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Wilcke, Claus, ed.

*Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft*

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## GENERAL

All of the essays and/or authors included in this valuable volume whose title, “The Spiritual Grasp of the World in the Ancient Orient: Language, Religion, Culture and Society,” reflects its broad scope, relate in some way—in some cases more closely, in others, less so—to Leipzig and its renowned department of Semitics. The book is divided into seven major sections: Language, Religion, Society and Politics, Law, Mathematics, Institutional History, and Concluding Words. For each of the essays in these sections, the up-to-date bibliography will be a helpful aid to the scholar’s continuing research on the topics.

The volume opens with a prologue entitled: “Statt eines Vorwortes: Altorientalistische Jubiläen in Leipzig.” In this essay (“In Place of a Foreword”), marked by touches of sentimentality and reminiscence, Claus Wilcke writes about the worthies of yesteryear—and of today—who contributed to the greatness of the Leipzig school. Noting some significant milestones in the history of Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern studies, Wilcke’s essay spans more than a century of scholarly endeavor and contribution.

The summaries of the essays in the book given below reflect the interests of the reviewer.

## LANGUAGE (five essays)

1. "Die altmesopotamischen lexikalischen Listen—verkannte Kunstwerke?" The late D. O. Edzard, in questioning traditional assumptions about the interpretation of lexical material, poses the question whether or not ancient Mesopotamian lexical lists might actually be viewed as types of unrecognized works of "art," as it were, that is, "belletristic" as opposed to "technical." This calls to mind Edzard's fascination with the overall problem of the classification of Sumerian and Akkadian literature, as seen, for example, in his RIA 7:35ff. entry "Literatur." While Edzard concludes that such classification is not possible, one can still identify certain elements in the lexical lists as containing a narrative of sorts. For example, in a section of the great lexical-encyclopedia work, *urra : hubullu*, the word for "boxwood" heads up a list of "luxury items" that ends with the word "tribute."
2. "Wort—Vers—Text. Bausteine einer altägyptischen Textology." Leipzig Egyptologist Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert presents a study in text linguistics exploring the concepts and definitions of Word—Verse—and Text in Egyptian. Fischer-Elfert's analysis follows the work of Gerhard Fecht and Friedrich Junge.
3. "Zur Entwicklung des Sprachbewusstseins im Alten Orient." Manfred Krebernik focuses upon the development of linguistic awareness among the people of ancient Mesopotamia through the use of their writing system, beginning with the earliest texts. The relationship of the Sumerian language to the evolving cuneiform writing system is explored. In a "Retrospect and Prospect," Krebernik tracks the evolution of linguistic awareness and science as relating to three factors: (1) the formation of the cuneiform writing system; (2) the adaptation of the same to several languages, including the expansion of Akkadian; and (3) further presentation and codification of Sumerian in a milieu dominated by other languages, as a "dead" language.
4. "Benno Landsbergers 'Eigenbegrifflichkeit' in wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Perspektive." Walther Sallaberger investigates Landsberger's influential concept of "Conceptual Autonomy" as characterizing the basic stance of the field of Assyriology. He points out Landsberger's "insistence on treating the Mesopotamian tradition on its own terms."
5. "Wort-Bedeutung und Bedeutung des Wortes: Von den Leipziger Semitistischen Studien zur modernen Akkadistik." The study of Akkadian words in Leipzig is traced by Annette Zgoll, beginning with Friedrich Delitzsch's Habilitationsschrift in 1874. She investigates her theme of a word's meaning as ascertained by lexicographers versus the meaning of a word for a particular individual. She illustrates this by attempting to

“excavate in order to uncover a word’s meaning” by analyzing a prayer, “Ištar, the Star, Goddess of Morning.”

#### RELIGION (four essays)

6. “Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt: Betrachtungen zum hethitischen Orakelpersonal.” Joost Hazenbos contributes a look at Hittite personnel dealing with oracles (“Man Proposes but God Disposes”). He examines oracle techniques, Hittite prosopography, seals with the names of augurers, and augurers in Hittite society, in the military sphere, in magic, and in the scribal craft. Augurers could belong to higher ranks of society and claimed certain common ancestors.

7. “Ein Blick in die Bibliothek des Grossen Tempels in Hattuša.” The Hittite Research project in Mainz supports work dealing with archaeological finds in Hattuša and reports on the publication of “The Concordance of Cuneiform Tablets,” since 1992, as we are informed by its editor, Silvin Košak. One awaits results of work on the text collections of the Great Library in Temple I and the “House on the Slope.”

8. “Heinrich Zimmerns Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion.” Doris Prechel’s article contains a valuable look at the place of Heinrich Zimmern in our grasp of Babylonian religion. (1) In his *BBR*, Zimmern (1862–1931) studied the ritual tablets of the series Šurpu. Though dated, his study is still valuable. (2) He saw Babylonian “astral mythology” as the *fons et origo* of all (Babylonian) religions. This static, nondynamic viewpoint is unacceptable today, since it is apparent that there was no such thing as a single Babylonian religion. There are different Babylonian religions. (3) He subscribed to the “Pan-Babylonian” hypothesis. (4) He tried to systematize religious texts according to specific motifs relating to Christianity, such as “Creation and Chaos,” the Trinity, the Savior (seeing Marduk as the point of origin of the concepts of Messiah and Christ), cult-offerings, and so forth. (5) Although Zimmern’s work on Babylonian ritual was groundbreaking, because of progress in Assyriology, few of his views can be sustained today.

9. “The Four Winds and the Origins of Pazuzu.” In examining the origins of Pazuzu, the domestic spirit and wind-demon, Frans Wiggerman explores the relationship between the art historian and the philologist. The author notes that a gap in perception was begun and perpetuated by members of the Leipzig School—especially Benno Landsberger and F. R. Kraus. Wiggerman sees this as a “very real gap” that cannot be bridged by traditional methods. The article is accompanied by a catalogue of illustrations and descriptions.

## SOCIETY AND POLITICS (three essays)

10. “Menschen ohne König: Zur Wahrnehmung des Königtums in sumerischen und Akkadischen Texten.” Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum explores the (modern) perception of kingship in Sumerian and Akkadian texts. To what degree can the cuneiform documents give an explanation of kingship, a central form of its social structure? The author is skeptical as to whether such a portrayal can be offered.

11. “The Hittite Usage of the Concepts of ‘Great Kingship,’ The Mutual Guarantee of Royal Succession, the Personal Unswerving Loyalty of the Vassal to His Lord and the ‘Chain of Command’ in Vassal Treaties from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.” Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate explores the Hittite usage of the Akkadian equivalent LUGAL.GAL (Great King) and other related concepts in three types of treaties: treaties on equal terms, so-called family or appanage (for maintenance of a ruling house), and purely vassal treaties.

12. “Das Recht: Grundlage des sozialen und politischen Diskurses im Alten Orient.” It is interesting that Claus Wilcke, editor of this volume, set this essay of his in the section on Society and Politics rather than in the section on Law. Wilcke points out the contribution of the Leipzig school in the area of jurisprudence, beginning with such scholars as Daiches and Walthers. While Wilcke states that “the thought of a battle with the ‘Other World’ of the daemonic outside the boundaries of the law was foreign to them,” I would ask: Was it so much their respect for the law, or the embedded nature of the law in their “social and political discourse,” that explains these rituals, or was it perhaps the reality of rank fear and horror at what a dangerous world could bring, and the notion that anything and everything should be used in the struggle, that motivated them to appeal (even) to legal options?

## LAW (two essays)

13. “Das altbabylonische Urteil: Mediation oder *res iudicata*? Zur Stellung des Keilschriftrechts zwischen Rechtsanthropologie und Rechtsgeschichte.” Eva Dombradi focuses upon the Old Babylonian (legal) decision, asking whether it exemplifies mediation or final judgment (no longer subject to appeal). This question entails an appreciation of cuneiform law as viewed from the perspective of legal anthropology (using primarily resources from the ancient Orient) or legal history (using primarily resources from Roman law). Dombradi holds that aspects of both types of Old Babylonian legal decision: *mediation as well as final judgment*, are present in cuneiform law.

14. “‘Gib mire mein Geld zurück!’ Zur rechts- und wirtschaftsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung keilschriftlicher Privatarchive des 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr.” Hans Neumann explores the issue of “Onionology” (emphasis on social and economic records) versus “Tammuzology” (emphasis on literary remains). Neumann notes how Gelb’s emphasis in his Onionology essay of 1967 inspired social-economic research. The prevailing view of rigid state control of economic systems in the third millennium B.C.E. will yield to a more complex (nuanced) view. Were pre-Sargonic economic transactions public or private? Public and private archives are mixed. According to Neumann, a desideratum is a social-historical analysis of this and other similar phenomena in the wider context of other attested sources.

#### MATHEMATICS (one essay)

15. “Zur Mathematik des alten Mesopotamien.” Based on Oelsner’s essay, written as a contribution to the colloquium entitled “On Numbers and Stars: Mathematics and Astronomy of Ancient Mesopotamia,” this present essay is offered as a contribution, noting that Babylonian mathematics has always played a role in the works of Leipzig scholars. Oelsner walks us through the development of mathematics from the early to the late periods in ancient Mesopotamia. He lists various types of texts from which we can infer mathematical information: catalogues; students’ rough work; model documents; and coefficient lists. The Late Babylonian period is not known for its profusion of mathematical and metrological texts, but the Hellenistic period, the period of Oelsner’s expertise, is recognized as the time of the flowering of mathematical astronomy.

#### INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY (one essay)

16. “Leipziger Altorientalistik: 1936–1993.” The study of the ancient Orient in Leipzig through the eyes of J. Oelsner is presented in this fascinating essay. It is most interesting for me because it deals with many people whom I knew about or had met while studying in Germany and at Chicago’s Oriental Institute. Note the dates covered by this essay: Oelsner begins his tale with the dreadful days of Nazi rule in Germany and runs with us through the terrible years of communist rule until after the fall of the Berlin wall. After the construction of the Berlin Wall, the situation got progressively worse (until) around the end of the DDR, when it reached just about zero with regard to the means for acquiring scientific literature. The essay ends with a happier time for Leipzig, from 1993, during which Claus Wilcke was appointed professor of Ancient Oriental Studies.

#### CONCLUDING WORDS (one essay)

17. “Bemerkungen zum Selbstverständnis der Altorientalistik als Nachwort zum Leipziger Kolloquium.” Finally, Gernot Wilhelm offers remarks on the self-image of the field of

ancient Oriental studies as an epilogue to the Leipzig Colloquium. Wilhelm reflects on the terminology identifying the field, such as ancient Oriental studies, Assyriology and Hittitology, or merely Assyriology, but also cuneiform studies, and languages and cultures of the Near East. The implications of these terminological differences affect how departments are organized at various universities and how grants are allocated. As the title of this essay indicates, the influence of Benno Landsberger (cf. Landsberger's "Eigenbegrifflichkeit" [1926]) is still quite prevalent in the field in that linguistic structure is one of the most important determinatives of a culture. Wilhelm concludes: we return to our texts, deciphering, joining, autographing, and editing. In like manner does the reviewer of this fascinating book, as he returns to the study of his texts.