# INTEGRITY AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION: BREAKDOWN WILL LEAD TO BREAKTHROUGH IF (AND ONLY IF) MAN REMAINS TRUE TO GOD

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**Abstract:** Insight, 'a thousand-mile journey begins with a single step', instruction, 'finish with the same care you took in beginning' (*Tao Te Ching, 64*), and hence the need for always choosing right, testify to integrity, while questioning our human quest. Who will we be, perforce, become, between the 'wholly other' and the 'wholly same'? If 'we are learning for the schoolroom, but not for real life' (Seneca, letter 112), then the answer to this question does not really matter.

**Keywords:** *alterity, God, identity, integrity, man*

'Like a soldier under oath he thinks of this life as a tour of duty'[1].

## By the rivers of Babylon

A few millennia ago, many a mile away, some time before Babylon[2], some place beyond Babylon[3], by the said rivers of sad history and of sad memory for all the women and for all the men whose heart would never follow them through the gates of exile out and afar from their beloved home Jerusalem[4], by rivers slowly flowing[5], slowly shifting beds across a parched Land wide and flat, by rivers mighty as a mighty palace, by rivers menacing as raging bulls[6], by rivers that would lend that Land its lasting

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name but not *their* name, by rivers that would lend that Land its life[7], in that Land that we Moderns like to call the 'cradle of civilisation', there was a city. A city in a Land of cities[8], clustered together with such density that one woman or man blessed with good eyes could sometimes see from one onto the next. The names of its numerous sisters we mostly know today. *Its* name is lost. The locals call it ʾAbū Ṣalābīḫ, Arabic for 'Father of Flints'[9] (or, alternatively, for 'Father of Clinker'[10]).

And in this city of uncertain name[11], covered in heavy silt and hardened salt, a city never large nor lavish ages ago when at its height, a city that the locals had known only for as long as they could remember as nothing other but four low mounds[12] white after the rain lost in a waste of land, in a forsaken place, where not much ever happened, and few lived[13], a city that would be discovered, to some extent, by accident[14] – in this city so very old[15] would be discovered the world's first literary treasure, dated to the 26th century BC. In so far as a *literary treasure* is a large corpus of such texts that Sumerologists and/or Assyriologists traditionally label 'literary', to wit, such texts that are neither administrative nor lexical. My kind reader may have already guessed that texts that old· or older (and indeed, more recent ones, too), are mostly either administrative (therefore serving utilitarian purposes) or lexical (therefore serving the (meta)utilitarian purpose of teaching the language and script of administration to scribes, so that they could in turn write more administrative texts). Hence any other text that Sumerologists and/or Assyriologists could lay their hands on they have labelled 'literary'. The literary texts discovered in ʾAbū Ṣalābīḫ mostly concern themselves with matters of religion and morality.

Call them then, if you do not like the label 'literary' – the world's first treasure of religious and moral texts. My kind reader will certainly not be so strict as to consider them strictly irrelevant because they are not, or *not only*, literary according to our modern tastes. Perhaps they are not formally experimental often enough. Perhaps they do not always stage the trials and tribulations of the modern psyche as it constructs and deconstructs and reconstructs itself. Perhaps they have low social consciousness. Let me be honest with you: certainly they carry very heavy baggage, ideologically speaking (gods, kings, dos, don'ts, human sin, divine wrath). Please hear them briefly, very briefly, speak.

Thus reads the end of the *Keš Temple Hymn* in its archaic version from ʾAbū Ṣalābīḫ as translated by the expedition epigrapher, Professor

Biggs, or 'Robert-the-Silent', as Agatha Christie[16] (certainly, better known to archaeologists as Mrs Mallowan[17]) once nicknamed him:

'To the city, to the city, O man, approach! Do not approach!
To the city, to the Keš temple, O man, approach! Do not approach!
To its goddess Tu, approach! Do not approach!'[18]

*Das ganz Andere*

So strange must have seemed this strong exhortation to Professor Jacobsen that he preferred to read instead the corresponding section of the standard, later (that is, Old Babylonian) version[19] of the *Keš Temple Hymn* in terms of 'clients come seeking clientage', four times[20]. That so perceptive a poet and so learned a religious scholar[21] should have given us this translation seems to me stranger still. And yet, one should perhaps remember at this juncture how confident Professor Jacobsen, arguably the greatest Sumerologist that ever lived since Sumer has been rediscovered in the nineteenth century, and certainly the greatest scholar of Mesopotamian religion, also appeared about his theory of 'primitive democracy'[22] (to put it very briefly: that Sumerian city-states in the Early Dynastic Period were instances of primitive democracy), and how little substantiated (and contested[23]) this theory remains.

The double exhortation at the end of the *Keš Temple Hymn*, uttered three times in the archaic version from Ảbū Ṣalābīẖ, four times in later versions, *is* contradictory, but to a Jew, in this connection, Exodus 3:4-5[24] may come to mind, and to a Christian also Hebrews 10:31[25]. To any student of religion, furthermore, both Rudolf Otto's concept of *das Numinöse*, with its *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*[26], and Mircea Eliade's concept of *coincidentia oppositorum* (see Appendix).

*Das ganz Selbe*

Integrity, then, I contend, is always to be found at the surprising intersection of two fundamental human quests: the quest for the 'wholly other' and the quest for the 'wholly same'. Indeed they are but one. And thus integrity asks of us the decisive question: is it this single, simple source the source of our two concepts of identity and of alterity? We know

that both identity and alterity emerge to our consciousness in relation to one another. But is this relation in itself the precious, priceless gift of something else, or someone else, that is, of absolute alterity and absolute identity, that are but one? And after all is said and written, is not integrity the courage and the grace to live one's life as *one* life, rather than a myriad of lonely lives lacking true love?

> One does not find God if one remains in the world; one does not find God if one leaves the world. Whoever goes forth to his You with his whole being and carries to it all the being of the world, finds him whom one cannot seek.
>
> Of course, God is 'the wholly other'; but he is also the wholly same: the wholly present. Of course, he is the *mysterium tremendum* that appears and overwhelms; but he is also the mystery of the obvious that is closer to me than my own I.
>
> When you fathom the life of things and of conditionality, you reach the indissoluble; when you dispute the life of things and of conditionality, you wind up before the nothing; when you consecrate life you encounter the living God[27].

## Appendix

'All these myths present us with a twofold revelation: they express on the one hand the diametrical opposition of two divine figures sprung from one and the same principle and destined, in many versions, to be reconciled at some *illud tempus* of eschatology, and on the other, the *coincidentia oppositorum* in the very nature of the divinity, which shows itself, by turns or even simultaneously, benevolent and terrible, creative and destructive, solar and serpentine, and so on (in other words, actual and potential). In this sense it is true to say that myth reveals more profoundly than any rational experience ever could, the actual structure of the divinity, which transcends all attributes and reconciles all contraries. That this mythical experience is no mere deviation is proved by the fact that it enters into almost all the religious experience of mankind, even within as strict a tradition as the Judaeo-Christian. Yahweh is both kind and wrathful; the God of the Christian mystics and theologians is terrible and gentle at once and it is this *coincidentia oppositorum* which is the starting point for the boldest speculations of such men as the pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhardt, and Nicholas of Cusa.

The *coincidentia oppositorum* is one of the most primitive ways of expressing the paradox of divine reality. We shall be returning to this formula when we come to look at divine "forms", to the peculiar structure revealed by every divine "personality", given of course that the divine personality is not to be simply looked upon as a mere projection of human personality. However, although this conception, in which all contraries are reconciled (or rather, transcended), constitutes what is, in fact, the most basic definition of divinity, and shows how utterly different it is from humanity, the *coincidentia oppositorum* becomes nevertheless an archetypal model for certain types of religious men, or for certain of the forms religious experience takes. The *coincidentia oppositorum* or transcending of all attributes can be achieved by man in all sorts of ways. At the most elementary level of religious life there is the orgy: for it symbolizes a return to the amorphous and the indistinct, to a state in which all attributes disappear and contraries are merged. But exactly the same doctrine can also be discerned in the highest ideas of the eastern sage and ascetic, whose contemplative methods and techniques are aimed at transcending all attributes of every kind. The ascetic, the sage, the Indian or Chinese "mystic" tries to wipe out of his experience and consciousness every sort of "extreme", to attain to a state of perfect indifference and neutrality, to become insensible to pleasure and pain, to become completely self-sufficient. This transcending of extremes through asceticism and contemplation also results in the "coinciding of opposites"; the consciousness of such a man knows no more conflict, and such pairs of opposites as pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion, cold and heat, the agreeable and the disagreeable are expunged from his awareness, while something is taking place within him which parallels the total realization of contraries within the divinity. As we saw earlier (§ 57), the oriental mind cannot conceive perfection unless all opposites are present in their fullness. The neophyte begins by identifying all his experience with the rhythms governing the universe (sun and moon), but once this "cosmisation" has been achieved, he turns all his efforts towards *unifying* the sun and moon, towards taking into himself the *cosmos as a whole*; he remakes in himself and for himself the primeval unity which was before the world was made; a unity which signifies not the chaos that existed before any forms were created but the undifferentiated *being* in which all forms are merged' (Eliade, Mircea, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated by Rosemary Sheed, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1958, xv+484 p., 419-420).

## Endnotes

1 'He who is wise and pursues wisdom clings to his body, but even so with the best part of himself he is elsewhere and focusses his thoughts on higher matters. Like a soldier under oath he thinks of this life as a tour of duty; and he has been trained to neither love nor hate life, and he puts up with mortal matters though he knows that higher things await him' (Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, vii.3=65, 18). English translation: Brad Inwood (Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by), *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters*, Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, xxv+409 p., 13. In the original Latin: '*Sapiens adsectatorque sapientiae adhaeret quidem in corpore suo, sed optima sui parte abest et cogitationes suas ad sublimia intendit. Velut sacramento rogatus hoc quod vivio stipendium putat; et ita formatus est ut illi nec amor vitae nec odium sit, patiturque mortalia quamvis sciat ampliora superesse*' (L. D. Reynolds (*recognovit et adnotatione critica instruxit*), *L. Annaei Senecae Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* (2 vol.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, xx+554 p., vol. 1, 179, lines 18-21). Professor Inwood is a leading scholar of Stoicism. Born in Brockville, Ontario [Canada] on 13 June 1953 – PhD in Classics from the University of Toronto in 1981 – Professor of Philosophy and of Classics at Yale University since 2015 (also, from 1990 to the present, Professor of Classics, then of Philosophy and Classics, then University Emeritus Professor, at the University of Toronto) – Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 1994, and Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 2019. Has published widely on the Presocratics, Aristotle, and Hellenistic Philosophy. Leighton Durham Reynolds was a leading Classicist and philologist. Born in Abercanaid, Glamorgan [Wales, UK] on 11 February 1930 – Emeritus Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at the University of Oxford from 1996 to 1997 (also, from 1957 to 1997, Fellow and Tutor in Classics at, then Senior Dean of, and Acting Principal of, Brasenose College, Oxford) – Member of the British Academy from 1987 – died in Oxford on 4 December 1999. Has produced standard editions of several Latin authors, and studies of the textual transmission of the Classics. Professor Inwood and Professor Reynolds are splendid authors. My kind reader should profit from the reading of any of their contributions.

2 'Hammurabi became king of Babylon in 1792 BC'; 'Babylon itself was only some 400 years old by the time Hammurabi ascended the throne' (Marc Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography*, Blackwell Ancient Lives, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, 171 p., 1). 'It is a fact that Babylon is very little known in the Third Millennium B.C. It only came to prominence when Hammurabi made it the dominant power in southern Iraq in the earlier second millennium B.C.' (Wilfred G. Lambert, 'Babylon: Origins', in Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum – Margarete van Ess – Joachim Marzahn (eds), *Babylon: Wissenkultur in Orient und Okzident*, Topoi: Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 1, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2011, 379 p., 71-76, 71).

3 See, for instance, the convenient map from Roger Matthews, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: Theories and Approaches*, Approaching the Ancient World, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, 253 p., 2.

4 'By the rivers of Babylon there we sat weeping when we remembered Zion. On the poplars in its midst we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for the words of a song; Our tormentors, for joy: "Sing for us a song of Zion!" But how could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget. May my tongue stick to my palate if I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem beyond all my

delights' (Psalm 137:1-6). In the original Hebrew: 'וּנֵרְכָזְב וּניִכָּב־םַּג וּנְבַשָׁי םָׁשׁ לֶבָּב ׀תוֹרֲהַנ לַע וּנָּל וּרִיַשׁ הֶחְמִשׂ וּניֵלָלוֹתְו רִישׁ־יֵרְבִד וּניֵבוֹשׁ וּנוּלֵאְשׁ םָשׁ :וּניֵתוֹרֹנִּכ וּניִלָּת הָכוֹתְב םיִבָרֲע־לַע :ןוֹיִּצ־תֶא וֹניִמְי חַכְשִׁת םָלָשׁוּרְי ְךֵחָכְשֶׁא־םִא :רָכֵנ תַמְדַא לַע הָוהְי־רִישׁ־תֶא רִישָׁנ ְךיֵא :ןוֹיִּצ רִישִּׁמ יִתָחְמִשׂ שׁאֹר לַע םַלָשׁוּרְי־תֶא הֶלֲעַא אֹל־םִא יִכֵרְכְזֶא אֹל־םִא יִכִּחְל'. There is no standard English translation of the Bible. I use the New American Bible Revised Edition included in: Donald Senior – John J. Collins – Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016[3], 2560 p. For the Old Testament, the standard edition of the Hebrew (and Aramaic) original is: Karl Elliger *et al.* (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997[5], 1629 p. For the New Testament, the standard edition of the Greek original is: Barbara Aland *et al.* (ed.), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, based on the work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012[28], 1008 p.

5 'The next day (a Friday) a trip had been planned for Babylon, so I finally got to see fabled Babylon. It was a disappointment to find that the Tower of Babel was now a deep, water-filled hole in the ground, and that no one knew for sure where the Hanging Gardens of Babylon had been located. However, there was a wonderful tranquility walking among the groves of date palms along the slowly moving Euphrates. Now, so many years later, the phrase that comes to mind when I think of Babylon is from Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept"' (Robert D. Biggs, 'My Career in Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology', *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 19 (2005: 1) 1-23, 8).

6 'The palace is a huge river; its interior is a goring bull' (Bendt Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, Bethesda, CDL, 2005, 426 p., 74).

7 'The Euphrates River of this study is a source of water and sediment, change and permanency in a harshly arid setting whose other natural resources are notably few. It makes fertile a green ribbon of cultivated fields and orchards, interspersed by the desolate ruins or bustling modern descendants of the world's most ancient towns. Shifting its course in greater or lesser degree as it rises each spring, it periodically contradicts its promise of security and contentment with the hardship of drought induced low water or the devastation of floods. But in the long run, overriding all such vicissitudes, it has provided the only possible foundation for an immense column of human achievement that has risen laboriously in a pivotal region over hundreds of generations. It is, in short, a brown, sinuous, pulsing artery that carries the gift of life' (Robert McC. Adams, *Heartland of Cities: Surveys of Ancient Settlement and Land Use on the Central Floodplain of the Euphrates*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1981, xx+362 p., 1). 'But it cannot be overstressed that there are few if any other streams, regardless of size, that have played so central and long-continuing a role in human history. The formative processes leading to the world's first urban civilization cannot be understood except as a creative adaptation to the priceless resource of Euphrates water. Vigorous later traditions in political economy, religion, administration, literature, and art continued to build on the foundation of an assured food supply that the Euphrates made possible. Even the land itself, the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia, is in large part composed of silt that the river carried down' (*ibid.*). 'The vast plains formed partly by the alluvial fill of the rift valley separating the African and the Eurasian tectonic sheets characterize the landscape. Mesopotamia includes the western foothills of the huge range of the Zagros Mountains, pushed up by those sheets. The Tigris follows an almost straight course through the original valley, while the Euphrates, having originated in almost the same area as the Tigris, joins this valley only after a wide loop through modern Syria. Ultimately the two rivers flow jointly into the Persian Gulf, the lower part of the valley. For millennia, the sediments carried by

the rivers gradually filled the valley, forming a vast alluvial plain. We assume that this process ended about ten thousand years ago, though minor changes may have occurred later' (Hans J. Nissen – Peter Heine, *From Mesopotamia to Iraq: A Concise History*, translated by Hans J. Nissen, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2009, viii+180 p., 1).

8 'Southern Mesopotamia was a land of cities. It became one precociously, before the end of the fourth millennium B.C. Urban traditions remained strong and virtually continuous through vicissitudes of conquest, internal upheaval accompanied by widespread economic breakdown, and massive linguistic and population replacement. The symbolic and material content of civilization obviously changed, but its cultural ambience remained tied to cities. How firmly the occupants of the lower Mesopotamian plain ever recognized that alluvial terrain as a special object of attachment is uncertain, but their enduring loyalty to familiar associations and localities within it – to cities – is not a matter of doubt. Here we are concerned with the material conditions that must have played an important part in originating and sustaining these roots of attachment. And it is impossible to escape the conviction that irrigation agriculture – or the comparative security, population density and stability, and social differentiation and complexity that it induced – was at the very heart of these material conditions' (Adams, *Heartland*, 2). 'Here we must also mention one further point. The terms *village*, *city*, and *state*, which are normally used in the archaeological literature, are so changeable that one would really prefer to do without them. Their definition becomes easier if we follow the example of settlement researchers, who assess the importance of a settlement by its relationship to its (settled) surroundings. The main terms that must then be used are *center* and *surroundings*, which together form a compact system, insofar as both parts of a settlement system are permanently dependent on each other. The people living in the surrounding area are dependent on the "central functions" in the center, such as, for example, temples, warehouses, and the administration or social leadership. On the other hand, the center requires compensation for its services in the shape of tribute or taxes paid by the inhabitants of the surrounding area. Such interdependence between the inhabitants of a central settlement and those in the surrounding area first becomes comprehensible to the archaeologist, however, when the people living in the surrounding area have also organized themselves into settlements. The place where the central functions are carried on for settlements of this sort is on a higher organizational level precisely because of its centralized functions and may thus be called the center of the settlement system. Since this mutual relationship provides us with a lowest common denominator, we may define this place as a "center of the first order" and call the system a simple, or two-tier, settlement system' (Hans J. Nissen, *The Early History of the Ancient Near East: 9000-2000 B.C.*, translated by Elizabeth Lutzeier, with Kenneth J. Northcott, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1988, xiv+215 p., 10).

9 'Readers of earlier issues of the Oriental Institute's annual report will recall that the Oriental Institute conducted brief soundings in Iraq in 1963 and 1965 at a site known as Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh ("Father of the Flints"), about twelve miles from Nippur. Like Nippur, the mound of Ṣalābīkh lies on the presumed ancient course of the Euphrates. Only small areas of this early period (about 2600 B.C.) were reached at Nippur, since they lie very far below the present surface of the mound. Consequently, the site of Abū Ṣalābīkh is all the more important to the work being done in central Sumer' (Robert D. Biggs, 'Tablets from Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh, Iraq', *The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 1971-1972 Annual Report*, 21-22, 21).

10 'Abu Salabikh (modern name, Ar. [my note: =Arabic], Tell or Īšān Abū eṣ-Ṣalābīḫ

["father of clinker"]), city of the fourth and third millennia in southern Iraq, located at the center of the Mesopotamian alluvial plain between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers (32°15′ N, 45°3′ E). The site's modern name comes from the quantities of overtired ceramic slag found on its surface. Settlement distribution and geomorphology suggest that in antiquity the site lay on a principal arm of the Euphrates, flowing from Kish toward Nippur, which lies only some 16 km (about 10 mi.) to the southeast and can be seen from Abu Salabikh on a clear day. The site's ancient name remains uncertain. Kesh (*kèš*), which was initially proposed, seems likelier to be near Adab, farther east (perhaps at Tell al-Wilayah). At present, Eresh counts as the best candidate, which would be significant in that its patron deity was Nisaba, goddess of reeds and hence of scribal craft. The mounds on the site are scattered over an area of about 2 × 1 km. None rises more than 5 m above the surrounding plain, but their lower parts are shrouded by 2-3 m of silt that has accumulated since the first settlement here' (J. N. Postgate, 'Abu Salabikh', in Eric M. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology in the Near East* (5 vol.), Prepared under the Auspices of the American Schools of Oriental Research, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, xviii+492; vi+488; vi+489; vi+536; and vi+553 p., vol. 1, 9-10, 9).

11 'Abu Salabikh (Kesh?)' (Thorkild Jacobsen, 'The Waters of Ur', *Iraq*, 22 (1960) 174-185, 176). 'Ancient name uncertain but perhaps Eresh' (Matthews, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia*, 163). 'Thus the site of Abu Salabikh (ancient name still unknown), and its tablets, whose discovery was due to fortuitous circumstances, revealed an important, and unexpected, aspect of mid-third millennium literature and scholarship and demonstrated that people speaking a Semitic language, rather than being simple herdsmen tending their flocks, were deeply immersed in a center of Sumerian learning' (Biggs, *My Career*, 13). 'From what we know of the politics of Early Dynastic south Mesopotamia, it is difficult to imagine that Abu Salabikh boasted a "king" of its own, and hence it is tempting to assume that the "king's field(s)" in IAS 551 from the same provenance refer to some external ruler. On the other hand, if one favours an identification of Ereš with Abu Salabikh, the tantalizing mention of a "king of Ereš" to whom the workmen in IAS 505 seem to belong, might conceivably refer to a divine rather than human ruler' (M. Krebernik – J. N. Postgate, 'The Tablets from Abu Salabikh and their Provenance', *Iraq*, 71 (2009) 1-32, 7). 'It is tempting to associate the physical remains of the South Mound palace with the textual evidence from Abu Salabikh itself which appears to refer to the "king's field(s)" and a "king of Ereš" (where Ereš might be identified with Abu Salabikh). As with the palaces at Eridu, Kish and Tell al-Wilayah discussed above, the Abu Salabikh palace is located distant from what appears to be the main temple area in Area E of the Main Mound and is probably separated from it by a watercourse, supporting Stone's argument of a physical separation of secular and religious power at the nascence of kingship in Sumer' (Roger Matthews – Wendy Matthews, 'A Palace for the King of Ereš? Evidence from the Early Dynastic City of Abu Salabikh, South Iraq', in Yağmur Heffron – Adam Stone – Martin Worthington (eds), *At the Dawn of History: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of J. N. Postgate* (2 vol.), Winona Lake IN, Eisenbrauns, 2017, xxiv+811 p., 359-367, 364).

12 'The site of Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh has lain abandoned for approximately 4500 years, and the present surface of the mound has a heavy concentration of salt (enough that the mound looks snow-covered when it begins to dry out after a rain). Nearly all tablets lay only a few inches below the surface, and the millennial seasonal fluctuations have caused the unbaked tablets to grow tall salt crystals, some as much as half an inch in length. The crystals form

not only on the surface, but in cracks as well, so that often tablets are thrust apart in various directions' (Robert D. Biggs (with a chapter by Donald P. Hansen), *Inscriptions from Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh*, University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 90, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1974, xii+112 p. + 183 plates, 19).

13 'Much of the central floodplain of the ancient Euphrates now lies beyond the frontiers of cultivation, a region of empty desolation. Tangled dunes, long disused canal levees, and the rubble-strewn mounds of former settlements contribute only low, featureless relief. Vegetation is sparse, and in many areas it is almost wholly absent. Rough, wind-eroded land surfaces and periodically flooded depressions form an irregular patchwork in all directions, discouraging any but the most committed traveler. To suggest the immediate impact of human life there is only a rare tent, its mirage floating just over the horizon; the occasional ruined scarps of mud-walled tribal watchtowers dating back a century or more; sometimes a small knot of women collecting dead scrub for firewood; and at long intervals a distant file of camels or a scattering of sheep and goats with their young herdsman. The bustling commercial towns of modern Iraq lie out of reckoning, hugging the modern river courses and their major effluent canals. Towns today, as always, are concealed as one approaches them on the ground by dense surrounding belts of palm groves. But sometimes, from a high dune on still, early mornings, one can detect them even from the remote desert as faint, spiky clusterings of electric transmission pylons, brick factory chimneys, and water towers. Just so wayfarers once must have taken their bearings on the turreted walls and ziggurats of much more ancient urban centers' (Adams, *Heartland*, xvii).

14 'Circumstances – and probably just plain luck – triggered events that were to lead to extraordinary finds of cuneiform tablets' (Biggs, *My Career*, 10-11).

15 'Slightly farther south, in the vicinity of ancient Nippur, conditions were different again. The surveyed area is particularly small in this case, and so there may be danger of overgeneralizing from what were only fairly local clusterings or abandonments related to minor shifts in the watercourse system. However, the available evidence at least suggests that clustered rural settlements made their appearance as early as the Early Uruk period, whereas by Jemdet Nasr times occupation of such sites had essentially come to an end. Thus there may have been a rapid concentration of population in towns or cities like Nippur and Abū Salabikh by the Jemdet Nasr period, somewhat earlier than the same process occurred at the great cities of southern Sumer like Uruk' (Robert McC. Adams – Hans J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside: The Natural Setting of Urban Societies*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1972, x+241 p., 90).

16 'At the School, all residents had breakfast on their own schedule, but lunch and dinner were taken together in the ground-floor dining room. The Brits apparently all learn at school the art of telling amusing stories, and we heard a good many, but I felt somewhat out of my element. One evening at dinner, Mrs. Mallowan good-naturedly called me "Robert-the-Silent", and it is true that I was rather silent. Following British custom, tea was served every afternoon around 4:30 in the second floor sitting room, usually with small cookies that the Persian cook, Ali, had baked. Mrs. Mallowan was often sitting there reading a murder mystery or knitting' (Biggs, *My Career*, 8).

17 'In November 1962, there was a bit of excitement at the British School when they got word of the impending visit of the British archaeologist Max Mallowan and his wife Agatha Christie. We were all told that we were to address her only as Mrs. Mallowan and that we were not to mention her mystery novels or her plays. As it happened, when they

arrived, they had just the night before attended a celebration of the fifteenth year of her play, "The Mousetrap", in London and they were still wearing the clothes they had worn to the celebration the evening before. Due to turbulence en route, a flight attendant (they were called stewardesses then) had spilled a whole tray of Coca Cola on her but, nonplussed, she soaked her skirt in a bathtub and changed' (Biggs, *My Career*, 8).

18 Robert D. Biggs, 'An Archaic Sumerian Version of the Kesh Temple Hymn from Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, 61 (1971: 2) 193-207, 203 (D recto ii).

19 As the sixth composition from the Decad, a curricular grouping of Sumerian literary texts, the *Keš Temple Hymn* was very widely copied across centuries, although its text remained remarkably stable.

20 'To the city, to the city, clients come seeking clientage, to the house Kesh and the city clients come seeking clientage, to its warrior Ashgi, clients come seeking clientage, to its mistress Nintur clients come seeking clientage' (Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once…: Sumerian Poetry in Translation*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997[2], xv+516 p., 385). 'The hymn to the temple Kesh is one of the oldest Sumerian literary works that have come down to us. Fragments of copies dating to the early part of the third millennium B.C. have been found, and a more complete text of this earliest version may be hoped for. As it stands, the hymn makes a distinctly archaic impression, and it is not easy to say how much of it we actually understand, and how much of it refers to things we know not of, but which may have been obvious to early hearers who knew the temple and its cult of their own experience, and to whom many allusions were clear that we find puzzling or miss altogether. Kesh, the temple hymned, has not yet been located on the ground. Most likely it is to be looked for in the eastern borderlands, and a proposal by Claus Wilcke to seek it a short distance north of Adab (present-day Bismaya) has much in its favor. The chief deity of Kesh was the birth goddess Nintur, also called Ninhursaga. Her husband was the god Shulpae and her son the god Ashgi. The latter is called " warrior" in the hymn, but very little else is known about his character' (*ibid*., 377). The translation of the same version from the recent and reliable anthology, based on the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford: 'Draw near, man, to the city, to the city – but do not draw near! Draw near, man, to the house Keš, to the city – but do not draw near! Draw near, man, to its hero Ašgi – but do not draw near! Draw near, man, to its lady Nintud – but do not draw near!' (Jeremy Black *et al*. (Translated and Introduced by), *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, lxiii+372 p., 329).

21 Author of wide and varied research interests, but, as concerns Mesopotamian religion, most notably, both of the fundamental *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976, 259 p., and of his swansong, his Presidential Address (delivered on 20 April 1993 at the 203rd annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in Chapel Hill), 'The Historian and the Sumerian Gods', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 114 (1994: 2) 145-153.

22 Thorkild Jacobsen, 'Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 2 (1943: 3) 159-172; 'Early Political Development in Mesopotamia', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, 52 (1957: 1) 91-140. 'We have tried to trace in these pages the early development of Mesopotamian political forms from a "Primitive Democracy" based on mutual agreement, designed to deal with crisis-situations, and centering in a general assembly appointing temporary officers, to a "Primitive

Monarchy" based essentially on force, striving for permanence, and centering in a king who, through his superiority in armed might holds out promise of internal and external peace, through his relations to the gods of a thriving economy' (*Early Political*, 136-137). 'Our material seems to preserve indications that prehistoric Mesopotamia was organized politically along democratic lines, not, as was historic Mesopotamia, along autocratic. The indications which we have point to a form of government in which the normal run of public affairs was handled by a council of elders but ultimate sovereignty resided in a general assembly comprising all members – or, perhaps better, all adult free men – of the community. This assembly settled conflicts arising in the community, decided on such major issues as war and peace, and could, if need arose, especially in a situation of war, grant supreme authority, kingship, to one of its members for a limited period' (*Primitive Democracy*, 172). 'We shall use "democracy" in its classical rather than in its modern sense as denoting a form of government in which internal sovereignty resides in a large proportion of the governed, namely in all free, adult, male citizens without distinction of fortune or class. That sovereignty resides in these citizens implies that major decisions – such as the decision to undertake a war – are made with their consent, that these citizens constitute the supreme judicial authority in the state, and also that rulers and magistrates obtain their positions with and ultimately derive their power from that same consent. By "primitive democracy", furthermore, we understand forms of government which, though they may be considered as falling within the definition of democracy just given, differ from the classical democracies by their more primitive character: the various functions of government are as yet little specialized, the power structure is loose, and the machinery for social co-ordination by means of power is as yet imperfectly developed. We should perhaps add that the contrast with which we are primarily concerned is the one between "democracy" as defined above, on the one hand, and "autocracy", used as a general term for forms which tend to concentrate the major political powers in the hands of a single individual, on the other. "Oligarchy", which so subtly merges into democracy and which so often functions in forms similar to it, can hardly, at the present stage of our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamia, be profitably distinguished' (*Primitive Democracy*, 159).

23 'Two very influential articles by the Sumerologist Thorkild Jacobsen claiming to demonstrate a progression in Mesopotamian political organization from rule by primeval popular assemblies in the early third millennium to absolute autocracy under the monarchs of the first millennium have gone largely unchallenged, despite the fact that Jacobsen reconstructed the earliest stages of this evolutionary *Märchen* almost entirely from an exegesis of mythological and epic texts written hundreds of years after the period whose conditions they supposedly reflect. A major contribution of Van De Mieroop in this book is his presentation of a plausible case that the actual historical course of political development was precisely the reverse of that posited by Jacobsen. Self-government of urban entities seems to have grown stronger over time, and the late cities of Babylonia (lower Mesopotamia) and Assyria (upper Mesopotamia) may therefore in many respects instructively be compared to the city-states of contemporary Greece' (Gary Beckman, 'Review of *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 9 October 1998, http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1998/1998-10-09.html). 'Another often-repeated assumption pertains to the theory of early assemblies. It has been postulated that there was a Pre-Sargonic assembly (Sumerian **ukkin** or **unken**) of city rulers. However, there is no historical trace of a Pre-Sargonic assembly of rulers from different cities, which would have met at Nippur and would have somehow mirrored the

divine assembly over which Anu and Enlil presided. Likewise, early cities would have had their own city assemblies, whose hypothetical existence provides the basis for the scholarly construct of "primitive democracy" in Early Mesopotamia' (Gonzalo Rubio, 'Sumerian Literature', in Carl Ehrlich (ed.), *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, 506 p., 11-75, 33). 'The issue of city assemblies and "primitive democracy" is also predicated on reading literature as a charter for historical and political reconstruction. One of the poems of the Sumerian Gilgamesh cycle, *Gilgamesh and Agga*, is frequently adduced as an example of an assembly system holding decisive power in early Mesopotamia. At the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh speaks before the elders (**ab-ba**) of his city and then before the able-bodied men (**guruš**) of his city. Based on this episode, some have argued that Uruk had a sort of bicameral system, consisting of an assembly of elders and an assembly of young men. However, this composition exhibits several binary patterns, including the contrast between **ab-ba** and **guruš**. Thus, the "bicameral" scenario is a metonymic reflection of the parallelistic structure of the poem, a literary trope rather than evidence of a historical institution' (*ibid*., 33-34).

24 'When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, "Here I am". God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground'.

25 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'.

26 Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, München, Beck, 2014, 294 p. (*The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, translated by John Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, 232 p.)

27 Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, a new translation with a prologue and notes by Walter Kaufmann, New York, Scribner, 1970, 185 p., 127-128. In the German original: '*Man findet Gott nicht, wenn man in der Welt bleibt,man findet Gott nicht, wenn man aus der Welt geht. Wer mit dem ganzen Wesen zu seinem Du ausgeht und alles Weltwesen ihm zuträgt, findet ihn, den man nicht suchen kann. Gewiß ist Gott »das ganz Andere«; aber er ist auch das ganz Selbe: das ganz Gegenwärtige. Gewiß ist er das Mysterium tremendum, das erscheint und niederwirft; aber er ist auch das Geheimnis des Selbstverständlichen, das mir näher ist als mein Ich. Wenn du das Leben der Dinge und der Bedingtheit ergründest, kommst du an das Unauflösbare, wenn du das Leben der Dinge und der Bedingtheit bestreitest, gerätst du vor das Nichts, wenn du das Leben heiligst, begegnest du den lebendigen Gott*' (Buber, Martin, *Ich und Du*, Nachwort von Bernhard Casper, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1995[11], 142 p., 75).

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