civilizations. In this case, however, one can spot an asymmetry between the methodologies of scholars on both ends of the spectrum. It is fair to say that the minimalists are more in favor of setting up