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A Festschrift that was intended to celebrate the achievements of the honoree and pay tribute to his scholarship ended with much sadness as a Gedenkschrift. Victor Avigdor Hurowitz died on 20 January 2013, before the two-volume book already in preparation could be presented to him. The loss of Hurowitz, both as scholar and friend, is expressed in the preface (xv–xvi) and “Personal and Academic Biography” (xvii–xxii) and continues to be voiced throughout: many of the authors open their papers with memories of and reflections on their close relationship with Hurowitz, either as students in graduate school, colleagues, or former students.

The Festschrift is broken up to two volumes: volume 1 consists of thirty-six English papers (over 650 pages); volume 2, of approximately 300 pages, includes fifteen papers in Hebrew (English abstracts of the Hebrew papers are given on 1:xxxv–xli)—fifty-one papers total. The papers within each volume are arranged alphabetically, not thematically. A count according to subject reveals that thirty-four articles deal with the biblical text or Bible-related matters, eleven are Assyriological, four are concerned with comparative Semitics and epigraphy, one with Ugaritic literature, and one is Hittitological.

The “Personal and Academic Biography” as well as the list of publications (xxiii–xxxiv) illuminate the main concern of Hurowitz. Although he wrote purely Assyriological studies, the majority of his work was devoted to reading the Bible in light of ancient Near
Eastern comparative data. The main themes of his concern were temple building (in the theological and ideological senses), the image of the divine (in particular, the cult statue), and wisdom literature. Because it is impossible in a brief review to encompass the entire content of this almost thousand-pages-long Festschrift, I will focus on a select number of paper that adopt the comparative method and thus best reflect Hurowitz’s scholarship (starting from the English volume and moving to the Hebrew one).

Shawn Zelig Alster (13–42) revisits one of Hurowitz’s well-known articles that dealt with “Isaiah’s impure lips” (see xxviii, no. 7) and develops the argument that Isa 6 was written with an intimate knowledge (perhaps mediated by diplomats arriving to Judah) of the ideological message of the Assyrian throne room in Kalah, as conveyed by the complicated layout of reliefs along its walls.

Mordechai Cogan (73–82) considers 1 Kgs 13, which tells of the man of God prophesying to Jeroboam of the birth of Josiah, in light of ancient prophecies and their fulfillment in the inscriptions of King Ashurbanipal.

Chaim Cohen (83–110) argues that kṣabīr in Isa 10:13 (in words said by the Assyrian king of his treatment of subjugated nations) is the semantic equivalent of the Akkadian kīma rimi/rimāniš, “like a wild bull” (common in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions), against the qere reading ka’bir, “strong, mighty.”

John Day (139–59; previously published elsewhere; see author note) argues for the textual integrity of Gen 11. He marshals Babylonian and Assyrian sources in order to rebut the thesis of Ch. Uehlinger (in his 1990 book, Weltreich und “eine Rede”) that it was Sargon II’s capital, Dur-Sharru-kin, which is when and where the inspiration and rendition of the story of the tower of Babel took off. He opts for the more traditional stance, that the story was written during the Neo-Babylonian/Persian period. Consider here Hurowitz’s article (in Hebrew) about Sargon II as a builder king (xxvi, no. 39).

Natalie N. May (369–88) explores the biblical tabernacle and its posts (qarshe hammishkan). She discusses Mari qersu, “tent-pole,” which designates as a pars pro toto a portable shrine and, as she argues, is a West Semitic loanword in Akkadian. In Neo-Assyrian sources, it comes to designate a portable sanctuary, represented pictorially in a number of reliefs. The biblical description of tabernacle thus “may have been inspired by the Assyrian portable shrine.”

Shalom M. Paul (401–6) compares Job’s curse of the day of his birth (Job 3) to ancient Near Eastern and Mesopotamian sources concerned with stillborn or difficult births. He points out some shared expressions and metaphors.
Frank Polak (407–27) makes a case for a distinction between first-person Neo-Assyrian and West-Semitic royal inscriptions, the latter opening with what he terms as the “I-style.” He continues to provide a discourse analysis of the Mesha Stela in comparison with Biblical Hebrew: verb-usage patterns, prose prosody, the function of the vertical stroke, and a possible oral performance of the text. His readings offer several insights of historical significance.

Mark S. Smith (479–97) calls upon the epic literature of Ugarit (Aqhat), Babylonia (Gilgamesh), and Greece (Iliad) in order to reassess “David’s voice(s)” in his lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1): one voice is public and commemorative (vv. 19–25), and the other is private and heroic (vv. 25–26).

Zafrira Ben-Barak (47*–72*) reads the episode of Naboth (1 Kgs 21) as a pivotal event in the fall of the house of Omri. With a view on the trail of Naboth, she looks at ancient Near Eastern evidence (Egyptian and Neo-Babylonian) for legal proceedings against high treason.

Jonathan Ben-Dov (73*–90*) gives considerable attention to the Neo-Babylonian sources (at times polemical) regarding the ritual duties and self-image of priesthood vis-à-vis the role of the king as the provider of temples. He does this in order to sharpen for us the ideological message in the book of Malachi: a picture of the ideal priesthood and a critique directed at its current state.

Israel Eph’al (35*–46*) discusses the phenomenon of renaming cities following their (re)conquest by the Neo-Assyrian kings. A brief discussion is given to examples found in the biblical text, but the article ends with an interesting excursion on the Israeli government’s semi-official policy of renaming Arab villages and sites with (at times ancient) Hebrew names after the 1948 war.

Shalom Eliezer Holtz (91*–100*) interprets the law against worship of other gods (Deut 17:2–7). He demonstrates that, in order to inflict the death penalty on the offender by stoning, the judge sitting on the case first was to be informed of the evidence, considered it, and then decided on its veracity. His reading and interpretation of the law is based on a similar three-phase procedure court that he detects in Neo-Babylonian sources.

Jonathan Yogev and Shamir Yona (151*–60*) focus on a number of literary motifs common to the narratives of Abraham and Danilu. They reach the conclusion, after examining the “barrenness” motif in ancient Near Eastern, Greek, and Roman literatures, that there is no ground for assuming a tie between the biblical story and the Ugaritic epic.
Michael V. Fox (185*-96*) demonstrates in detail the editorial techniques of the author of Prov 22:17–23:10—a section that, as is known, is based on the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. He argues that the author of the section held in his hands an Aramaic translation of the Egyptian text—a scroll—out of which, as he read it up and down, he picked out what he considered relevant for his moral message.

Danel Kahn (229*-40*) writes about the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs 17–18). A comparison between the chapters in Kings and Sennacherib’s Third Campaign reveals a structural similarity of narrative. This suggests to Kahn not a dependency on an Assyrian source but rather a shared literary technique or convention of storytelling. This supports his opinion that 2 Kgs 17: 3–6 should be considered a single source and not the fusion of two or more sources.

Nili Shupak (271*-94*) studies the Egyptian term bwt, “abomination, taboo,” and other prohibitions. She argues that, although not stated explicitly as bwt, the eating of lamb for (certain social classes of) Egyptians was forbidden because of religious taboos and that shepherding was considered a lowly and despised occupation. Seen from this perspective, one can understand the biblical expression tōʿbat miṣrayim (Gen 43:32; 46:34; Exod 8:22) as a reflection of actual Egyptian practices and norms.

I have chosen to highlight these contributions because they engage with the same methodological problems that Hurowitz faced in his studies. At times they even directly respond to or converse with Hurowitz’s own explorations. Brought together in this Festschrift, they stand as a testimony to the worth of his engagement with the Bible and Mesopotamia and hold the standard for comparative studies. Even if the comparative method may seem to be less in fashion nowadays, for we are living through a skeptical age, these papers demonstrate that both fields—Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies—stand much to gain by following the path of dialogue and discourse upon which Victor Hurowitz left his indelible footprints.