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**Review: Claus Ambos and Lorenzo Verderame (eds.),
*Approaching Rituals in Ancient Cultures; Proceedings of
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This volume arises from a conference held in Rome in 2011. Apart from Mesopotamia the cultures represented include those of Egypt, the Hittites, Israel and Greece. There is also a more general article on ritual figurines in relation to embodiment theories and gender studies. The topic of ritual and rituals in ancient Mesopotamia is a vast one and while the authors provide a useful Introduction it remains to be pointed out the sparse basis that previous work has provided in terms of presentation of Mesopotamian ritual as a topic in its own right rather than text editions. The fact is that there have been only two extensive statements, both from well over half a century ago. The first, by Erich Ebeling in 1931, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* (Berlin – Leipzig), was sparked off by the publication of a plethora of cuneiform texts of ritual content in the wake of major excavations that added greatly to what could be known. The second was a more general study by Giuseppe Furlani, *Riti Assiri e Babilonese* that appeared in 1940. While there is therefore scope for a new publication covering all the facets of Mesopotamian ritual the present publication with its individual contributions shows the way.

Harold Hays' chapter is Egyptological and deals with the ultimate rite of passage, in this case the passage to the afterlife as conceived by the ancient Egyptians while Emanuele M. Ciampini treats of the dynamic of the Hathor ritual. Giulia Torri and Susanne Görke take a new approach to the building rituals of the Hittite kings and utilise newly published texts. Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Mireia López-Bertran investigate the figurines used in rituals from the perspective of gender studies as well as post-feminist and *queer* (their italics) studies with special attention to heteronormativity and dual sex and gender systems. Writing about royal prerogatives in the

kingdom of Judah Nicola Modena discusses the vexed question of the possible cultic role of the *gebira*, usually translated 'queen mother'. Pietro Giammellaro draws attention to the remarkably large number of occurrences of words for threshold on the Homeric epics and discusses the possible significance of this phenomenon. Also outside Mesopotamia but within the Mesopotamian cultural orbit Patrick Maxime Michel writes on the cult and processions of Dagan, providing much new and valuable information.

Of the remaining seven contributions in this book only one is primarily concerned with ritual in the third millennium BC and the rest are devoted to Assyrian and Babylonian ritual topics. Davide Nadali's article takes as its main focus Gudea of Lagaš and provides interesting reflections derived from both the inscriptions as providing divine guidance on the building of the temple of Ningirsu, the statues themselves as three dimensional physical objects, and the two dimensional record of the final plan of the temple, preserved for example on statue B. Nadali could have benefited from the use of Claudia Suter, *Gudea's Temple Building. The Representation of an Early Mesopotamian Ruler in Text and Image* (Groningen 2000), especially since he draws attention to the conjunction of communicative information which the ruler achieves by having the statue of himself, incorporating both the inscription and the temple plan, physically standing in the temple. As Nadali points out this concatenation amounts to a sort of metapicture. The first named editor publishes two of his articles in this volume. The first presents a newly identified tablet pertaining to the building rituals which were the subject of a recent monograph by him. While this addition to the corpus of building ritual texts is welcome museums should perhaps encourage scholars to publish new texts in the major and widely circulated journals. The second deals with the *bīt rimki*, 'house of bathing', ritual text in relation to the substitute ritual for the king. M. Erica Couto-Ferreira explains on p.98 that her contribution will centre on the Late Babylonian tablet from Uruk which bears the excavation number W 23262 and a page later helpfully explains that this has been published as *SpTU* 248. This text is devoted primarily to rituals to make childbirth safe and the author points out how different successive phases of the ritual, always with the woman present, are performed in different places: the garden, a potter's kiln, the river, a 'separate' place. The contribution by Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel has a more general applicability to Babylonian ritual but focuses on a series of

incantations in Tablet VII of the ritual and incantation series *utukkū lemnūtu*, 'evil demons'. Here, it is not only the words accompanying the cultic acts that have an impact on the participants but also the gestures and the sounds and smells, for example of cymbals and incense. Marta Rivaoli writes about the Assyrian king in relation to the annual military campaigns that he led. In the royal annals we read about how the god Ashur bestows on the king not only his support but also the divine standard and it is argued that the act of bestowal must have been marked and accompanied by a ritual of some sort. The topic taken up by Lorenzo Verderame is that of the use of substitution in a variety of ways in Assyrian and Babylonian ritual, focussing on the material we have from the various Neo-Assyrian libraries. He begins by pointing out that this has an economic backbone (not Verderame's way of putting it) since within the assemblage of remedies, actions and substances ranging from the aromatic to the most noxious, what was done was dependant on what the sufferer could afford. Verderame points out that at the centre of his topic lies a simple principle, the specified use of objects, animals and even human beings as substitutes for a person. There are few misprints: p.197 'poutrai' for portrait, p.145 'tipologies' for typologies, p.187 'began' for begun, p.189 'ritual' for rituals, p.212 'who' for 'which'.

One may reasonably hope that this volume will provide a catalyst for future study of Mesopotamian ritual.