

Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia

Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia presents fresh and engaging translations of works that were composed or edited by female scribes and elite women of the ancient Near East. These texts provide insight into the social status, struggles, and achievements of women during the earliest periods of recorded human history (ca. 2300–540 BCE). In three introductory chapters and a concluding chapter, Charles Halton and Saana Svärd provide an overview of the civilization of ancient Mesopotamia and examine gender by analyzing these different kinds of texts. The translations cover a range of genres, including hymns, poems, prayers, letters, inscriptions, and oracles. Each text is accompanied by a short introduction that situates the composition within its ancient environment and explores what it reveals about the lives of women within the ancient world. This anthology will serve as an essential reference book for scholars and students of ancient history, gender studies, and world literature.

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Women's Writing of Ancient Mesopotamia

An Anthology of the Earliest Female Authors

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To Ettore Cingano and Lucio Milano and the faculty and fellows of the Advanced
Seminar in the Humanities 2011–2012 at Venice International University.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book exists because Ettore Cingano and Lucio Milano organized a research seminar on the study of the ancient Mediterranean. The seminar convened for several weeks at Venice International University on the island of San Servolo, a five-minute *vaporetto* ride from St. Mark's square in Venice, Italy. The idea for this book came about during conversations in between lectures and presentations and over many shots of espresso, grappa, and vino from the Veneto region.

Charles lamented the lack of a book which gathered together the cuneiform texts that are attributed to female authors. One of the difficulties of studying the ancient world and Mesopotamia in particular is that the primary texts that make up the field are published in thousands of obscure journals, monographs, and *Festschriften*. There are very few indexes and anthologies that guide scholars to them. A photographic memory and an exhaustive library are essential to studying all but the most general of topics. This is starting to change with the emergence of the *Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record* series published by Ugarit-Verlag and various anthologies of cuneiform literature in translation. But nothing like this existed for texts attributed to female authors.

Saana shared Charles's lament and believed that an anthology of female writing had the potential to open up new avenues of study. We began assembling a list of texts that an anthology would include and pitched the idea to publishers. Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press strongly supported the project and suggested that we also include discussions that guided readers in how they could productively approach female-authored texts and reflections on what this literature can teach us about the lives of ancient women.

Even though we have closely collaborated throughout the production of this book, we divided the work fairly evenly. Charles wrote the first chapter and translated most of the older texts including the Sumerian compositions, scholarly documents, hymns and poems, and oracles from Mari. Saana wrote chapters 2 and 3 and most of the conclusion. She also translated the later texts including the letters, Neo-Assyrian oracles, and Akkadian inscriptions. We are very grateful to Eduardo Escobar for allowing us to publish his translation of the perfume recipe in chapter 9.

We would like to thank our original commissioning editor Beatrice Rehl, who believed in our project, and Anastasia Graf and the rest of the editorial and production team at Cambridge who brought it into reality. The

anonymous reviewers that Cambridge University Press arranged provided valuable suggestions and greatly improved this book.

Alan Lenzi, Jeffrey Cooley, and Angela Roskop Erisman read an early version of the prospectus and helped us structure the anthology. Karen Nemet-Nejat graciously edited an early version of the introduction. Thanks are in order to colleagues who provided helpful hints about letters of women: Heather Baker, Katrien De Graef, Alan Lenzi, Jaume Llop, and Robert Whiting. Finally, several colleagues provided help in many different ways: Tero Alstola, Jouni Harjumäki, Brigitte Lion, Mikko Luukko, Raija Mattila, Natalie May, Cécile Michel, Martti Nissinen, David Owen, and Martin Worthington.

Finally, many thanks to the conveners, faculty, and fellows of the VIU Advanced Seminar in the Ancient Mediterranean 2011–2012. We dedicate this book to you for your support and encouragement of this project and for your friendship during the time we spent together on San Servolo. Gebhard Selz, Jack Sasson, and Lucio Milano inspired us with their scholarship and offered many helpful comments and critiques. In particular, we dedicate this anthology to the memory of Joan Goodnick Westenholz who was a member of the faculty of the seminar and served as the opponent in the public defence of Saana's dissertation.

Notes to the Reader

The focus of this book is on Mesopotamia, more specifically texts written in the Sumerian and Akkadian languages. We have mainly concentrated on the heartland of Mesopotamia, the area surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A slight exception to this are the texts from the kingdom of Mari, which was located to the west of Mesopotamia proper. This focus was chosen for two main reasons. Even with this focus the topic is huge, covering millennia and much of the Near East. To cover all of the Mediterranean world and its dozens of languages and cultures would have been too big a project. However, as it turns out, most of the concrete examples of cuneiform texts attributed to females are from Mesopotamia and Mari (see details in chapter 1). For instance, there are no extant texts from Ugarit that are known to have been written by a woman.

Regarding special characters, in translations we have kept Š and Ṭ, but instead of Ĥ, the Roman H is used. Contracted vowels are shown (e.g., Nabû) but not the lengthening of vowels (e.g., ū). However, in transliterations of ancient vocabulary (e.g., *harimtu*), the diacritics are kept. These choices are a compromise between Assyriological conventions that attempt to accurately reproduce phonetics and the need to use reader-friendly diacritics.

Line numbers are given, but to offer smoother translations we usually translate in blocks. Parentheses are used to indicate texts which are added by us, the translators. Square brackets are used to indicate restorations of texts that have broken away from the original. However, only sections that are completely destroyed are placed in square brackets: we have not placed square brackets in the middle of words. Missing sections are indicated with three periods, but when possible, we try to indicate the approximate extent of missing text when the missing sections are thought to be more than one line. The ' after a line number means that since a part of the text is missing, the line numbers are uncertain. In other words, line 1' is the first line after an indeterminate break in the text.

As for the style of translations, we have attempted to toe the blurry line between too literal and too liberal translations. Too literal translations leave the meaning of the text unclear to readers unfamiliar with Sumerian and Akkadian language. At the same time, too liberal translations can demolish the intent of the ancient author. Needless to say, this line is highly subjective and translations offered here will no doubt seem either too literal or too liberal to many of the expert readers.

Table 0.1 *Mesopotamian Measures*

Sumerian	Akkadian	Modern translation	Modern value (approximate)
GÍN	<i>šiqlum</i>	shekel	8.3 grams
MA.NA	<i>manûm</i>	mina	500 grams
GÚ.UN	<i>biltum</i>	talent	30 kilograms
SILA ₃	<i>qûm</i>	liter	1 liter
BÁN	<i>sûtum</i>	seah	10 liters
NIGIDA (PI)	<i>pānum/parsiktum</i>	fifth-of-a-kor	60 liters
GUR	<i>kurrum</i>	kor	300 liters

For each text we have compiled a brief bibliography to help the readers along should they be inclined to know more about the ancient texts. When possible, we included information on where the drawing (so-called cuneiform copy) or photograph of the original text can be found and information on transliteration, transcription, and translation of the text in question. These will enable professionals to engage with texts more fully. We have also included a selection of the most reliable, often the most recent studies on the text, where the reader will get a more detailed bibliography. Full bibliographical references are included in the footnotes of the chapters. The first time a work is mentioned in each chapter full bibliographical information is given, after that the work is referred to with an abbreviated title.

The translations within this book are not new editions. That is, we did not recollate the texts. Instead, we used the most recent editions and other previous work done on the texts as the basis of our translations. Thus we remain hugely indebted to the scholars who published primary sources. At the same time, we hope to have been able to contribute some new readings and insights into documents translated in this volume.

All dates used within this book are BCE unless otherwise indicated. Measurements are translated into English (mina, shekel, etc.) but a table for conversion is included here (following John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 3rd edn. [Harvard Semitic Museum Studies 45; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011]). The exact values of these units varied throughout history but the table will give the reader a rough idea of the modern values.

Abbreviations

ARM	Archives royales de Mari
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AS	Assyriological Studies
CAD	A. Leo Oppenheim, <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago</i> (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956ff)
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , 3 vols. (ed. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002)
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/)
GMTR	Guide to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
MSL	Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon/Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon
NABU	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods (Toronto, 1987ff.)
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods (Toronto, 1990ff.)
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings of the Ancient World
SP	E. I. Gordon, <i>Sumerian Proverbs</i> (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1959)
VAT	Museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Vorderasiatische Abteilung. Tontafeln)
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete</i>