AVAR
January 2022
Volume: 1, No: 1, pp. 113 – 138
ISSN: 2752-3527 (Print) ISSN: 2752-3535 (Online)
journals.tplondon.com/avar
TRANSNATIONAL PRESS® LONDON

Received: 15 June 2021 Accepted: 22 December 2021
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33182/aijls.v1i1.1615

Godless People and Sunless Skies: Deviant Space in the Tukulti-Ninurta and Nebuchadnezzar Bilinguals[1]

Benjamin Dewar[2]

Abstract

This paper is a study of descriptions of foreign conquest of the Mesopotamian centre in two Sumerian–Akkadian bilingual texts concerning Tukulti-Ninurta I and Nebuchadnezzar I. Both texts present these deviant spaces resulting from these conquests in terms of a peripheralization of the centre. Having established similarities in the presentation of the topoi in the two texts, the paper then analyses the different contexts in which these topoi are placed in the two texts to explore how their significance differs. In the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, the conquest of Assyria by its enemies would create a deviant space at the centre, and the god Ashur must therefore prevent it. In the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual, Babylonia has already become a deviant space. The abandonment of the land by its gods and its destruction by foreign enemies therefore serves as a necessary transitional stage in the transformation of deviant space into correct space.

Keywords: *Assyriology; Nebuchadnezzar I; Tukulti-Ninurta I; Deviant Space; Heterotopia*

Introduction

> Western societies have always claimed that 'order,' 'stability,' 'settledness' is the basic norm, against which 'disorder,' 'instability,' 'mobility' are secondary, deviant, indeed punishable states.[3]

[1] I am thankful to Johannes Bach for providing me with photographs of the tablets VAT 10103 and VAT 9942 + 10276. All translations given below are my own, and, unless otherwise stated, follow the transliterations from the cited editions.

[2] Benjamin Dewar, N/A, United Kingdom. E-mail: bendewar@hotmail.co.uk.

[3] Russell West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 175.

This statement by the literary critic Russell West-Pavlov elaborates on the assumptions that the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari sought to challenge by centring states of flux and transience in their work,[4] but could equally well describe ancient Near Eastern official ideologies—as normally reconstructed by Assyriologists. Since the 1970s, there has been a continued focus on the study of Mesopotamian (and especially Assyrian) royal ideologies in terms of oppositions between ordered centre and chaotic periphery, in which the king must subdue and bring order to the periphery to protect his land and people.[5] Within this reconstruction of royal ideology, the inhabitants of the periphery violate the social, legal, and religious norms of the centre. For example, Mario Liverani writes, on ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the world:

> The geographical elements and the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants of the peripheral world are considered not only different but inferior to those in the central country. If the periphery is a desert, it is the seat of death and void (even the image of the netherworld); but if it is a woodland, it is the seat of darkness, and if it is a highland it is difficult in access. Its economic resources … are limited and insufficient for human life … The culture of the foreigners is viewed either as lacking the basic requirements of the civilized world (as in the Mesopotamian stereotypes of the nomads who "do

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21-24, 361-63.

[5] For example, Frederick Mario Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: "The Moral Judgement"," in *Mesopotamia und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, ed. Hans-Jörg Nissinen and Johanne Renger (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982), 425-35; Mattias Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Mattias Karlsson, *Alterity in Ancient Assyrian Propaganda* (Helsinki: Neo Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2017); Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 297-317; Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600–1100 B.C.* (Padova: Sargon srl., 1990); Julian Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art." In *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 329-43; Carlo Zaccagnini, "An Urartean Royal Inscription in the Report of Sargon's Eighth Campaign," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis*, ed. Frederick Mario Fales (Roma: Instituto per l'Oriente, 1981), 259-95.

> not know/have house/city/grain/etc."), or else as opposite to the normal (i.e. correct) behaviour.[6]

In this light, in the usual interpretation of ancient Near Eastern ideologies, enemies at the periphery are deviant peoples inhabiting deviant spaces, and existing to be conquered by a strong king who embodies everything that is good, just, and well-ordered at the centre.

But what about when the tables are turned? How are instances in which the periphery conquers the centre—when the "deviant" becomes dominant—represented in literature produced by the inhabitants of the centre? This paper will focus on two pieces of bilingual (Sumerian–Akkadian) Mesopotamian royal literature that portray such deviant spaces at the centre. The Assyrian "Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual" and the Babylonian "Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual" both represent situations (hypothetical and mythologized respectively) in which the centre is oppressed or conquered by the periphery. Analysing the similarities and differences between the deviant spaces in these two texts promises to further clarify the manner in which such spaces could be portrayed in ancient Mesopotamian literature and how these spaces served inhabitants' conceptualizations of the world they occupied.

I begin by focusing on some similarities in the representations of the spaces resulting from foreign conquest of the centre in these two texts. This comparative analysis relies on a construction of space in terms of a binary opposition between centre and periphery that has become an established approach in ancient Near Eastern studies. However, recognising that scholarship on spatial analysis has advanced beyond simple dichotomies, I go on to consider how the deviant spaces in these two texts differ from one another, and what these differences can tell us about Mesopotamian conceptions of deviant behaviour. Ultimately, I show that, while the disordered spaces portrayed in the Mesopotamian literature studied here can be regarded as deviant and therefore bad, more nuanced categories can

[6] Liverani, Prestige and Interest, 36-37.

be observed in which these spaces could serve transitional or intermediate roles resulting in greater ambiguity in their spatial character and moral status in the minds of ancient Mesopotamian audiences.

The Intentions of Assyria's Enemies in a Middle Assyrian Hymn to Ashur

The first of our two case studies is a bilingual hymn to the god Ashur for the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243-1207 BCE, hereafter the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual).[7] The extant text is primarily focused on the good conduct of the Assyrian king and his people, the evil designs of Assyria's enemies, and the need for Ashur to protect the land from those enemies. Ashur has shown kindness to the foreign peoples, but they have rejected him and his commands, hate his chosen Assyrian king, and have evil designs for Assyria should they succeed in conquering it.[8] The hymn is therefore one of the most developed expressions of what Liverani calls the "siege mentality" of the early stages of Assyrian imperialism.[9]

The text's description of the hypothetical deviant space that Tukulti-Ninurta's enemies would seek to create in Assyria has some unique elements that make it an interesting object of study for the current purpose. Tukulti-Ninurta's Bilingual gives us by far the most detailed and developed expression of the intentions of Assyria's enemies as conceived within the official ideology. This allows us to explore the

[7] The text (KAR 128 + KAR 129) is known from one large tablet (VAT 10103) and two smaller fragments (VAT 9942 + VAT 10276) all now in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. It has been edited in Erich Ebeling *Quellen zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion I* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1918), 62-73 and Kuk Won Chang, *Dichtungen der Zeit Tukulti-Ninurtas I. von Assyrien* (Seoul: Sung Kwang Publishing co.. 1981), 174-210), and translated by Foster *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, Third Edition (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 318-23. Citations of the text below will use the line numbers from Chang, *Dichtungen*. On some peculiarities of the Sumerian version see Maurizio Viano, *The Reception of Sumerian Literature in the Western Periphery* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2016), 109-12, and for the difficulties of Middle Assyrian Sumerian more generally see Viano, *Reception of Sumerian Literature*, 87-129; Klaus Wagensonner, "Sumerian in the Middle Assyrian Period," in *Multilingualism, Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra*, ed. Jens Braarvig and Markham J. Geller (Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2018), 225-97.

[8] KAR 128 Obv. 9-34.

[9] Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 117-18.

question of what a world in which the Assyrian centre was conquered by the periphery might look like in Assyrian thought.

Towards this end, one line describing the enemies' evil intentions is especially interesting:

> All of the evildoers await a dark day without sunlight (lit. without the visibility of the sun).[10]

The sun disappearing from the sky during the day is a powerful image that carries a great deal of significance on a number of levels as a demonstration of the deviant nature of a world without Assyria. Most obviously, taken at face value, the absence of the sun would be of great detriment to all aspects of human life and is a clear inversion of the natural order of things. Beyond this most literal interpretation, the above passage can be understood on a variety of levels as will be demonstrated below.

To begin, the Akkadian *šamaš* can refer to not only the sun as a celestial body, but also to Shamash, the sun god and god of justice. The sun not being visible therefore suggests a world of lawlessness. As god of justice, Shamash was responsible for overseeing oaths, and therefore played an important role, from a Mesopotamian perspective, in international law during the Late Bronze Age. This period saw the emergence of a system of diplomacy between the major imperial powers of the time,[11] and the Middle Assyrian Empire

[10] KAR 128 Obv. 31. Translation based primarily on the Akkadian, with restoration of the lost Akkadian verb on the basis of the Sumerian, which I read (*pace* Chang, *Dichtungen*, 179: Ebeling, *Quellen*, 1918, 63) as: …]LU níg-erím-ak-ak-meš gi-ba SI[…] gi-ir-še gub-ba-aš, and translate on the basis of ĝiri gub = *qu"u*, "to wait for" (ePSD2 s.v. ŋiri gub [wait for]). This agrees with the translation by Foster (*Before the Muses*, 320), who does not explain his interpretation of this line. For unusual verbal forms in the Sumerian versions of Middle Assyrian Sumerian–Akkadian bilingual texts, see Viano, *Reception of Sumerian Literature*, 98-121.

[11] For an overview of international diplomacy in the Late Bronze Age Near East, see Amnon Altman, *Tracing the Earliest Recorded Concepts of International Law: The Ancient Near East (2500–330 BCE)* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2012), 88-165; Trevor Bryce, *Letters of the Great Kings of the Ancient Near East: The Royal Correspondence of the Late Bronze Age* (London: Routledge, 2003); Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*. The international diplomatic correspondence of

was a member of the "club of great powers," alongside Egypt, Hatti, and Babylonia. That treaties formed an important part of this system is demonstrated by the corpus of Hittite treaties, which includes both vassal treaties with rulers who were subordinate to the Hittite king and parity treaties with foreign rulers viewed as his equals.[12]

Although we lack an extant corpus of Middle Assyrian treaties analogous to the Hittite material, some Middle Assyrian sources do mention oaths being made between the Assyrian king and either conquered peoples or his equals on the international stage. For example, the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I state that he made sixty captive rulers of the lands of Nairi swear an oath of servitude to him,[13] whilst the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic portrays Tukulti-Ninurta I's conquest of Babylonia as a response to the Babylonian king, Kashtiliash, breaking an oath made by the two kings' predecessors, Adad-narari I and Nazi-Maruttash.[14] Shamash plays a prominent role in both of these examples; Tiglath-pileser has the kings of Nairi swear their oath before Shamash's cult statue,[15] and the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic contains a long petition to Shamash by its eponymous protagonist for Kashtiliash to be punished for his oath breaking.[16]

In light of his role in the enforcement of treaties and oaths, both within the Middle Assyrian Empire and on the international stage, the absence of Shamash would allow all those subjugated peoples

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this period has been edited in Anson F. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on the Collation of all Extant Tablets* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) and translated in William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

12 See Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* Second Edition (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997) for translations of these texts and citations to further literature on them.

13 Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), A.0.87.1: iv 94-v 16.

14 Peter B. Machinist, "The Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I: A Study in Middle Assyrian Literature" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1979), I A 25'-32', II A 13'-61'. Tukulti-Ninurta's conquest of Babylonia is also recorded in his royal inscriptions (Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), A.0.78.24: 34-40). For the differing ideological emphases of the accounts in the royal inscriptions and the epic, see Kathryn F. Kravitz, "Tukulti-Ninurta I Conquers Babylon: Two Versions," in *Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern and Other Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch*, ed. Jeffrey Stackert, Barbara Nevling Porter, and David Pearson Wright (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2010).

15 Grayson, *Early First Millennium BC I*, A.0.87.1: v 8-16.

16 Machinist, "Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta," II A 13'-61'.

and foreign powers holding agreements with Assyria to break their oaths and act as they wish without fear of repercussions. This is an interesting implication in light of the historical context of the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual; a world in which multiple empires coexist through diplomacy is in this hymn presented as one wherein Tukulti-Ninurta is the only great king who has any intention of observing his oaths. In reality, the Middle Assyrian king is one of several great kings, but in his royal inscriptions and hymns, he stands as the lone defender of justice amidst a sea of criminals and oath breakers.[17]

In her broad-ranging study of the interplay between religion and ideology in Assyria, Beate Pongratz-Leisten identifies an increasing tendency over the course of Assyrian history to relate kingship with the sun, a trend that she calls the "solarization" of Assyrian kingship. The association between kingship and the sun already had a long history in Mesopotamia by the Late Bronze Age, but first became prominent in Assyrian sources in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. In his royal inscriptions, this king is given the epithet *šamšu kiššat nišī*, "sun of all people," and is described as *ša kibrāt erbetti arki Šamaš irte"û*, "one who shepherds the four quarters after Shamash." In light of this association between the king and the sun—an association apparently introduced into Assyrian royal ideology under Tukulti-Ninurta I himself—the enemies' desire for day without sunlight in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual might also be read as a desire to do away with the institution of Assyrian kingship. An end to Assyrian kingship would, from the Assyrian perspective, leave a plurality of enemy kings without a single, unifying ruler at the centre. This situation is not in keeping with Mesopotamian ideals of kingship. One of the ways in which the Umman-manda or Gutians, the mountain peoples to whom the downfall of the Akkadian Empire is frequently attributed in Mesopotamian literature, are presented as

[17] We see a similar characterisation of other empires as having no regard for international agreements in the inscriptions of Adad-nirari I. Uasashatta, the rebellious king of Hanigalbat/Hani-rabbat, seeks Hittite support for his rebellion against Assyria. The Hittites accept his tribute, but offer him no assistance (Grayson, *Third and Second Millennia BC*, A.0.76.3: 15-20, for the reading Hani-rabbat, see Miguel Valério, "Hani-Rabbat as the Semitic name of Mitanni," *Journal of Language Relationship* 6 (2011): 173-83).

particularly alien and unfit to rule the land is that they are often described in the sources as either having no king or being ruled by a plurality of kings.[18] Furthermore, I have demonstrated elsewhere that the particularly cruel punishment of burning captives, including children, is reserved in early Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions for mountain peoples who lacked the institution of kingship as understood by the Assyrians.[19] This further demonstrates the extreme otherness in the Assyrian royal perspective of non-monarchic political systems. The land was thought to need a king, and to abolish the institution of Assyrian kingship was therefore an inversion of the natural order.

The final level on which the desire for day without sunlight can be read is in relation to the other spaces in Mesopotamian literature which experience no sunlight: the remote outer regions of the earth. The connection between remote landscapes and a lack of sunlight appears in several works of Mesopotamian literature:

- In an Old Babylonian poem about Sargon of Akkad's campaign to the faraway land of Uta-rapashtim, the trees there grow so thick that they block out the sun.[20]
- Sargon II's Letter to the God contains a similar sentiment about low-light conditions in distant lands in its description of the mountains Nikippa and Upa:

  > High mountains that all types of trees entwine around so that their interiors are wild and their passes are terrifying. Like a cedar forest, a shadow stretches out over their surroundings

[18] In the Weidner Chronicle, kingship passes from Naram-Sin to the armies of Gutium rather than an individual Gutian ruler (Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), no. 38: 63), and in the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin, the Umman-manda are ruled by seven brothers (Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), no. 22: 37-46).

[19] Ben Dewar, "The Burning of Captives in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, and Early Neo-Assyrian Conceptions of the Other," *Studia Orientalia Electronica* (Forthcoming).

[20] Westenholz, *Kings of Akkade*, no. 6: ii 59-62.

> so that the traveller on their paths does not see the radiance of the sun.[21]

- On the Babylonian Map of the World, one of the northern distant regions across the sea is labelled as:

  > Great wall, six leagues in between, where the sun is not seen.[22]
  >
  > The most straightforward explanation of this label would be that the "great wall" was believed to block out the sun in this part of the world.[23]

- In Tablet IX of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the eponymous hero travels along "the path of the sun" (*ḫarrān šamaš*), a region of total darkness, during his journey to find the flood hero Uta-napishtim at the edge of the earth.[24]

Whatever the exact nature of these locations may be, there is a clear connection between remote regions of the earth and a lack of sunlight across Mesopotamian history. At the edges of the earth, the sun is obscured by geographical features that do not occur at the centre (mountains, dense forests, cosmic walls, etc.). In light of this, the enemies' anticipation of a day without sunlight in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual might be read as a desire to make the centre like the most distant periphery.

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[21] Grant Frame, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721–705 BC)* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2021), no. 65: 15-16.

[22] Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 21-22 caption 18, 402 Plate 2.

[23] Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 33. This "great wall" also appears in the Sargon Birth Legend, wherein Sargon of Akkad quarries stone from it (Wayne Horowitz, "The Great Wall of Sargon of Akkad," *NABU* 1997, no. 3 (2017): 98; Westenholz, *Kings of Akkade*, no. 2: 20-21, 30-31).

[24] Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 672 lines 140-166. Scholars have disagreed on the reasons that the path of the sun is in total darkness. George (*Gilgamesh*, 493-97) argues that it is a tunnel that the sun passes through during its nightly journey beneath the earth and is shrouded in darkness because Gilgamesh traverses it while the sun is above ground during the day. Alternatively, Horowitz (*Cosmic Geography*, 100) argues that it is more likely an above-ground region of perpetual darkness such as the one featured on the Babylonian Map of the World.

This interpretation gives an interesting contrast between the Assyrian king and his enemies. The Assyrian king has a divine mandate to expand his territory and seeks to subdue the periphery in service to the centre,[25] while foreign peoples seek to make the centre like the periphery. Just as Liverani writes of an "imperial mission" in Assyrian ideology,[26] we might equally see an "anti-imperial mission" of foreign kings in the worldview espoused by the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual. We see this thinking throughout the text. The foreign enemies wish to overturn all aspects of Assyria's achievements; they intend to plunder Ashur's land, sack his cities, and destroy his "wonders" (*tabrâtū*).[27]

In its brief description of Assyria's enemies awaiting a day without sunlight, the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual presents an interesting and complex image of what it was imagined that a deviant space at the Assyrian centre would be like in the Assyrian royal perspective: such space would be lawless; foreigners would be free to act in whatever way they wished without fear of reprisals; the institution of Assyrian kingship would be absent; and the centre would become like the most remote parts of the periphery.

Marduk's Absence from Babylon in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual

Our second case study is a historical–literary text that gives a mythologised account of events from late–second millennium BCE Babylonian history culminating in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (1125-1104 BCE), known to Assyriologists as the "Nebuchadnezzar

[25] Liverani, *Imperial Mission*, 12-16, 55-65.

[26] Liverani, *Imperial Mission*.

[27] KAR 128 Obv. 26-28. Foster (*Before the Muses*, 320) reads KAR 128 Obv. 30 as "and they yearn to inflict a defeat upon(?) the spirits (of) his (ancestors?). He interprets this as a reference to the violation of the tombs of past Assyrian kings (*Before the Muses*, 320 n. 2). In this context, KAR 128 Obv. 30 might appear to be another example (albeit a highly unusual one) of Tukulti-Ninurta's foes seeking to subvert the natural order of things and erase Assyria and its history. However, Foster's translation of this line is based on a misreading of *e-te-em-mi-šu* as *eṭemmīšu*, "his ghosts," rather than a form of the verb *emēšu*, "to strive" (CDA s.v. *emēšu*; Chang, *Dichtungen*, 195; Viano, *Reception of Sumerian Literature*, 110), a word missing from both the CAD and the AHw. The line is therefore a statement that Tukulti-Ninurta's enemies yearn to defeat him, not a unique expression of their desire to erase Assyrian history.

Bilingual" or "The Seed of Kingship."[28] The text describes: the sack of Babylon by the Elamites, during which the cult statue of Marduk was carried off to Elam; the dire circumstances experienced in the land in the chief god's absence; Marduk's selection of Nebuchadnezzar for kingship; and the return of Marduk from Elam to Babylon.

For our current purpose, the description of Babylonia during Marduk's absence is especially interesting:

> At that time, in the reign of a previous king, the omens changed.
>
> Good withdrew. Evil was constant.
>
> The lord became furious and felt wrathful.
>
> He spoke and, (concerning) the land, its gods abandoned it. The minds of its people were altered. They were caused to take up crime.
>
> The *rābiṣu*-demons of wellbeing became angry (and) ascended to the vault of heaven. The tutelary deity of justice stood aside.
>
> (The god) …, who protects life, abandoned the people. All of them became like those who have no god.
>
> Evil demons filled the interior of the land. Merciless *namtaru*-demons entered the cult centres.
>
> The land became small. Its thinking changed.

[28] The text is known from various tablets from Babylon, Sippar, and Nineveh (K 4874, Rm 255, K 6088, K 211 + K 3649 + K 6189 + K 8636 + K 9168, K 10739, VAT 17051, BM 47805 + BM 48032 + BM 48037 + BM 48046, K 3444 + BM 99067, K 3317 + K 3319, K 5191, BM 35000), and has been most recently edited in Grant Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia from the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 BC)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), B.2.4.8–9 and translated in Foster, *Before the Muses*, 377-80. A digital version of Frame's edition of the text is available through the *Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus* (http://oracc.org/ribo/Q006248; http://oracc.org/ribo/Q006249).

> The evil Elamite, who did not value its (the land's) abundance […] his battle. His onslaught was quick.
>
> He devastated the settlements (and) turned (them) into wasteland. He carried off the gods (and) demolished the shrines.[29]

Like the description of a day without sunlight in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, this passage contains a plethora of evocative imagery that forms an interesting subject of study.

The deviant space described in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual is presented in far more mythologising terms than that of the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, particularly with regards to demons entering the land and its cult centres. Because of this, it will be instructive to consider some points relating to the mythic geography of the Mesopotamian "mental map." In a study on distant lands in Mesopotamian though, Franz Wiggermann explores the nature of the mythical periphery. He presents the differences between the centre and periphery in Mesopotamian thought thus:

Fig. 1. Oppositions between centre and periphery in Mesopotamian thought (after Frans Wiggermann, "Scenes from the Shadow Side." In *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L.J. Vanstiphout (Groningen: Styx, 1996) 210-211).

	Centre	**Periphery**
Place	Lowland cities	Deserts, border rivers, foreign nations, mountains, sea
	Surface of the earth	Underworld
	Surface of the earth	Sky
Time	Present (being)	(Primordial) past (becoming)
Society	Civilization, just rule	Barbarian, enemy, witch
	Bound to gods	Ungodly
	Living beings, noise	Spirits of the dead, silence[30]

[29] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.8: 15-24.

[30] Although Wiggermann only mentions silence as a feature of the periphery, some peripheral spaces are instead characterised by abnormal or excessive noise. For example, the description of the Cedar

Animals	Domesticated	Wild
	Acting normally	Acting abnormally
Supernatural	Gods (cult)	Demons (no cult), mountain gods
	Anthropomorphism	Animal gods, monsters, monstrosities

The Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual contains various examples of the centre gaining qualities that Wiggermann identifies as belonging to the periphery. The land is reduced to a wasteland. People are no longer bound by the rule of law and behave as though they are godless. In the second tablet of the text, the land is described as having been filled with silence.[31] Meanwhile, the gods are taken from their usual abodes in the temples of the Babylonian cities to a foreign land by the Elamites. The most elaborate demonstration of the inversion of the usual relationship between centre and periphery in the text comes when the good protective spirits, the *rābiṣu*-demons of wellbeing, abandon Babylonia for the heavens, only to be replaced by evil demons, which fill the land in their absence. In these lines of the text, the protective spirits guarding the centre leave for a periphery—the sky—while evil demons, residents of the desert, the mountains, the sea, the netherworld, and the Apsu (the subterranean groundwaters between the surface of the earth and the netherworld),[32] come up from their abodes in the periphery to occupy the centre.

Thus, the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual also portrays the creation of deviant space at the centre as a transformation of the centre to be like the periphery. This peripheralization of the centre in the creation of deviant space is not limited to texts with a royal focus. Mesopotamian combat myths, in which a hero-god defeats a dangerous and rebellious monster or demon, demonstrate a similar inversion of the centre–periphery relationship. For example, in the

Forest in a recently-discovered portion of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh focuses on the noise made by the animals of the forest (Farouk Al-Rawi and Andrew R. George, "Back to the Cedar Forest: The Beginning and End of Tablet V of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 66 (2014): 76-77 lines 17-26), and Sargon II's Letter to the God describes the waterfalls in the mountains between Nairi and Musasir as loud enough to be heard from a league away (Frame, *Inscriptions of Sargon II*, no. 65: 326).

[31] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.9: 3.

[32] For the desert, mountains, sea, and netherworld as inhabited by demons, see Wiggermann, *Scenes from the Shadow Side*, 211 n. 43. For demons inhabiting the Apsu, see Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 343-44.

Epic of Anzu, the eponymous monster usurps the kingship of heaven by stealing the Tablet of Destinies from his master, the god Enlil, and flies away to take up residence in the mountains.[33] In Lugal-e, the rocks elect the demon Asakku to be their ruler, and he holds court in the mountains, behaving like the king of the gods.[34] Similarly, in a Sumerian literary-historical text concerning the expulsion of the Gutians from Sumer by Utu-hegal, the land of Gutium is described as having "carried off" kingship of Sumer to the mountains.[35] Just as deviant space results in the centre being peripheralized in the Tukulti-Ninurta and Nebuchadnezzar Bilinguals, it results in the periphery becoming centralised in these other texts.

Deviance and Intent

So far, this paper has adhered to a binary opposition between centre and periphery that has been a staple of the study of Mesopotamian ideologies for several decades. This binary opposition has its roots in the work of a number of Assyriologists, especially those of the "Rome School,"[36] who have applied structuralist approaches to ideological criticism to ancient Near Eastern material. This structuralist influence has proven particularly strong in the study of Assyrian history. This has led to the standard model of Assyrian royal ideology being based on a centre–periphery opposition in which, as Carlo Zaccagnini succinctly puts it, "everything pertaining to Assyria (the country, the king, the people, etc.) is good; everything pertaining to the outerworld (the "enemy") is bad."[37]

The study of identity and alterity in Assyriology has therefore often operated in terms of binary oppositions between good and bad or

[33] Amar Annus, *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzu* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), I 63-88.

[34] Jan van Dijk, LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-ĜÁL: *Le récit épique et didactique des Travaux de Ninurta, du Déluge et de la Nouvelle Création, Tome I* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 56-58 lines 35-47.

[35] Douglas Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1993), E2.13.6.4: 4-6.

[36] For this designation, see Marc Van De Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast: Sargon of Assyria and Rusa of Urartu," in *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*, ed. Sarah C. Melville and Alice L. Slotsky (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 417-18.

[37] Zaccagnini, "An Urartean Royal Inscription," 260.

order and chaos. This structuralist approach has proven productive,[38] but has not been without criticism. Marc Van de Mieroop argues that structuralist approaches to Assyriology are too rigid and too rigorous to account for individual artistic expression. He points to Sargon II's Letter to the God as an example of a text that resists interpretation in terms of binary oppositions by extending sympathetic and humanising qualities to Rusa of Urartu, the text's primary antagonist, and giving detailed descriptions of impressive Urartian technological achievements.[39]

In this light, considering Mesopotamian representations of space solely in terms of good space and bad space—synonymous with ordered and chaotic, central and peripheral, or present and past space—is oversimplistic. In order to introduce more nuance and complexity to our understanding of ancient Mesopotamian perceptions and conceptions of space, it will be necessary to bring different theoretical approaches and methodologies to bear on the source material. Towards this end, it will be useful to consider the differing contexts in which these similar topoi appear in the two texts.

Such considerations of context are not uncommon in the study of crime and deviance in modern contexts. For example, the sociologist Pat Lauderdale writes on the subject of political versus apolotical deviance:

> Increasingly, sociologists define political deviants as those individuals or groups who challenge or deny the legitimacy of rules, laws, or norms because of some commitment to a higher or different moral order. Apolitical deviants, or simply "deviants" in the present hegemonic order, on the other hand, are those individuals who accept the existing societal order, but who seek to circumvent its restrictions to achieve personal ends. Intent is the key here. Politically deviant behaviour, while not accepted by society as fully legitimate,

[38] For examples, see the literature cited in n. 4 above.
[39] Van De Mieroop, "A Study in Contrast," 424-31.

> is often exempt from the usual stigma attached to illegitimate behaviour by virtue of the intent of the actors.[40]

The same action can be viewed very differently in different contexts, and intent is a central aspect of this.[41] Just as *mens rea* is an important element in determining whether an individual's actions were criminal in modern legal frameworks, an individual's intentions are an important element of people's perceptions of whether that individual's deviant behaviour was justified.[42]

At first glance, this approach may not seem especially relevant to the case studies tackled in this paper. Neither the enemies of Assyria in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual nor the Elamites in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual are presented as acting out of "commitment to a higher or different moral order." Instead, they are presented as evil and motivated by hatred of the centre. They are typical examples of a popular Mesopotamian conceptions of the enemy, who acts evilly seemingly for the sake of acting evilly.[43] However, there is a second way in which we can approach the question of the intentions behind deviant behaviour in ancient contexts. Instead of considering the motivations of the human perpetrators of deviant behaviour, we might consider the intentions of the gods, and how the behaviours in question stood in relation to the divine plan.

Acting against the Will of the Gods

In Assyro–Babylonian thought, future events were predetermined, and could be foretold through a variety of divinatory techniques, but this did not mean that all events were part of a divine plan. There is

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[40] Pat Lauderdale, "Political Deviance," in *The Handbook of Deviance*, Erich Goode (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 521.

[41] The identities and social standing of the perpetrators of deviant behaviour and those affected by it also play an important role in how that behaviour is perceived (see Dewar, "Burning of Captives").

[42] Lauderdale, "Political Deviance," 521-23.

[43] Mario Liverani, "The King and His Audience," in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23, 2014*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa, Alessandro Greco, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Simonetta Ponchia, and Robert Rollinger (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 382-83.

an inherent tension in the presentation of divination and the will of the gods in the sources between the concepts of predetermination and a divine plan on the one hand, and the ability of individuals to act against the will of the gods on the other. The Assyrian royal inscriptions contain various instances of enemies acting against the will of the gods. For example, Sargon II describes Merodach-baladan II in his annals from Khorsabad as *ša kī lā libbi ilāni šarrūt Babili ēpušma*, "one who exercised kingship over Babylon against the will of the gods,"[44] a situation which the Babylonian chief god Marduk "hates" (*ẓêru*),[45] while Esarhaddon's rebellious brothers are stated to act *lā libbi ilāni*, "against the will of the gods," or *ša lā ilāni*, "without the gods," four times in the course of his "apology."[46] From Babylonian sources, the most pronounced example of misrule against the will of the gods comes from a text known to Assyriologists as the Crimes of Nabu-Shuma-ishkun,[47] which gives a lengthy account of the transgressions against Babylonia and its people by the eighth-century BCE Babylonian ruler Nabu-shuma-ishkun. Glassner outlines these transgressions thus:

> …the king stopped making war, compelled the priests to break the law, put the gods under his orders, went so far as to sell his own subjects, violated justice, profaned the holy places, seized the treasures of the Esagila, introduced foreign gods into Babylon, and, lastly, insulted his own family.[48]

Frequently, acts of deviance such as these in Mesopotamia literature result in punishment from the gods. Perhaps the most obvious example of this comes from several of the literary traditions surrounding Naram-Sin of Akkad. In both the Curse of Agade and the Weidner Chronicle, Naram-Sin commits crimes against a major cult centre—Nippur in the Curse of Agade, Babylon in the Weidner

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[44] Frame, *Inscriptions of Sargon II*, no. 1: 21.
[45] Frame, *Inscriptions of Sargon II*, no. 1: 267-68.
[46] Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), no. 1: i 26, 29, 34, 46.
[47] Frame, Rulers of Babylonia, B.6.14.1; Glassner, Mesopotamian Chronicles, no. 52.
[48] Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 302.

Chronicle.[49] As punishment for these crimes, the gods have Naram-Sin be beset by the Gutians or Umman-manda, who destroy his empire.[50]

In instances such as this, the space created is "bad" as experienced by those living there, but "good" on a cosmic level because the perpetrators of deviance are punished. In this fashion, instead of "bad" spaces and "good" spaces, we might divide Mesopotamian cosmic geography into "correct" space, deviant space, and punitive space created as a divine response to acts of deviance. This is a tripartite conception of order and chaos in which the subjective experience of a space's inhabitants must be separated out from its "objective" moral nature on a cosmic level, as demonstrated in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. The moral character of disordered and ordered spaces at the centre in Mesopotamian thought.

	Disordered Spaces		**Ordered Spaces**
	Deviant Space	**Punitive Space**	**Correct Space**
Subjective Experience at the Centre	Bad	Bad	Good
"Objective" Nature on a Cosmic Level	Bad	Good (necessary)	Good

Deviance and Righteous Suffering in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual

Although in the examples of divinely-punitive space above the punishment comes after law and social convention has already failed, in other instances there is no clear sign as to what the gods are punishing. For example, the death of Sargon II on campaign in Anatolia was seen in Assyria as punishment for some transgression committed by that king, but the nature of the transgression was

[49] Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 54-57 lines 102-48; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 38: 62.

[50] Cooper, *Curse of Agade*, 56-63 lines 149-281; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, no. 38: 62-63. The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin (Westenholz, *Kings of Akkade*, no. 22) provides a different version of Naram-Sin's conflict with the Gutians, in which this king neglects omens, is punished for it, then repents and survives with his kingdom intact.

unclear. Sargon's son, Sennacherib, therefore took various precautions against accidentally emulating his father's mistakes.[51] This human inability to discern the reasoning behind divine punishment is a core concept in Mesopotamian wisdom literature of the "righteous sufferer" type.[52]

Conversely, when the gods decided to punish an individual severely, that individual could try to change their minds. Takayoshi Oshima argues that the "righteous sufferer" motif was applied in hymns and prayers to demonstrate that the sufferer was too valuable a servant of the gods to be killed for whatever unknown sin they had committed.[53] This is the mindset adopted in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual; the foreign enemies have enjoyed Ashur's good will but have wholeheartedly rejected him and his chosen king. Meanwhile, Tukulti-Ninurta and his people have always followed their god's every command. Tukulti-Ninurta is not deserving of punishment, while his enemies' plans would deviate significantly from the natural order of things. The conquest of Assyria by its enemies and the overthrow of Tukulti-ninurta would not be in Ashur's best interests. The god must therefore protect Tukulti-Ninurta and his land from such a fate.

Crime and Punishment in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual

The space described in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual differs from that in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual in that the disorder in the land is not a hypothetical state such as the one Tukulti-Ninurta insures against with his entreaty to Ashur, but an event that actually comes to pass through divine displeasure. Bad omens pre-empt the change in the land's fortunes, evil deeds become commonplace, and this

[51] Ben Dewar, "Rebellion, Sargon II's "Punishment" and the Death of Aššur-nādin-šumi in the Inscriptions of Sennacherib," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 3, no. 1 (2016): 25-38.
[52] Takayoshi M. Oshima, "Morality and the Mind of the Gods: Divine Knowledge and Human Ignorance in Mesopotamian Prayers and Didactic Literature," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 6, no. 4 (2017): 404-407.
[53] Oshima, "Mind of the Gods," 407-10.

causes Marduk to become furious and leave the land.[54] Such divine abandonment resulting in the downfall of cities is a common trope in Mesopotamian literature and historiography.[55] The situation in Babylon is a response to the fact that the city has already become a deviant space, unlike Assyria in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, which is inhabited by a king and people pious enough to be undeserving of such extreme punishment.

The disorder in Babylonia only comes to an end when a suitably pious king—Nebuchadnezzar I—presents himself, and his prayer bring Marduk back to the land:

[…] the servant (Nebuchadnezzar) who fears him (Marduk), pious one, compliant one, who is constantly attentive to his (Marduk's) appearance, did not withhold prayer until he (Marduk) had caused him to achieve his desires.

> Until I (Nebuchadnezzar) had gazed upon his exalted form, day to day, without ceasing, a low mood would not leave my body and I did not complete (enough) sleep in the sweet lap of night.
>
> As a result of my pained supplications, my wearied prayers, the raising of my hands and the touching of my nose (in prayer), with which I beseeched (and) prayed to him daily, his broad heart took on compassion and he turned his attention back to the interior of the pure city (Babylon).

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[54] Beaulieu states that, in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual, the decline of Babylonia into sinfulness "is caused solely by divine abandonment" (Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marlies Heinz and Marian H. Feldman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns), 147). However, the progression of lines 15-17 demonstrates that this is not entirely the case; Marduk's abandonment makes the situation in the land far worse, but his anger comes after evil has already become a constant presence in the land. In this context, the changing omens in line 15 represent divine displeasure at the behaviour of the Babylonians.

[55] On this topos, see Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press 1974), 9-21; Cooper, *Curse of Agade*, 29-30; Andreas Johandi, "The Motif of Divine Abandonment in Some Mesopotamian Texts Featuring the God Marduk," in *Kings, Gods and People: Establishing Monarchies in the Ancient World*, ed. Thomas R. Kämmerer, Mait Kõiv, and Vladimir Sazonov (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 2016).

> Because his heart desired to traverse the city and the steppe, when he came out from amidst the evil of Elam, he took a road of exultation, a way of celebration, a path (demonstrating his) attention and response (to my prayers), to the interior of Shuanna (Babylon).[56]

This new king is uniquely capable of calming Marduk's anger, something that the text earlier states that not even the other gods can do.[57] Just as the Assyrian king's piety protects Assyria from being dragged into chaos by its enemies in the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, Babylonia is rescued from chaos by the piety of the Babylonian king in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual. In both instances, the Mesopotamian ideal of charismatic kingship is firmly on display.

Nebuchadnezzar's supplication to Marduk leads to a cessation of the chaos in the land, and Babylon returns to being the glorious centre of the world:

> The lord (Marduk) entered and took residence in his peaceful dwelling,
>
> Kasulim, the shrine of his lordship shone, full of celebration.
>
> The heavens (gave) their plenty, the earth, its produce, the mountain, its yield.
>
> There were constant prayers—as many as there are different languages—for him who is without rival.
>
> They brought their heavy tribute to the lord of lords.[58]

In this fashion, over the course of the text, Babylonia transitions from deviant space to punitive space and finally to correct space. This progression is pre-empted at the beginning of the text, where

[56] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.9: 5-14.
[57] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.8: 26-30.
[58] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.9: 17-25.

Marduk is described as: "the one who has the ability to ruin and resettle."[59]

Divine Abandonment as Heterotopia

Thus far, I have considered divine abandonment and the chaos resulting from it solely in terms of their role as a punishment for those who have angered the gods. However, the progression of events in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual suggests a different way of thinking about spaces of divine abandonment as not only punitive, but also transitional spaces. Towards this end, I turn to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia: various forms of "other spaces" that perform an array of functions in maintaining social order.[60] Foucault applies this label to several different types of space, but for our current purpose, two of his types of heterotopia are particularly relevant: heterotopia of crisis (spaces where individuals experience periods of transition or rites of passage), and heterotopia of deviation (spaces in which individuals who transgress against social norms are placed).[61]

These two types of space are not sharply delineated from one another, and a space may display elements of both types; Foucault characterises retirement homes as being on the border between heterotopia of crisis and of deviation, for example.[62] Similarly, the

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[59] Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.2.4.8: 3.

[60] Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces," trans. Robert Hurley, in *Aesthetics, Methods, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press 1998), 178-85.

[61] Foucault, "Different Spaces," 179-80. Foucault ("Different Spaces," 182-83) tries to distinguish his concept of heterotopia from "heterochronia," a similar concept relating to time rather than space. However, he struggles to clearly define the relationship between these two concepts. Peeren therefore argues they are better understood as inseparable aspects of a single phenomenon (Esther Peeren, "Grave Stories: (Re)Burial as Chronotope and Heterotopia in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Tahar Djaout's *Les Chercheurs d'os* and Assia Djebar's *Algerian White*," in *The Ideologies of Lived Space in Literary Texts, Ancient and Modern*, Jacqueline Klooster and Jo Heirman (Gent: Academia Press, 2013), 55-57). As will become clear below, Peeren's argument holds true for the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual, in which the spatial and temporal elements of the heterotopian space cannot be disentangled from one another. Peeren uses the term "heterochronotopia" to refer to this spatial–temporal alternative to Foucault's spatial heterotopia. However, this term is unwieldy, and is also used by Bal to refer to a different concept (Mieke Bal, "Heterochronotopia," in *Migratory Settings*, ed. Murat Aydemir and Alex Rotas (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008)). I will therefore use the term "heterotopia" to refer to these "other spaces," while acknowledging that they carry a temporal as well as a spatial element.

[62] Foucault, "Different Spaces," 180.

space resulting from Marduk's abandonment of Babylon displays elements of both types of heterotopia outlined above. It serves to facilitate a state of transition—albeit on a cosmic rather than an individual scale—and addresses deviant behaviour. However, unlike Foucault's heterotopia of crisis or deviation, which are real, peripheral places to which people go or are sent from the centre (the psychiatric ward, the prison, the honeymoon suite, the private boarding school), the situation in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual instead involves a transformation in the quality of the centre facilitated by divine abandonment.

When considered in this light, Marduk's abandonment of Babylon becomes more than a simple punishment for deviant behaviour. Rather than being the actions of an angry god lashing out at those who have displeased him, it holds a vital role in the restoration of order; before Babylonia can be rebuilt as correct space, it is necessary for the land to first be destroyed.

Divine Abandonment as Demolition

The sequence of decline, demolition, and rebuilding was a natural way to conceive of the restoration of order in a society where mudbrick was the primary building material. When a building was in need of renovation, this was done by demolishing the worn, old structure and replacing it with a new one. Temple building in particular has clear parallels with the events surrounding divine abandonment; during renovations, the cult statues of gods were removed from their shrines and housed elsewhere.[63] At the same time, the labourers working on the building project gained access to areas of the building that were usually restricted.[64] In this fashion, both temple building and divine abandonment serve to correct an

[63] Claus Ambos, "Building Rituals from the First Millennium BC: The Evidence from the Ritual Texts". In *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 228-29.

[64] For the usually restricted access to Mesopotamian temples, see Barbara Nevling Porter, "A Question of Violence: Ashurnasirpal II's Ninurta Temple Inscription as a Religious Polemic," in *Religious Polemics in Context*, ed. Theo L. Hettema and Arie van der Kooij (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2004), 42-43.

undesirable situation (a temple suffering from neglect or a kingdom suffering from misrule and social decline). They do so by temporarily peripheralizing the centre before destroying and rebuilding it, and finally returning it to the correct situation of the more distant past.[65]

A similar situation occurs in perhaps the most famous of Mesopotamian narratives about destruction: the flood myth.[66] Here, the growth of the world's human population angers Enlil, who decides to destroy mankind with the deluge. Enki/Ea saves the flood hero (Ziusudra, Atra-hasis, or Uta-napishti) by warning him of Enlil's plan and instructing him to build an ark. Once the deluge has subsided, the flood hero rebuilds the land, and civilisation starts again. Here again we see a pattern of decline, destruction, and rebuilding. There is also another example of the inversion of the norm with regards to centre and periphery; the central land temporarily becomes sea like the edges of the world,[67] and the surviving inhabitants of the centre must flee to the mountainous periphery.[68]

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[65] For the representation of history in terms of a good distant past, bad recent past, and a return to the good in the present in Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, see Frederick Mario Fales, "Kilamuwa and the Foreign Kings: Propaganda vs. Power'," *Die Welt des Orients* 10 (1979): 7-9; Mario Liverani, "Telipinu, or: on solidarity," in *Myth and Politics in Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*, ed. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop (London: Equinox 2004), 31-36; Mario Liverani, Liverani, M. (2004b). "Shunashura, or: on reciprocity," in *Myth and Politics*, ed. Bahrani and Van De Mieroop, 69-74; Mario Liverani, Liverani, M. (2004c). "The story of Joash," in *Myth and Politics*, ed. Bahrani and Van De Mieroop, 151-52; Zaccagnini, "An Urartean Royal Inscription," 260-61.

[66] The story of the deluge is recorded in Akkadian versions in the second half of Atrahasis (Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 66-129) and in Tablet XI of the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh (George, *Gilgamesh*, 702-19 lines 8-230), and in a Sumerian version in the tablet CBS 10673 (Miguel Civil, "The Sumerian Flood Story." In Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, 138-45, 167-74).

[67] For the sea as the edge of the world in Mesopotamia cosmology, see Gina Konstantopoulos, "The Bitter Sea and the Waters of Death: The Sea as a Conceptual Border in Mesopotamia," *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 35, no. 2 (2020): 171-97; Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 325-27, 332-33.

[68] In CBS 10673 (Civil, "Sumerian Flood Story," 145 vi 260) the ark instead lands in Dilmun (modern Bahrain), a peripheral land beyond the sea (Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 328-29). For Assyrians fleeing to the mountains as an inversion of the natural order in Assyrian royal inscriptions, see Ben Dewar, "Us against Them: Ideological and Psychological Aspects of Ashurnasirpal II's Campaign against Assyrian Rebels in Ḫalziluḫa," *Iraq* 82 (2020): 115.

In Mesopotamian thought, time was cyclical,[69] and these patterns of decline, demolition, and rebuilding would therefore repeat throughout history. Indeed, the motif of Marduk abandoning Babylon in a similar fashion to that in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual appears in the royal narratives of various later kings.[70] An individual king may enjoy a glorious reign during which Babylonia enters into a new golden age, but this situation cannot last forever. The land will inevitably slip into decline at some point in the future, necessitating its destruction and eventual rebuilding. States of "order," "stability," and "settledness" are the ideal, but states of "disorder," "instability," and "mobility," while unpleasant, are sometimes necessary for resolving states of deviance.

Conclusion

Previous studies on ancient Near Eastern ideology and worldview have frequently focused on the form and structure of texts.[71] While this approach can be and has been very fruitful for the study of ancient historiography and literature,[72] the two case studies in this paper demonstrate the importance of keeping this approach tied to a consideration of content and context. The deviant spaces in the Tukulti-Ninurta and Nebuchadnezzar Bilinguals both present the inversion of the norm at the centre in similar terms of oppositions between centre and periphery. However, the spaces described differ from one another considerably in terms of their causes and character. In the Tukulti-Ninurta Bilingual, Assyria is the god Ashur's favoured land, and Tukulti-Ninurta and the Assyrians are his devoted servants. If Assyria was overrun by its enemies, this pious king and his people

[69] For a brief overview of Mesopotamian conceptions of time, see Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 7-10.

[70] For example, Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, B.6.21.1; Leichty, *Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, nos. 104-114; Frauke Weiershäuser and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk (561–560 BC), Neriglissar (559–556 BC), and Nabonidus (555–539 BC), Kings of Babylon* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2020), Nabonidus 3.

[71] Douglas J. Green, *"I Undertook Great Works": The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 16.

[72] For examples, see n. 4 above.

would be replaced by enemies of the god Ashur. Such a deviation from the cosmic order would be unequivocally negative.

Conversely, while the inversion of the norm in the Nebuchadnezzar Bilingual is undesirable for the Babylonians, it also demonstrates the potential benefits of some disordered space in Mesopotamian thought. Just like the renovation of a dilapidated temple, the punitive space created during the destruction of a land or city that has earned the wrath of the gods is a transitional, "heterotopic" state that allows the land to be reordered in response to deviant behaviour at the centre. In this fashion, such punitive spaces are positive in the cosmic order of things.

In this fashion, even royal-focused Mesopotamian narratives can at times display a far more nuanced understanding of the nature of chaos than has often been assumed in previous scholarship. Order and stability are precarious states that rely on the presence of a good and pious king. In the absence of such an ideal ruler, the centre is overrun by the periphery and becomes just like it. This is not a good situation for the land to be in, but it is sometimes a necessary one. When social deviance has taken a hold of the centre, things must get worse for its inhabitants before they can get better.