

Winter, Irene J. 2007. Agency Marked, Agency Ascribed: The Affective Object in Ancient Mesopotamia. In *Art's Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner. Pp. 42–69. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

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*The Eršema Prayers of the First Millennium BC*. By URI GABBAY. Heidelberg Emesal-Studien, vol. 2. Wiesbaden: HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG, 2015. Pp. xv + 375, 30 pls. €89.

With *The Eršema Prayers of the First Millennium BC* (henceforth *Eršema*), Uri Gabbay presents us with a much-needed edition of all extant first-millennium Eršemas. This book, which is a revised version of Gabbay's dissertation, complements *Pacifying the Hearts of the Gods* (henceforth *Pacifying*) by the same author, which is the first volume in the new series, Heidelberg Emesal-Studien.

*Eršema* is therefore best understood within this two-book context, although this review focuses only on the present work—this reviewer has not read *Pacifying*. This is an important point to make, because it shapes the ways in which Gabbay deals with his subject matter. As Gabbay warns us in his introduction to *Eršema*, “the Eršemas together with other genres of Emesal prayers [have been dealt with] in my book *Pacifying the Hearts of the Gods*. In this introduction only the most relevant points will be repeated, while some issues not dealt with in the other book will be expanded” (p. 1). Unfortunately, this choice is extremely problematic, because it makes *Eršema* too heavily dependent on its predecessor. A couple of examples discussed below will illustrate this point. This is, however, the only problem in an otherwise impeccable work.

It is well known that Eršemas are ritual compositions written in Emesal and dating back to the Old Babylonian Period. They share similar “language, phraseology and form” (p. 5), but for all that they contain unique features. The main theme of the Eršemas is a goddess' lament, usually associated with the wrath of a deity causing havoc among mankind (p. 4). Yet not much work has been done on this genre, as emerges from Gabbay's review of the scholarship. With *Pacifying* and *Eršema*, Gabbay successfully rectifies this situation.

*Eršema* is divided into six chapters: a short introduction (pp. 1–20), the edition of the Eršemas paired with Balaḡs (pp. 21–168), the edition of the so-called Ritual Eršemas (pp. 169–260), the edition of seventeen fragments which could possibly be part of Eršemas (pp. 261–80), and a synoptic transliteration of first-millennium Eršemas and their parallels (pp. 281–343). The volume also contains thorough indexes as well as thirty plates. The result is an outstanding work in which the author displays his mastery of the topic and provides us with an important contribution to the scholarship on the Eršemas.

The introduction opens with a description of the nature of first-millennium Eršemas followed by a review of the secondary literature (pp. 1–3). The latter is surprisingly short, given the complexities of such interesting subject matter. This is not a fault of the author, naturally, as he surveys the extant studies in a concise but clear manner. It nevertheless stresses how important Gabbay's work is in filling a major gap in the scholarship.

This is followed by a brief summary of the book's plan and by the bulk of the introduction. In it Gabbay presents an overview of the typology of the Eršemas (pp. 3–4), an overview of their content (pp. 4–5), a discussion of some of their unique features (pp. 5–11), a review of the deities to whom the Eršemas were dedicated (pp. 11–12), and a description of the cultic context and performance of the Eršemas (pp. 12–13).

Classifying ancient literary genres is not an easy task. Yet when it comes to the Eršemas, the ancient Mesopotamians were very clear about their typology. Gabbay identifies two types of first-millennium Eršemas: the independent, or Ritual Eršemas, which exist independently from other Emesal texts; and the Eršemas paired with Balaḡs, another type of Emesal ritual lament. Almost all extant Balaḡs end with either one or two Eršemas. One of the main differences between these two types of Eršemas is the fact that Ritual Eršemas do not contain the pacification units, while the Eršemas paired with Balaḡs do (see below).

The content of the Eršemas has been mentioned briefly above. Generally speaking, this can be relatively standardized, and some sections—for instance the manifestation of the deity as well as his

pacification—occur throughout the corpus. Other elements, however, are unique to the Eršemas. They include the so-called heart pacification unit, a unique sequence of deities, and unique literary structures.

The heart pacification unit is thoroughly discussed in *Pacifying*. It is a feature of the Eršemas paired with Balaḡs and it rarely occurs in Ritual Eršemas. The reasons for this difference are not explained in this section—though one imagines they are discussed in *Pacifying*. Yet, the curious reader might wish to know more without consulting another book.

Gabbay points out that several types of heart pacification units exist, but common features, as well as differences, can be detected. The pacification is introduced by “a plea that the heart and mind of the god be pacified” (p. 5). This opening is followed by sections that vary depending on the deity to whom the pacification is addressed (pp. 5–7). As for the concluding line of the pacification, besides being visually separated from the rest of the composition by a dividing line, it often opens with the exclamation “How long!” The significance of this organization is not discussed.

The unique sequence of gods covers all of half a page (p. 9), and it lists deities “typical of the opening litanies of some Eršemas and probably absent from the other genres of Emesal prayers.” The relevance of these deities is not discussed, although a reference to *Pacifying* suggests that the topic might be expanded upon there.

Gabbay’s discussion of the unique literary structures attested in the Eršemas is slightly more thorough. Here, the author identifies elements such as “a two-line couplet that begins a section after a dividing line (with one exception), where the second line begins with the phrase è-a, ‘appearing,’ and then repeats the content of the first line” (p. 10); pairing of lines not attested elsewhere, as well as “a single line before proceeding with the following triplet” (p. 11). A useful table (Table 3) illustrates these patterns. Unfortunately, Gabbay does not clarify the meaning or the significance of these literary structures. The fact that only five Eršemas share these features makes one wonder about their actual relevance to the study of the corpus as a whole.

After a short review of the gods to whom Eršemas are dedicated, Gabbay turns to the cultic context and performance of the Eršemas. He connects them with the performance of the Balaḡs and concludes that both types “were probably regularly performed one after the other in front of the seated god in his cella, before the meal, but with different instruments” (p. 12). This is evidenced not only by the ritual texts, which he discusses in *Pacifying*, but also by the names of the compositions themselves (p. 11).

The remainder of the volume consists of the critical edition of one hundred and fourteen documents. Each text is provided with an introduction, a very useful list of all ritual attestations of the text, a critical edition, a translation, and a commentary. In this section Gabbay demonstrates his breadth of knowledge and his ease with the material under investigation.

The layout of the critical editions is remarkably easy to follow. This is certainly the case when the composition is attested only in one manuscript, as is No. 94, an Eršema to Marduk uncovered in Nineveh (pp. 253–54). However, the edition is equally clear in cases such as No. 42, “Shining heaven, like fire,” an Eršema to Inanna preserved on five manuscripts dating from the Neo-Assyrian to the Arsacid Period (pp. 150–63). Achieving such clarity is always a challenge when dealing with bilingual documents, and Gabbay is to be applauded for having chosen a “user-friendly” format.

In conclusion, despite the fact that *Eršema* presupposes knowledge of *Pacifying*, and that the two books work in tandem, this volume is an excellent work of scholarship and a welcome addition to the study of Emesal documents.

As a final note, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the volume is reasonably priced. Indeed, it is quite remarkable that a book of such a length, and with so many plates, costs less than €100. The publishers and the editors of the series must be commended for striving to make these volumes accessible to more than just university libraries.

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