



Student's name

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BOOK REPORT

Babylon by J. Oates

Oates, Joan. *Babylon*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1979. 215 pp. Print.

Introduction

This paper is the book report of the book *Babylon*, written by Joan Oates in 1979. In her book *Babylon*, Joan Oates depicts the development of this great city under the rule of Sargon and then Hammurabi. The latter is the well-known law-giver under the rule of which in the eighteenth century BC Babylon initially obtained pre-eminence. The author describes the greatest era of Babylon during the reign of his heirs, Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BC, and the decay and ultimate abandonment as Greeks and Persians turned Mesopotamia into a battlefield.

Story

It must have been a very complex book to write. The title of the book, of course, enables the readers to understand what this work is about: glamorous, glorious Babylon. But, on closer acquaintance, much of the



magnificent city turns out to be something reflected in a distorting mirror, with Hammurabi wearing Nebuchadnezzar's wig. People generally know so little about the early periods. Even about the great Neo-Babylonian period and empire they know far less than it might have been expected, as the official and administrative accounts are compared with those of the Assyrians one century before, whilst the economic documents still require extensive investigation and discussion. The old German excavations provided scholars with the fine view of the city's monuments, but that does not bring them to life.

The authors, who write about Babylon, find themselves diverging into whatever aspects of old Mesopotamian culture, which are of the major interest to them; and the further away from Babylon they move, the better they write. Joan Oates obviously respects the prehistory, and the most valuable part of the book is, thus, the initial quarter, the primary two chapters dealing with the time period before 1800. During this time period, as the author comments (Oates 60), "Babylon had made no mark on its country's history", a tactful manner of asserting that it was a tiny provincial town barely mentioned in the text. In fact, the earliest recognized mention of Babylon emerges during the period of Sharkalisharri (reigned c. 2217– c. 2193 BCE), a ruler of Akkad and successor of the empire's creator, Sargon (reigned c. 2334–2279 BCE). The writing refers to two temples in the city, but little else is acknowledged from this early time.

In the 19th century BCE, the story of Babylon comes into far sharper focus. In 2000 BCE the local Akkadian and Sumerian populaces of

Mesopotamia had been subject to the attacks of Amorites, the “westerners”, who had settled in the river valley and adopted local traditions. Amorite, just like Akkadian, was a Semitic tongue, but the speakers did not use it in writing. They carried on using Akkadian and Sumerian languages in documents.

Amorite rulers took control of some Mesopotamian places, including Babylon. Over the following century, the Amorite dynasty, created by Sumu-Abum (reigned 1894–1880 BCE), consolidated own power over all surrounding territories. By the early 18th century BCE, one dozen kingdoms, including Babylon, were dominated by Syria and Mesopotamia; some were united by coalitions, others were frequently at war (Reade 363-364).

Hammurabi (reigned 1792–1750 BCE) is treated as the greatest of all kings of the initial dynasty of Babylon (recognized as the Old Babylonian era). From the establishment of his reign, he stressed to be the ruler concerned with justice. It was conventional at that time to mention the years by names rather than numbers, and the name of the king's second year of reign demonstrates his care for justice. He established justness and liberty in his territory. Though Hammurabi was not the primary lawgiver as there were written laws in Mesopotamia. However, his regulations made a strong impression on the following generations of Mesopotamian scribes that copied them for many centuries. His rules also had an impact on surrounding populaces, such as the Canaanites and Hittites, and finally on the Israelites and, thus, on Biblical law.

Analysis

Joan Oates describes that, at its zenith, Babylon was one of the major, largest, and most significant cities of the ancient globe. It was situated in Mesopotamia, near the place where Euphrates and Tigris flow close to one another. This part of the book offers the genuine feeling of the historical evolvment. Joan Oates describes the so-called Sumerian problem and the supposed Sumerian-Semite conflict. The author concerns that they absorbed an unbelievable amount of energy in the past, and it is pleasant to observe them shrink before the writer uses lucid prose into little more than questions of terminology. The book is highly recommended for this part alone, and there are scholars, who might really benefit from the careful reading. However, it is not very convenient to read about all these uncelebrated dates; for instance, c. 3100 b. c., the centuries too late for the earliest known texts, in book are intended for the general public (Oates 15). Mesopotamian archaeologists reasonably accept the superior attitude to the grand calibration scramble, having known since the early sixties, that for readers anyway there was something wrong with radiocarbon before about 3000 BP (Oates 23), but the situation has changed, and definitely there is no need to calibrate, judiciously, as far back as it is possible; the readers, who miss the author's cursory clarifications of what she is doing, could be badly misled.

The following chapters, three to five, cover the second and first millennia, from Hammurabi to the Greeks. The author mentions the Mari letters from Syria, the Amarna letters from Egypt, and the Assyrian accounts, thus, it is extremely difficult to preserve own interest in so



many dynasties. Probably the author should have presented more discussion. Can the readers identify Gaugamela with modern Karamleis (ancient Karmulisi), as of Gogemal/Tell Gomel was out of the question (Oates 139)? There are lots of statements like this one, which require further qualification even in such a compressed account, especially when certain technical issues, for instance, the problem of the Dur-Kurigalzu stratigraphy, are clearly depicted. Nevertheless, mostly, as the readers should have expected from the author, this part is a serious effort to offer the modern account of the major characteristics of the evolution of the Babylonian state, with the necessary archaeological connotations not neglected, and the book serves this aim well. This book finishes with the chapter of the legacy of Babylon, mostly the description of literature, science religion, and technology. Sadly, the author does not have much space to do justice to her theme.

A huge work has been obviously made concerning the choice of illustrations, many of which demonstrate crucial but relatively unfamiliar items. However, this paper, which is richly illustrated with photos and plans, and written with judgment will delight students, scholars and laypersons alike.

The Epic of Gilgamesh By N.K Sanders



Sandars, N. K. (Translator). *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. N.p.: Penguin Classics, 1960. 128 pp. Print.

Introduction

Gilgamesh, the King of Uruk, and his friend Enkidu are the solitary heroes, who continue to exist from the old texts of Babylon; they are commemorated in the epic story, which dates back to the third millennium BC. They travel to Spring of Youth together, defeat the Bull of Heaven and slay the monster Humbaba. Once Enkidu passes away, Gilgamesh's sorrow and fright of demise force him to carry out the quest for eternal living. A timeless story of morality, drama and real adventure, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the landmark literary investigation of human's search for eternal living. This paper is the book report of *The epic of Gilgamesh* written and translated by N.K Sanders in 1960.

Story

The Epic of Gilgamesh was initially the old Sumerian poem translated into Akkadian and written down some 700 – 1000 years after the reign of the historical king in Cuneiform script. The fullest variant, in the Akkadian tongue, was discovered on twelve stone tablets in the ruins of the Ancient library of Ashurbanipal, the ruler of Assyria, at Nineveh in 1849 by the British traveler Austen Henry Layard. The primary eleven tablets relate the common variation of the Epic, whilst the final tablet tells an ancient Sumerian poem, Bilgames and Netherworld. As the final



tablet opposes the account declared in the first eleven tablets, it is not embraced in most common variations of this story. Consistent with the scholar Sandars, the work is “the best surviving heroic poem from any time period till the emergence of Homer’s Iliad; and it is infinitely elder” (Sandars 7).

The major protagonist of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the legendary ruler of Uruk, who, consistent with the poem, felled the huge trees of the Cedar Forest with his friend Enkidu to create strong gates of City and travelled far to discover a secret of immortality from the prophet Utanapishtim. It is commonly acknowledged that Gilgamesh was the 5th king of Uruk, generally regarded as the place of birth of writing in the west, approximately 2500 BCE. The archaeological discoveries of inscriptions and letters confirming his actions, and those of his son, offer no reason to doubt that Gilgamesh really existed. Yet, after a while, the human king was altered from a mortal to half-god. His male parent is said to have been Priest-King Lugalbanda and his female parent was the goddess Ninsun, therefore, making Gilgamesh half-god of extraordinary stamina and strength, but, also, mortal. Whilst Gilgamesh performed many great deeds, he could not ultimately realize his utmost wish to defeat death and to live eternally.

Consistent with the story, the great ruler, egotistical and brutal among all lesser humans he ruled, received an odd present from gods: wild giant Enkidu who would confront Gilgamesh’s force and, probably, teach him humbleness. Enkidu, initially growing wild in the woods, is tamed by temple harlot Shamhat, and is taken to Uruk, where he, as

planned, challenges the great king. After they struggle, and Enkidu is beaten, the two swear everlasting friendship to one another and Gilgamesh's mother goddess accepts Enkidu as her own son.

After the struggle in the Cedar Forest where they beat the demon Humbaba and, soon after, the Bull of Heaven (abusing the goddess Inanna-Ishtar) the gods announce death of Enkidu, deciding that somebody has to pay for such arrogant actions. Enkidu passes away and, in that moment, Gilgamesh understands that he, too, will pass away and this knowledge tortures him. He cries, "How can I rest? As I am scared of demise I have to go as best I can to discover Utnapishtim whom they recognize as Faraway, because he has joined gods" (Sandars 97).

After having crossed the Land of Night and Waters of Death, the king discovers a very old man Utanapishtim, the single person to survive flood, who was, after that, granted eternal life. Utanapishtim tells the king an account of how he was informed by God Ea of the future flood, followed his command to create the ark and put varied beasts inside as to protect himself and his relatives from death. He tells Gilgamesh immortality will be provided to him if the king can stay awake for the following six days. The king fails in this as well as in the next effort to bring back magic plant that will make any person young again. This plant is eaten by a snake whilst Gilgamesh sleeps. Thus, having failed to win immortality, the king goes back to Uruk with the help of the ferryman Urshanabi, and, when home, he writes about his own great adventure.

Analysis

This epic is, basically, the eternal fight of the person to find sense in existence. Sandars asserts that even if Gilgamesh is not, in fact, the primary human hero, he is the primary recognized tragic idol. "He is the most compassionate to people, and most characteristic of individual person in his search for living and acknowledgement" (Sandars 7).

Though Gilgamesh failed in the quest for eternal life and the historical ruler is recognized merely through passing references, inscriptions and lists, he lives on forever through work of Shin-Leqi-Unninni and many others, who wrote down the oral story, which is translated and transferred from generation to generation. These writers attribute the initial resource of the account to Gilgamesh himself, who, supposedly, inscribed own amazing actions and adventures on a large stone by the gates of Uruk. Thus, Gilgamesh became immortal by making a crucial input to the magnitude of his own city by benefiting himself of the city's final cultural invention: writing. Through the writings, the account of Gilgamesh and his arrogance, his sorrow for the loss of his friend, his fear of demise and quest for immortality, the king does, actually, overcome death and wins his eternal living every time his story is read.

Generally, this 5900 years old story is as reachable and captivating as it could be. The heroes are guided by charming dream passages that profoundly illustrate the complication and creativity of people. The booklover observes one vision, heroes hear another, and the inevitable drama touches the most human of all feelings - the weakness of the old, the pride of youth, instability, mortality, mysteriousness, loyalty, love

and the desire for life.

Though science fiction and fantasy are still to this day looked down upon by those people, who call themselves 'literary', this set of fantasy accounts shaped the rational tale around the major protagonist Gilgamesh, the well-known king of Uruk over four centuries ago. Gilgamesh, historically recognized as a real person, was an equivalent of Greek Hercules. He was partially god, partially human. He upset and amused gods, he was their son, their plaything, their puppet. The gods send Enkidu to disgrace Gilgamesh: they struggle, they declare truce, and they become friends. They set out together to track the malevolence monster Humbaba and kill him. Enkidu, just like Gilgamesh, is mortal and he passes away. Gilgamesh is overwhelmed with sorrow and goes questing for a secret of eternal life. He meets 'Noah' (Utnapishtim here) who is immortal now, and he describes how he survived the flood that historically happened thousand years before. Gilgamesh get the magic plant but it is eaten by a devious snake. The story is the millennia-old tragedy, yet it is not possible not to feel the grief of the great king at Enkidu's demise. The story is not faultless, but Sandars' excellent sixty-page work and introduction clarifies all that in a rather academic manner.

It should also be mentioned that this narrative edition provides the scientific accuracy, but certainly keeps the delicacy of feeling. The introduction to the deities is enjoyable. As for the narrative, it is full of myths and intrigue and, even though introduction provides a lot of the plot and actions, it was still extremely exciting and full of surprises. It is

difficult to believe the protagonists of the story lived so long ago. This book is highly recommended for all people, who are interested in old myths and history.



The Culture of Ancient Egypt by J.A Wilson



Wilson, John A. *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*. N.p.: University Of Chicago Press, 1956. 352 pp. Print.

Introduction

This book report reviews the book *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, written by Professor John A. Wilson in 1956 and issued by the University of Chicago Press. The initial hardcover was named *The Burden of Egypt*. It is the finest single work ever written concerning Ancient Egypt. It is the interpretative work rather than merely straight history that introduces the booklover to the Egyptian mentality and to the course of Egyptian civilization. It is amazingly organized and entertaining.

Story

The account of Egypt is the account of history itself - the everlasting human attempt to carry on, enjoy, and recognize the secrecy of the Universe. Rising from the old spirits of time, Egypt met a challenge of mystery in the wonderful evolution of intellectual, political and religious institutions and for two centuries flourished with the energy, invested in the social order. Then Egypt started to crumble into desert sands and waters of the Nile, and the extraordinary accomplishments in society became the Wilson's lingering epitaph.

The book is not simple to read as the author is presenting beliefs, considered by people as conflicting, but which Egyptians found



harmonizing. The Egyptians altered their own theology within 3,000 years. The author begins the journey from the geographic aspects of Egypt and the long prehistoric struggle and ends the work with the late empire and post-empire (1350 B.C. and after). Generally, the book consists of ten chapters and includes the list of illustrations, which are extremely useful for the reader. The author has an extremely balanced and un-biased look at Ancient Egypt, and suggests a lot of insight into the culture.

The best thing about this book is that it does more than just provide the history lesson. It moves from era to era and clarifies the dynamics of the culture of that period of time. The author discusses the tendencies in art, religion and literature. And it is actually exciting to observe how the unchanging religion and culture of Ancient Egypt, in fact, did alter from era to era. It is an extremely rare glimpse, and the readers should use this chance. It is also nice to see the author acknowledge not to have an answer to some questions, and to note shortcomings within the knowledge.

Analysis

John A. Wilson has created a rich and interpretive life history of one of the utmost cultural eras in the history. As one of the best of current Egyptologists he answers the questions unavoidably asked about the termination of Egypt's magnificence. Here is the scholarship in its best form, concerned with humanity, which had preceded modern people. The findings in people's past splendor and failure is meaningful for



people of today.

The main interest of Wilson was not to investigate and establish the facts. Without doubt, the writer realizes the significance of exploring the real historical facts, but his major interest is not to confirm facts. He takes some data as given and then tries to search for its importance.

It is surprising that in five decades after the book had been written, we actually didn't obtain a lot of knowledge about the subject. Whilst reading this book, it is possible to notice some things mentioned in other books. It is like we actually have not learned anything stunning in recent years. Taking into consideration some of the things discussed by the author, it is nice to put them into perspective. Many authors have a difficulty with identifying where the facts are coming from, and when you know the culture and the way in which it develops, it plays a huge role in how the pieces fit together. There should be more books like *The culture of ancient Egypt*, that break things down era by era, and discuss the occurred alterations.

Generally speaking, it is a very good book. It is a little bit old one, but still relevant to these days. Wilson offers an era by era un-biased look at ancient Egypt, and about the way in which the culture shifted and altered over the centuries.



Ancient Israel by H.M Orlinsky



Orlinsky, H. M. *Ancient Israel*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954. 193 pp. Print.

Introduction

The book *Ancient Israel* by Harry M. Orlinsky, was initially issued in 1954. *Ancient Israel* is the primary work of literature in Western Civilization . The book was issued by the Cornell University Press. In this work, Orlinsky follows the evolvement pathway of the Jewish populace from the genesis in Fertile Crescent, throughout Egyptian custody, the era of Judges, the Exodus, the Kingdom, the Babylonian deportation and ultimately to Restoration. This paper offers the book report on *Ancient Israel*.

Story

The common history of Israel is, by its nature, somewhat extremely difficult to piece together, as the archaeological and written evidence is incomplete. The restricted data, which is accessible, is sourced mainly from religious texts, and the interpretive and metaphorical essence of these writings evolves the difficulties in stating the accuracy of the accounts as the historical fact. The same problems are confronted when researching the military history of ancient Israel. Furthermore, the traditional resources, utilized to corroborate historical interpretations, for instance, archaeology, have not been useful in terms of increasing historians' awareness of old military history in Israel. In spite of the



challenges, which are depicted in the attempt to reconstitute the history, a close inspection of secondary resources exposes the dependable narrative, which assists the contemporary students in learning about the significant role the military played in the initial days of the Israelites.

Once these resources are consulted, a student learns that the weaponry, organization, and strategic aims of the military of old Israel were separated from the same variables among militaries of neighboring states. Concerning Israel, one of the crucial historical facts that stand out is that people of Israel lacked the advanced weaponry and training to utilize arms, as contrasted to the Philistines, who had sophisticated weapons of iron (Orlinsky 63). Actually, iron plays the major role in the military history of the old Near East, and it is this theme that is thoroughly depicted in the book *Ancient Israel* by H.M Orlinsky.

Throughout a course of history, the lack of the object or source has been frequently seen as much the provocation for clash as the presence of it. In the old Near East, iron plays crucial role in military history, both with esteem to the causes why wars were led and how they were led. In contrast to their neighbors, Israel never enjoyed the types of natural sources, which were in great quantities in the area known today as Palestine (Orlinsky 48-49). Especially, Israel lacked reserves of ores and minerals, and as Orlinsky has asserted, "iron and copper ores that did exist in the south were used by people of Israel just when Edom was under their power" (Orlinsky 48-49). The lack of ores, particularly iron, is crucial as the time period was the Iron Age, and foes of the Israelites



had superior weaponry by using natural resources, which were adjustable for this aim (Orlinsky 63). Actually, iron arms existed in Palestine in tiny amounts from at least the period of Pharaoh Merneptah. The fact, recognized as Pharaoh's iron sword, was revealed by archaeologists.

Though the arms of the old Israeli military is one of the most unfinished chapters of the human history, as the biblical texts do not depict their weaponry and very little is known concerning equipment of Israeli military, some common conclusions and observations may be made, based on the restricted archaeological discoveries, discussed in this book.

Apart from the military issues, in *Ancient Israel*, the author traces steps of the Jewish populace from their origins in the Fertile Crescent, through Egyptian custody, the Exodus, the era of the Judges, the Kingdom, and finally to the Babylonian deportation and Restoration. The book is concisely arranged; it is a simply written story of the society, which produced the Bible. As Orlinsky traces the changing destinies of the Israelites and Hebrews during 2000-300 B.C.E., the booklover may observe how Jewish spiritual notions evolved in the context of genuine historical circumstances.

Analysis

The *Ancient Israel* is an academic book, with over 190 pages of notes providing numerous citations and textual analysis. It is much more



available than the majority of such volumes, nevertheless. Whilst it does presume a common awareness of the Old Testament and the primary history of Israel, no special knowledge is required to read this book. The passages presented are included, so there is no need to consult the Bible all the time. The historical moments are written in detail; and they are very exciting. The outcome is the volume that should attract booklovers from outside academia.

Like many scientists, Dr. Orlinsky dismisses the historical reliability of the supernatural events mentioned in the Bible and doubts the direct, individual contact between God and humans. Even so, he asserts that the Bible is the unusually consistent historical document of antiquity. This little book is simple to read, but it is a comparatively short survey of the Old Testament. The author intertwines the historical account with the prophetic message to form a precise image of the ancient Jewish existence.

Some characteristics of the work's presentation are aimed especially at non-specialists. There are highlighted parts within the text, which include quotations from old resources to illustrate the points, made in the major narratives. There are also some figures that provide digests of applicable data, such as the summaries of crucial plot fragments in biblical accounts, comparisons among the related biblical passages, parallels among biblical and extra-biblical resources, and outline sequences of events, which are derived from numerous sources. Moreover, there are the connotations of technical terms and a wide bibliography, and the student-friendly characteristics of this book are

obvious. Altogether, it is the most useful orientation aid, which performs rather like a map with the pathway marked out on it: a reader may definitely follow the marked route if he or she likes, but there is also adequate data on the map to enable booklover to follow other pathways. Considering that students will finally have to make their own way through the history of ancient Israel, they are provided with a pattern of how it might be done in the advantageous way.

