

**A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY
OF THE MORAL PRACTICES OF
CERTAIN SOCIAL GROUPS IN
ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA**

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A contribution to the study of the moral practices of certain social groups in ancient Mesopotamia by Beatrice Allard Brooks

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BY

BEATRICE ALLARD BROOKS

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ABR Kobler, J. and Peiser, F., *Aus dem babylonischen Rechtsleben*, 4 vols., Leipzig 1890.
- ADD Johns, C. H. W., *Assyrian Deeds and Documents*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1901.
- AJSL *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, Chicago.
- Arch. & Bib. Barton, G. A., *Archaeology and the Bible*, Philadelphia 1916.
- BA *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, edited by F. Delitzsch and Paul Haupt, Leipzig 1890—1894.
- Bab. Briefe Ungnad, A., *Babylonische Briefe aus der Zeit der Hammurabi-Dynastie*, Leipzig 1914.
- BB Zimmern, H., *Babylonische Bußpsalmen*, Leipzig 1885.
- BE *Publications of the Babylonian Section*, University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia 1911 f.
- BE (A) Hilprecht, H. V., ed., *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania*, Series A., Philadelphia 1893 till 1911; München 1913, 1914.
- BL Langdon, S., *Babylonian Liturgies*, Paris 1913.
- Br. Brünnow, R. E., *A Classified List*, Leyden 1889.
- BN Botta, P. E., *Monument de Ninive*, 5 vols., Paris 1847—1850.
- CEBK King, L. W., ed., *Chronicles concerning Early Babylonian Kings*, 2 vols., London 1907.
- C. T. *Cuneiform Texts* from Babylonian tablets in the British Museum, London 1896—1914.
- Cun. Par. to O. T. Rogers, R. W., *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, New York 1912.
- Déc. De Sarzec, E., *Découvertes en Chaldée*, Paris 1884 f.
- DeClercq DeClercq, M., *Collection DeClercq Catalogue Méthodique et Raisonné*, 3 vols., 1888—1911.
- Dél. Scheil, W., ed., *Délégation en Perse Vol. IV.*, Paris 1902.
- ERH Radau, H., *Early Babylonian History*, New York 1900.
- Ham. Laws Harper, R. F., *The Code of Hammurabi*, Chicago 1904.
- Ham. Letters King, L. W., *The Letters and Inscriptions of Hammurabi*, 3 vols., London 1898—1900.
- Hilp. Ann. Vol. Hilprecht, H. V., *Anniversary Volume; Studies in Assyriology and Archaeology*, Leipzig 1909.
- HLC Barton, G. A., *Haverford Library Collection of Cuneiform Tablets*, 3 vols., Philadelphia 1905—1914.
- HWB Delitzsch, F., *Assyrisches Handwörterbuch*, Leipzig 1896.
- Invent. de Tello Thureau-Dangin, F., *Inventaire des Tablettes de Tello*, 2 vols., Paris 1910—1911.
- AOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, New Haven.

- Jastrow, Civilization Jastrow, M., *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria*, Philadelphia 1915.
- JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*, New Haven.
- Johns Bab. & Ass. Johns, C. H. W., *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts, and Letters*, New York 1904.
- J. P. Morgan J. P. Morgan Collection. *Babylonian Records in the Library of J. P. Morgan*, 3 vols., New York 1912—1916.
- JR Jastrow, M., *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens*, 2 vols., Gießen 1905.
- JSOR *Journal of the Society of Oriental Research*, Chicago.
- KAT3 Zimmern, H., *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, 3. Auflage, Berlin 1902—1903.
- KB Schrader, E., ed., *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek*, 6 vols., Berlin 1889—1900.
- King, Hist. Bab. King, L. W., *History of Babylonia*, New York 1915.
- King Hist. Sumer King, L. W., *History of Sumer and Akkad*, New York 1910.
- KU Kohler, J. and Peiser, F., *Hammurabi's Gesetz*, 5 vols., Leipzig 1904—1911.
- Lay Layard, A. H., *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character*, London 1851.
- Lindl Lindl, E., *Das Priester- und Beamtentum der altbabylonischen Kontrakte*, Paderborn 1913.
- M Meißner, B., *Seltene assyrische Ideogramme*, Leipzig 1910.
- MA Müß-Arnolt, W., *A Concise Dictionary of the Assyrian Language*, Berlin 1905.
- MAP Meißner, B., *Beiträge zum Altbabylonischen Privatrecht*, Leipzig 1893.
- MBI Barton, G. A., *Miscellaneous Babylonian Inscriptions*, New Haven 1918.
- Mess. Keil. hist. Messerschmidt, L., *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur, historischen Inhalts*, 1911.
- Meyer, Sum. und Sem. Meyer, E., *Sumerier und Semiten in Babylonien*, Berlin 1906.
- OBI Hilprecht, H. V., *Old Babylonian Inscriptions*, Transactions of American Philosophical Society, Vol. XVIII, 1896.
- OBW Barton, G. A., *Origin and Development of Babylonian Writing*, 2 vols., Baltimore 1913.
- OLZ *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, Leipzig.
- PSBA *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, London.
- R Rawlinson, Sir H., *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, 5 vols., London 1861—1884.
- RA *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale*, Paris.
- Reisner Hymnen Reisner, G., *Sumerisch-Babylonische Hymnen*, Berlin 1896.
- RT Craig, J. A., *Assyrian and Babylonian Religious Texts*, 2 vols., Leipzig 1895.
- SAK Thureau-Dangin, F., *Die Sumerischen und Akkadischen Königschriften*, Leipzig 1907.

- Schorr Schorr, M., *Urkunden des altbabylonischen Zivil- und Prozessrechts*,
Leipzig 1913.
- SCWA Ward, W. H., *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, Washington 1910.
- Studien Frank, C., *Studien zur Babylonischen Religion*, Leipzig 1911.
- Tam. & Ish. Langdon, S., *Tammuz and Ishtar*, Oxford 1914.
- TD Thureau-Dangin, F., *Lettres et contrats de l'époque de la Première
Dynastie Babylonienne*, Paris 1910.
- Toy. Vol. *Studies in the History of Religions*, presented to C. H. Toy by
his pupils, New York 1912.
- VAT *Vorderasiatische Abteilung der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin.*
- VS *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin,*
Leipzig.
- WZKM *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Wien.
- YBT *Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts*, New Haven.
- ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, Straßburg.
- ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig.
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The Sumerian and Akkadian peoples were little concerned with speculative ethics. The approach to the study of the moral ideals of a society now merely historical, our knowledge of which is based on scattered and all too insufficient records, must be a sociological one. Yet sociological development and moral evolution are not identical; for a social structure may be built up or torn down unwittingly. While the rules evolved by any society are not necessarily ethical, it is essential to study varieties of customs, since non-ethical customs are of value in so far as they affect the standard of conduct of the group or individual. In the evolution of a people, influenced as it is by geography, economic conditions, religious conceptions, and other forces, it is difficult to trace the moral elements. The purpose of this dissertation is to select from Sumerian and Akkadian literature now accessible to us, such illustrations as seem to indicate most clearly the moral ideals and practices of the group. We are not here concerned with the ideals of the individual as such, but shall confine ourselves rather to customs which reveal some of the principles which regulate conduct within certain social units, as the nation, the family, classes of women, slaves. A study of the laws and customs connected with such groups may serve as a basis for judging the general moral status of ancient Mesopotamia.¹

When we consider the larger unit, the nation, or in early time, the city-state, we find that the principal activities were war and commerce. Of these the more important for the study

¹ It is curious that efforts to study the morality as such have been so few. Mention should be made of the brief statements of Jastrow in *Hebrew and Babylonian Tradition*, and *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*. We are indebted to S. A. B. Mercier for having first attempted a systematic outline of moral practices, published in *JSOR* and *Religious and Moral Ideas in Babylonia and Assyria*.

of morality, and that about which we have the most data, is war. Aside from accounts of campaigns which fill the royal annals, we are informed of military organization through the letters and contracts. That there existed, particularly in Assyria, a state of society which was continually organized to meet the exigencies of war furnished by attack or by the ambition of powerful monarchs, we have evidence from contracts and letters. Such groups as the *Kišru*¹ and *šabe*² were subject to military service. Neither with the details of the organization³ nor with military tactics as such, are we here concerned,⁴ it is sufficient to note that society was so organized that the demands of war could be quickly met.

To the Babylonians and Assyrians, war was a natural human activity. If the country were attacked, it became the divine duty of the king, acting as the instrument of the gods, to protect it, and punish the invader by any means that seemed effective. If a king aspired to enlarge his empire, he could, provided he had a sufficient following and military ability, march through the country, conquering town after town, making the vanquished peoples „submit to his yoke” and „bow down at his feet”. Perhaps it was because of this conception of the commonplaceness of war, that the Sumerians and Babylonians wrote little of their conquests; they considered rather that the building of temples and palaces, the dedication of boundary stones and canals were of a more permanent interest than the details of campaigns. It was left to the Assyrians to furnish descriptions of military strategy.

That the Sumerians were active in battle, is shown by the date-lists, the year often being named for the chief event that occurred in it. Frequently a number of successive years received their date from the same event as: „The second year after the subjection of Kismash”⁵ or „The fifth year after he con-

¹ ADD II § 79, 224 f. King Ham, Lett. III No. 1.

² Cf. p. 82—85.

³ Cf. „Das stehende Heer der Assyrerkönige und seine Organisation”, ZA XXIV 97 ff., 185 ff.

⁴ Cf. „Assyrische Kriegführung von Tiglat-pileser I bis auf Šamši-adad III”, Marie Paneritius, Dissertation 1904. Also HA III 166 ff.

⁵ HLC Pt. II Tablet 33.

quered Isin."¹ The military activity of the Sumerians and Babylonians is also indicated by the warlike epithets which they, as well as the Assyrians, apply to themselves, at the beginning of most of the royal annals.

In the early period, disputes over boundary stones furnished one of the chief causes of war. The so-called „Stèle of the Vultures” of Eannatum, and the Cone of Entemena are records of such conflicts. Entemena describes the difficulties Mesilim, King of Kish, had with Uš, Patesi of Umma:²

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Me-silim</i> | Mesilim, |
| <i>lugal-kis-ki-ge</i> | King of Kish, |
| 10. <i>ka d. Ka-di-na-ta</i> | by the command of Kadi, the
exalted, |
| <i>KU gan-bi-ra</i> | at the beginning of his territory |
| <i>Ki-ba na-ne-ru</i> | there he erected a stèle. |
| <i>Uš</i> | Uš, |
| <i>pa-te-si</i> | patesi |
| 15. <i>giš-uh-ki-ge</i> | of Umma, |
| <i>nam-enim-ma-dir-dir-šu</i> | according to evil intentions |
| <i>e-ag</i> | acted. |
| <i>na-(ru)-a-bi</i> | That stèle |
| <i>ni-pad</i> | he took away |
| 20. <i>edin Sir-la-pur-ki-šu</i> | into the territory of Lagash |
| <i>ni-du</i> | he went. |
| (d.) <i>Nin-gir-su</i> | Ningirsu |
| <i>ur-sag d. En-til-la-ge</i> | the hero of Enlil, |
| <i>ka-si-di-(ni)-ta</i> | according to his (ie. Ningirsu's)
righteous command, |
| 25. <i>giš-uh-ki-da</i> | with Umma |
| <i>dam-ha-ra</i> | a battle |
| <i>é-da-ag</i> | he made (ie. Mesilim). |

The desire of Mesopotamian monarchs for territorial expansion, naturally led them to wage aggressive warfare. The necessity of maintaining any army for defense, supplied them with ready material for the nucleus of powerful forces, when

¹ SAK p. 237 (g). See also date lists in HLC, SAK, Ham. Letters, Vol. III p. 212 f. etc.

² Cone. Col. I f. 8—27. Trans. from Déc. Pt. III pl. XLVII. In the translation of quotations, all previous interpretations have been compared.