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FROM MESOPOTAMIAN TEMPLES AS SACRED GROVES TO THE DATE-PALM MOTIF IN GREEK ART AND ARCHITECTURE

I. The palm-tree motif in Mesopotamian temple-façades

During the Middle Bronze Age in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC several major city-temples in Mesopotamia displayed mud-brick façades that imitated palm trees, as if the temple stood within a sacred grove. This short-lived fashion in religious architecture coincides with a period of Elamite imperial power over all of Mesopotamia,[1] led from Susa in western Iran as well as Anshan (near the much later city at Persepolis), twin capital cities; the fashion in Mesopotamia can be compared with a much longer-lived tradition in Elam for shrines in actual sacred groves.

The symbolic importance of the date-palm allowed motifs derived from the tree to spread beyond the area where living date-palms flourish. They are used on stone columns further west, both as bases and as capitals in the 'Proto-Aeolic' or 'Proto-Ionic' style. The palm frond as a symbol of victory can be traced to a version of the Babylonian *Epic of Creation*. In Mesopotamian temple architecture the style of those façades can be linked to an episode in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and its forerunners. This paper explores some relationships between the

[1] POTTS 1999, 160-187; CHARPIN, EDZARD, & STOL 2004, 213-231; DURAND 2013.

physical phenomena and two great works of Babylonian literature: visual schemes in temples of a particular period on the one hand, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Epic of Creation* on the other. It shows how date-palms and their fronds continued to carry their early significance into Hellenistic and Roman art, still linked to the great literary works of Mesopotamia.

Before villages, towns, and cities began to emerge in the ancient Near East in the aftermath of the last Ice Age, humans felt a sense of grandeur and spirituality in nature, recognising a numinous presence in natural springs, in mountain peaks, in forests and groves. In Mesopotamia the architecture and decoration of early urban temples continued to recognise the allure of those prehistoric places, inhabited by a divine presence. This is known in part from the naming of great temples whose ziggurat (a solid temple tower attached to the main building) was evidently intended to represent a holy mountain; and in part from the architecture itself. The great temple at Nippur in central southern Iraq was called É.KUR, literally "house-mountain", and the names or epithets of some deities also refer to it, such as Nin-hursag, "lady-mountain".[2] Such temples with courtyard buildings leading to their ziggurats were built in the monotonous, flat alluvium from which the mountains of the Zagros to the west can often be discerned.

In the words of Simon Barnes:

> "When you walk in ancient woodland, you are generally struck by the idea of how much like a cathedral it all is. But perhaps we've got it the wrong way round. Perhaps the point is that our ancestors made cathedrals to look and feel like forests: in search of such things as silence, majesty, a sense of the specialness of place, an area at once spacious and confined, a place to speak in whispers and to tread softly, a place where personal silence brings an almost tangible response, a place where humans are deeply at home but feel a deep sense of privilege at doing so. And then from the lofty, vaulted ceiling an angelic voice

[2] KUR and HUR.SAG are both Sumerian words for "mountain". KUR can also mean "Underworld".

> cascades down to mortals below [he refers to birdsong].[3] The columns of a cathedral do a good job in holding the roof up: but perhaps that's their secondary function. Perhaps their primary function is to recreate in pilgrims the sense of the sanctity of the forest."

One might compare this with Strabo's acerbic remarks: ". . . the poets embellish things, calling all sacred precincts 'sacred groves', even if they are bare of trees. Such, also, is the saying of Pindar concerning Apollo: 'stirred, he traversed both land and sea, and halted on great lookouts above mountains, and whirled great stones, laying foundations of sacred groves [i.e., temples]'".[4] The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* links that god's temples with wooded groves, and since Leto, about to give birth to the god on the Aegean island of Delos, embraced a palm tree, one may infer that palm groves were associated with his shrine there.

Early in the 2nd millennium BC a remarkable new fashion arose in Mesopotamia. Many city temples were built to show the appearance of a grove of date-palms imitated in mud-brick façades (Fig. 2.1). This marks a change from the earlier tradition of rectangular niches, sometimes called reveals, which were purely geometric designs allowing shadows to break up the bright, reflective surface of smooth-plastered brick. None of the palm-tree façades of the early 2nd millennium is found in a palace context; all are associated with temples.[5]

The first example of the new fashion is the so-called Bastion of Warad-Sin (Figs. 2.2-2.4). It is a monumental entrance to the great ziggurat terrace at Ur in southern Iraq, part of a huge complex dedicated to the Moon-God. This is dated by inscribed foundation deposits to the reign of Warad-Sin, king of Larsa, who reigned in the 19th century BC (*c.* 1834-1823 by the Middle Chronology). He was the son of Kudur-mabuk, grandson

[3] *The Times*, March 10th 2012.
[4] STRAB. 9, 2, 33, trans. H.L. JONES.
[5] See, e.g., GIOVINO 2007, 188.

of Simti-šilhak, both of them having Elamite names, although Warad-Sin is a Babylonian name. This is evidence that the dynasty had Elamite origins, at least in part, and it was the most powerful of that period, until Babylon under Hammurabi eventually gained ascendancy.

Framing the stairs up to the terrace were two slender free-standing columns, whose bricks were cut and set to form a pattern of triangles in shallow relief. As a date-palm grows taller, the lower fronds are cut off, causing a characteristic pattern to extend up the trunk of the tree; according in part to exactly how the cutting is done, and in part how the angle of light falls at any particular time of day, the pattern resembles either triangles (also referred to as diamonds, scales, and imbrications) or spirals. Hence the pattern on these columns seems intended to imitate the effect of palm-tree trunks.[6] On either side of the entrance the façade of the walls was decorated with semi-engaged pillars similarly patterned. The surface was covered with plaster, coloured grey or green. Not surprisingly, preservation was insufficient for the shape of the tree-top to be identified. The level at which the Bastion stood was 1.60 m higher than the lower terrace. The whole effect for the worshipper, therefore, was of entering, or looking up to, a forest or date-palm grove over which the ziggurat towered like a mountain peak. Because the way on to the terrace was partly obstructed by contemporary buildings, it has been suggested that the doorway, which was approached up elegant semi-circular steps, acted like a stage, as a place where worshippers could view the deity without entering sacred space, as if standing, like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, at the edge of a sacred forest.[7] Such doorways framing a deity and approached up steps are depicted on terracotta plaques in low relief (Fig. 2.5).[8] The

[6] Woolley 1939, 42-43.
[7] Blocher 2012.
[8] Battini 2009, Figs. 4-5.

plaques with this scene are probably limited to the Old Babylonian period.

A similar effect was produced for the worshipper approaching the great temple of the Sun-God at Larsa at roughly the same period; no foundation inscriptions were found to give precise dating. The first of two huge courtyards through which one processed towards the temple tower was excavated sufficiently to reveal a façade with semi-engaged pillars of two types: triangles alternating with a spiral pattern. This decorative scheme flanked the doorway that led from one huge courtyard to another (badly preserved) courtyard and on in a straight line towards the temple tower itself.[9] As with the Bastion of Warad-Sin, approach to the ziggurat was made as if through a forest towards a mountain. Monumental staircases separated the palm-tree courtyards from the ziggurat. From a distance it was as if a palm-tree-clad mountain rose up from the flat and featureless plain of lower Mesopotamia.

Other temples of roughly the same date, also in southern Iraq, with similar columns of moulded brick, are reported from Zabalam and Abu Thahab, both in the modern province of Dhi Qar, centred on Nasiriyeh.[10] East of the Tigris, Tell Haddad also had a temple at the same approximate period, with engaged columns that represented palm trunks (Figs. 2.6-2.7).[11] Black paint was found inside, although no details are published. All those temples were central to the city, but the deities to whom they were dedicated are not known.[12]

The same decorative scheme has been found on several temples in cities of northern Mesopotamia west of the Tigris, including northern Iraq and north-eastern Syria, where the date-palm does not flourish, and for that reason one may infer

[9] HUOT *et al.* 1978, 185-202 and Figs. 1 (plan) and 2 (brickwork); HUOT 1980-1983.

[10] AL HAMDANI 2008.

[11] AL HAMDANI 2008; SULAIMAN 2003-2004, esp. 141, Fig. 9 (plan).

[12] I have been unable to find evidence that there was such a temple at Terqa, as stated by FITZGERALD 2010, 48.

that the fashion spread from south to north. One example is Tell Basmusian, in north-eastern Iraq, the largest site in the Rania plain, just south of the better-known site of Shemshara;[13] and at Tell Leilan in north-eastern Syria.[14] They belong to the same period, although none is precisely datable, since neither foundation inscriptions nor brick inscriptions have come to light. A fine example has been excavated at Tell al-Rimah south of Jebel Sinjar in north-western Iraq, where the palm-tree façade encircles the exterior of the building, including its attached ziggurat, as well as all the walls of the interior courtyard (Fig. 2.8). The darkness of a forest is projected internally, for antechamber XV between the central courtyard and the ziggurat had both floor and walls coloured black in all three building phases; Room III had a black floor,[15] and there were black patches on the jambs of the door leading from room XXV to room II.[16] The use of black paint is comparable with what was found at Tell Haddad. This would have enhanced the effect, already conveyed by the external decoration, of entering a dark forest.[17] One may compare the grey or green colour observed at Ur on the palm trunk pillars.

The inspiration for this type of decoration for a temple façade may derive from Elamite temple-groves, although evidence of any kind is lacking until a later period. The design is known only from the latter half of the 2nd millennium; no Elamite inscriptions or temples are extant for the period of the temples with palm-tree façades in Iraq and Syria.[18] We have already referred to Kudur-mabuk, father of Warad-Sin, in the 19th century; two generations later, Elamite emperors as overlords exerted power as far west as Mishrifeh, ancient Qatna in west-central Syria, according to recent evidence from texts

[13] Al-Soof 1970, 65-104.
[14] Weiss 1985, 5-34.
[15] Oates 1966, 127.
[16] Oates 1990, Pl. 5.
[17] Oates 1967, 70-96.
[18] Potts 2010, 58.

found at Mari on the middle Euphrates.[19] However, no temples in Elam built by the emperors whose names are known from those Mari texts have yet come to light, so it remains to find material proof that Elamite palm-grove temples continued to maintain traditions of earlier centuries.

At Susa by the Achaemenid period the citadel rose some 40 m above the flat alluvium which surrounds it on all sides, so presumably brick representations of trees rather than living ones were essential for reasons of water supply. Already by the end of the 2nd millennium the citadel would have been very high. Its patron god Inšušinak, "Lord of Susa", was called "Inšušinak of the grove" in the 12th century.[20] There a brick façade representing palm trees is dated by the accompanying brick inscriptions to the reign of Šilhak-Inšušinak in the 12th century BC.[21] The god Išni-karab was likewise called "of the grove", perhaps with reference to a part of Susa.[22] The building is called an "exterior chapel of wood/trees" (the term can mean both timber and living trees; Elamite inscriptions are notoriously difficult to interpret correctly) and the façade, though badly damaged, shows a bull-man holding a palm tree (Fig. 2.9).[23] From the combination of inscription and iconography, the façade is "thought to represent a sacred garden".[24] The word "garden" is used here in a very broad sense, corresponding to the very wide scope of Babylonian *kirû*, a Sumerian loanword that can refer to any kind of plantation — trees of all kinds (most commonly fruit; as we would say, an 'orchard'), vegetables, herbs, and presumably also flowers and potted plants, etc., whether belonging to the palace or to the temple. When the Persian word entered the Babylonian language as

[19] See n. 1.
[20] Huteluduš-Inšušinak, son of Šilhak-Inšušinak.
[21] POTTS 1999, 240.
[22] POTTS 1999, 247.
[23] POTTS 1999, 240.
[24] POTTS 1999, 240; also HENKELMAN 2008, 443-445.

pardēsu ("paradise"), it was used as an alternative to *kirû*, apparently with the same wide range of meaning.

At Ur the Bastion of Warad-Sin is thought to have remained visible into Late Babylonian times, a remarkable continuity of about 1,400 years, even though the fashion in façades had reverted to the older, traditional, abstract style of rectangular niches.[25] Some of the other temples with palm-tree façades, often in a ruined state, may have been identifiable many centuries after they were built, but new building in that style did not persist. A house altar at Ur had a spiral decoration, so perhaps the tradition was kept up in a domestic sphere.[26]

Five centuries after the main Elamite inscriptional evidence for grove-temples, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal sacked Susa, destroyed or damaged its ziggurat, looted the temples, and added in his account: "its secret groves, which nobody foreign had approached (?) nor stepped inside their boundary, my battle troops went into them".[27] We are lucky enough to have a drawing made of a now-lost stone sculpture probably showing the ziggurat at Susa surrounded by trees in the time of Ashurbanipal (Fig. 2.10).[28] One cannot, however, interpret the perspective with any confidence; the ziggurat may stand at a much higher level than the trees, some of which are clearly date-palms; others cannot be identified with certainty, though some kind of pine or cedar is possible.

At Choga Zanbil in western Iran the Elamite temple of the great goddess Kiririsha was in a grove (*kištum.ma*), according to inscriptions of the 14th century BC. A long list of 19 grove-sanctuaries (*siyan husame)* was drawn up by Šilhak-Inšušinak I (12th century BC), indicating that that type of sanctuary was already common at that time.[29] Not all of them were dedicated

[25] Blocher 2012, 55 n. 12.
[26] Woolley & Mallowan 1976, 14, Fig. 40.
[27] Borger & Fuchs 1996, 52-55, 240-241, §F32.
[28] Reade 1976, 100-101 and Pl. 25; no longer thought to be Erbil.
[29] For transliteration, see König 1965, 111, no. 48, col. iii, lines 145-278; for revised translation, Potts 2010, 58 and Henkelman 2011, 494.

to deities with Underworld or funerary associations, so it may be mistaken to infer that all Elamite shrine-groves were connected with the veneration of ancestors. This has sometimes been suggested[30] because in the inscription of Ashurbanipal, quoted above, the next lines concern the opening and desecrating of royal tombs, but it is disputed whether they refer to a part of the same episode or a second, separate item.

Did the style arise in mud-brick as an imitation of buildings made of timber which have not survived? This is possible, for although brick had been the main building material both in Mesopotamia and in southern Iran from earliest times, the much earlier temple at Tell al-Ubaid, four miles west of Ur, used timber pillars structurally on its free-standing canopy support. The building, one of the earliest known temples, dates to the Early Dynastic III period, around the early 3rd millennium BC. So one certainly cannot relate every use of the palm-tree motifs in temple architecture to Elamite influence; the pillars there were made of real palm trunks coated with thick plaster, to which a mosaic of variously coloured terracotta cones was applied to give a pattern resembling the trunk of a date-palm, and they were decorated with mother-of-pearl, red sandstone, pink limestone and black bituminous stone. They do not surround the building.

The palm-tree façades of the early 2nd millennium, by contrast, are not structural. Lacking hallmarks of timber construction, they are better explained as a decorative style imitating the planting of living trees. Mud-brick is an ideal medium for moulding into different shapes. Since the citadels lay high above the water-table and were surrounded by mud-brick, which would dissolve in the water needed to irrigate real trees, it is most unlikely that real trees were ever planted there until the time of the Sargonid kings with their aqueducts in the late 8th and early 7th centuries BC.

[30] HENKELMAN 2008, 443-445.

II. The significance of the date-palm in Mesopotamian culture

There are good reasons to think that the decorative scheme based on date-palms had symbolic significance that can be connected to its reflection in epic literature. This can be demonstrated both from sculpture and from texts. First and most obviously, in general the date-palm was a source of wealth and stood for fecundity. Babylonian texts call it "tree of riches", and the great goddess known as Inanna in Sumerian and Ishtar in Babylonian was addressed directly as "date-palm" in a hymn of Ashurbanipal in the 7th century BC.[31] This can be compared directly with the Egyptian goddess Isis, who is identified within a date-palm in Egypt.[32] In the biblical Hebrew Song of Songs (7, 7) the female lover is "In stature like the palm tree / Its fruit clusters your breasts". The trunk is metaphorically the backbone of a male deity in a Babylonian text;[33] the whole tree sways,[34] and its fronds are like hair blowing in the wind, according to the Song of Songs (5, 1). Those texts show that the tree was actually identified with deities both male and female.

It is generally reckoned that the date-palm will not produce fruit above 35 degrees of latitude.[35] Tell al-Rimah, Basmusian, Tell Leilan and the great capitals of late Assyrian kings — Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad — are thus excluded from the zone of fertility, although the tree itself may have been raised successfully without the expectation that it would yield edible dates. This reckoning, being dependent on studies undertaken for modern conditions, could be challenged on the

[31] E.g., K (i.e., tablets in the Kuyunjik [Nineveh] collection of the British Museum) 1286 Hymn of Ashurbanipal to Ishtar of Nineveh, in LIVINGSTONE 1989, no. 7, line 1.

[32] LOEBEN, *supra*, p. 35.

[33] VAT (i.e., tablets from Ashur in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin) 8917, 11 = LIVINGSTONE 1989, no. 39, line 11.

[34] See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* s.v. nazāzu.

[35] CHARLES 1987, 2.

grounds that climate may have altered. But Assyrian texts, unlike those of Babylonia, do not list dates among offerings to the gods, an omission which seems to support the data on climatic conditions compiled from recent evidence.[36] Where iconography outside the fruiting zone shows a key role played by the tree, one must search for reasons why it was not replaced by other trees that had more local significance.

In southern Babylonia and south-western Iran, the date-palm is in its ideal environment. The tree is extraordinarily productive in many respects. Dates for eating as fruits, for fermenting for alcoholic drink, and for making syrup, and stones from dates for fodder and fuel, are its obvious benefits. Also, its fronds are tough and are used for various artefacts, including roofing and trays; the trunk can be used for poles and planks, beds and chairs, cradles and bird-cages. The tough fibre around the trunk is ideal for ropes, for stuffing mattresses, and for caulking boats.[37] Unlike most fruit trees, the palm is not deciduous.

A characteristic of the date-palm is its ability to propagate either by sprouting the stone of a date or vegetatively by basal offshoots. In the latter, the plant sprouts by sending out a symmetrical pair of fronds which curl over, and of the two possible methods the latter is preferred for growing a new tree. As a motif carved in stone, volutes — sometimes defined as spiral scrolls — are found in the Levant about two centuries earlier than the earliest classical ones. They are depicted on the stone tablet of the Babylonian Sun-God from Sippar of the mid-9th century, on the capitals and bases of pillars supporting the canopy, as well as on the stand for the great symbol of the Sun-God (Fig. 2.11).[38] They are shown on pillars on a boat-house (if the small pavilion is correctly identified as such) in the garden of Sargon II in the late 8th century that is depicted in low

[36] POSTGATE 1987, 130.
[37] LANDSBERGER 1967.
[38] See WOODS 2004, 23-103, with earlier bibliography.

relief on a panel from the palace at Khorsabad (Fig. 2.12). Long associated with the Phoenicians, volutes are shown, rather damaged but recognisable, on a sculptured panel from the palace of Sargon's son Sennacherib, marking the entrance to a Phoenician temple, perhaps at Joppa (Fig. 2.13).[39] They are part of balustrades, perhaps wooden rather than stone, shown on Phoenician-style ivories of the 9th-8th centuries found at Nimrud.[40] In some 19th-century (AD) scholarship, volutes and palmettes were thought to represent honeysuckle,[41] but recent work has come down firmly in favour of the motif imitating date-palms.[42]

Such volutes found in stone on several Iron Age sites in Palestine, Syria, and Cyprus can be identified not only as capitals for columns, but also as column bases and as monumental pedestals.[43] The palmette which became a widespread ornament in architecture, sculpture, and painting is derived both from the crown of the palm tree, where new fronds curve downwards, and from the basal offshoots.[44] The motif was not always used in isolation: it could combine with the characteristics of other plants to sprout tendrils and lotus flowers, or wings to form a winged disk. Not surprisingly, its origins have been reinterpreted in different locations at different periods, rams' horns being quite popular.

An unusual characteristic of the date-palm is that trees are identifiably either male or female. The inflorescence of the male tree, which produces hard, inedible fruits, is used to pollinate the female. Pollination as a deliberate act of human intervention is described in texts with the same verb, *rakābum*, as was used to describe the copulation of animals and humans. From sculpture found at Tell al-Rimah, it is evident that the

[39] MARKOE 2000, 44-45; correction by GALLAGHER 1997.
[40] E.g., HERRMANN 1992, no. 103.
[41] See GIOVINO 2007, 21, quoting LAYARD 1849 and RAWLINSON 1862.
[42] FRANKLIN 2011; LIPSCHITS 2011.
[43] FRANKLIN 2011; earlier, WINTER 2003, 253.
[44] WINTER 2003, 253.

male tree — associated with a bearded god — was stylized by a spiral-patterned trunk, whereas the female tree — associated with a goddess — had the now familiar scallop- or triangle-patterned trunk (Figs. 2.14-2.15). An incised ivory pyxis from Ashur on the Tigris, of the Middle Assyrian period (late 2nd millennium BC), gives the same information in a different way, showing a cockerel perched on a spiral-trunk tree (but not a palm) to make the gender clear (Fig. 2.16). Those examples indicate that the spiral patterning of the male-associated palm trunk became a convention for indicating the male gender not only of date-palms, but also of trees that did not have trunks patterned in the same way. The Babylonian word *alamittu* has been identified as the name given to the male date-palm, although *gišimmaru* may be used as a generic term for both genders. The singular noun is masculine in form, the plural form is usually feminine.

In cuneiform lexical texts the date-palm is several times described as "the elder son of the Underworld". This epithet provides a link with a chthonic god, perhaps identifiable as Meslamta-ea, who, it has been suggested, is associated with the image of a tree bent over, enclosing a deity, and from the trunk of the tree a second deity emerges (Fig. 2.17).[45] The image is shown on a few cylinder seals of the Akkadian period, *c.* 2334-2154 BC, during the same period as the Old Kingdom in Egypt, when tree-deities first appear there in art, although depicted inside an upright tree. In Sumerian and Babylonian texts the male tree-god Nin-giš-zida, whose name can be translated "Lord of the true / reliable tree", is a functionary of the underworld who stands at the gate. Another arboreal god is "King Date-Palm". Some of these associations give trees the attribute of being in touch with the Underworld and suggest a link with Egypt, where tree-goddesses offer food and drink to

[45] STEINKELLER 1992, 267-272. Photographs also in COLLON 2005, nos. 845-846.

the dead man, plainly revealing the concept that trees nourish people in the afterlife.[46]

The attribution of gender to non-dioecious trees, well known in Egypt, is found even more widely in the ancient world. At times, in Hebrew and Aramaic texts at least, the date-palm representing the female gender was contrasted with the cedar representing the male gender, thereby indicating that trees could be personified as male and female even when there was no botanical reason for this.[47] The idea that trees of all kinds were either male or female, regardless of clear botanical distinctions, is also found in the *Enquiry into Plants* of Theophrastus, in whose work an inconsistency of understanding is similar to that of Mesopotamian usages.[48] As for the volutes on proto-Ionic columns, the separate genders of the male and female date-palm provide an explanation for Vitruvius' attribution of gender to the different orders in Greek architecture.[49] It can therefore be deduced that the temple façades of Mesopotamia, combining both types of palm trunk, symbolise the fertility of both genders, and are therefore suitable for the temples of gods, as well as goddesses. The façades represent groves of trees, in touch with the Underworld, surrounding a high mountain, in touch with the sky.

III. The goddess and the palm frond

The palm frond as a symbol of victory owes its power to its association with the goddess Ishtar as a war-goddess who played a leading role in supporting the king in battle. This aspect is explicit in a Babylonian ritual text connected to the *Epic of Creation* quoted below. The frond is held by a goddess on

[46] See LOEBEN, *supra*, Abb. 1.5-1.7.

[47] Song of Songs, 5, 10-15; 7, 9; *Genesis Apocryphon* col. XIX, 14-21; BLOCH 1995.

[48] THEOPHR. *Hist. pl.* 3, 8, 1; discussion by MEIGGS 1982, 18-19.

[49] VITR. *De arch.* 4, 1, 6-7.

various sculptures and coins of the Hellenistic Near East as far to the west as Antioch, and in upland cities such as Edessa. Examples from sculpture that can be definitely identified as palm fronds (rather than the branch of any other tree, such as olive, laurel, or myrtle) are seen being presented to the Tyche of Palmyra on a plaque found at Dura Europus (Fig. 2.18) and on the famous sculpture made by Eutychides for the foundation of Antioch around 300 BC,[50] on which the goddess holds in her right hand a bundle of palm fronds. She has her foot on the upper part of a beardless person half immersed in water. To an indigenous Near-Easterner that person would be the equivalent of Babylonian Tiamat, the sea goddess who was subdued by the victorious deity, in a pose described in the standard *Epic of Creation*, Tablet II (12th century BC or earlier): "You shall soon set your foot upon the neck of Tiamat". This is a motif that goes back to the victory stele of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (*c.* 2254-2218 BC) and persisted in later Mesopotamian art.[51] Female attributes of the half-submerged, beardless figure are clear on the version from Dura Europus,[52] on which the person holds her right breast, offering milk, to make her maternal role clear. The gesture of offering the breast on the Dura sculpture suggests that on Eutychides' design for Antioch the identification with the Orontes River, of which Strabo wrote, "Though formerly called Typhon, its name was changed to that of Orontes, the man who built a bridge across it",[53] is a reinterpretation of an essentially Near-Eastern motif. It has a certain ambiguity: the idea that Orontes is so youthful as to have no beard makes nonsense as a renaming from the powerful monster, Typhon; but river-gods from southern Italy, Sicily, and Greece are sometimes shown as beardless youths.[54]

[50] SMITH 1991, 76 and Pl. 91.

[51] See, e.g., FRANKFORT 1954, 43, 204, Pl. 44 = [5]1996, 86 (with Fig. 91), 334.

[52] See DOWNEY 1977, 172-173.

[53] STRAB. 16, 2, 7.

[54] See ASHMOLE 1972, Figs. 33-35; COLEMAN 1988, 120-122 and Fig. 3.

The figure of other classical river-gods found elsewhere, depicted as a complete man reclining with a large pot from which water flows, is different and easily recognisable, such as the Ptolemaic figure of the Nile personified, heavily bearded and reclining.[55] Swimmers in Egyptian and Mesopotamian art are shown with the entire body, so the composite nature of the figure as half-human, half-water, apparent in Eutychides' design and the sculpture from Dura Europus, would be understood by the non-Greek population to be representations of the sea as chaos defeated by divine order, a composite monster, with automatic recognition of the dominating foot, and as a young river god by the Greek population, to whom the dominating foot motif would not have been familiar. The mural crown worn by the goddess on both sculptures has a long ancestry in the Near East, worn by goddesses on Hittite rock sculpture of the Late Bronze Age and by Neo-Assyrian queens.[56] The foot stepping on the subdued enemy, and the mural crown, are not the only elements traceable to the Near East in earlier times. The deity Gadda/Gaddē, once thought to be a West Semitic calque on Greek Tyche, is found in Late Bronze Age cuneiform texts of the 12th century BC at Emar on the Euphrates south of Carchemish.[57]

The awarding of a palm frond to the victorious deity becomes especially significant when we realise that it is found outside the area where the date-palm is productive, yet has not been replaced by an olive branch or a laurel. It can be related to a cuneiform text of the Late Babylonian period (after 539 BC, comprising Achaemenid and Seleucid rule, and perhaps earlier too; the texts are often impossible to date accurately):

(55) Month Kislev, 4th day . . .
(58) The main meal of the morning will be served to Bēl . . .

[55] See, e.g., MORENO 1994, Tome 1, 166, Fig. 214.
[56] See BOEHMER 1980-1983.
[57] ARNAUD 1986, no. 369, line 36; no. 373, line 165'; no. 461, lines 4'-5'.

> (62) While [a beer mixture] is being sprinkled in front of Bēl, the singer (63) (will chant) Enūma Eliš [*Epic of Creation*] to Bēl. At (the recitation of the line) "for Usmû, who (64) carried your present to give the news [of victory]" the dumuniglala-priest will raise a palm frond[58] and (65) place it on a silver tablet opposite Bēl.[59]

The Babylonian city from which this text comes is not known, but the month in which that ritual took place is Kislīmu, when the end of the date harvest was celebrated. Another temple ritual from Babylon, which took place in the same month, tells that parts of the date-palm were presented to the god Zariqu before being removed for ceremonial depositing.[60] Also in II Maccabees (10, 7) people in Jerusalem, again outside the area where the date-palm flourishes, celebrated their victory over Antiochus Epiphanes by "carrying branches, leafy boughs and palms". The frond, the mural crown, and the composite human figure are all traceable to Babylonian and Assyrian myth and ritual, and have been used by Eutychides to take local tradition into account. The associated motifs confirm that the palm frond was a traditional rather than a Greek motif.

IV. Continuity of tradition

The Assyrian temple of the New Year festival, 200 metres outside the city of Ashur on the Tigris, is known from around 700 BC, and it was rebuilt to the same plan as late as the Parthian/Roman period.[61] Aramaic inscriptions testify that the traditional New Year festival was still performed there in Roman times.[62] Continuity of tradition there has thus been proved

[58] Words for palm fronds are several: *liblibbu*, *libbi gišimmari*, *eri ša gišimmari*, *zinû*.

[59] Çagirgan & Lambert 1991-1993, 95-96.

[60] George 2000, 280-289.

[61] Andrae 1977, 219-224, 249.

[62] Livingstone 2009.

from both architecture and texts. The layout of the original temple is known both from archaeology and from the *Foundation Inscription* of Sennacherib. Both within the courtyard of the temple and surrounding it, pits for shrubs were found — not big enough for trees — and a large well, a stone canal, and perhaps a cistern, for watering real plants;[63] the excavators suggested pomegranate bushes, which grow only to the height of a man. Since the temple lay beyond the city walls, rather than on the citadel, and it was close to the river, problems of water supply were not acute. The city of Ashur lies beyond the zone where date-palms produce good fruit, so as a great cult centre it would have ensured that rituals for the victory of the gods over the chaos of the sea perpetuated the use of palm fronds as symbols of triumph. An updated translation of Sennacherib's *Foundation Inscription* for that temple reads (lines 33-36):

> "Two irrigation ditches I dug around its sides and encircled it with a garden of abundance and with orchards of fruits with productive beds[64] I surrounded its sides."[65]

Late Roman coins from cities right across the Fertile Crescent indicate that the evidence from Ashur does not stand in isolation. The date-palm frond, the mural crown, and the foot placed upon the subdued individual are all indications of a Near Eastern rather than a classical inspiration. The earliest known representation of the Tyche in imitation of Eutychides' statue appears on coins of the Armenian king Tigranes II (reigned 95 - c. 56 BC), minted in Antioch and Damascus during his occupation of Syria,[66] and around the same time on one

[63] See FRAHM 1997, 173-174, with references; BAGG 2000, 227 has collected and discussed the details. For ground plans of the temple, see ANDRAE 1938, Figs. 45-46.

[64] For the identification of *mūsaru* as "(flower-, vegetable-)bed" see BLACK, GEORGE, & POSTGATE ²2000 *s.v.*

[65] LUCKENBILL 1924, 137, substituting the understanding of *šá sa-sa* as a logogram for *muthummu*.

[66] MØRKHOLM 1991, 176.

from Seleucia on the Tigris.[67] In many other cities where Seleucid mints are known, much later Roman bronze coins sometimes carry the same design.[68] Following the lead of Tigranes II, they date from the reign of Augustus[69] to that of Philip I (AD 244-249), thus enduring from the end of the pre-Christian era until the mid-3rd century AD.[70] On some of those coins it is possible that breasts are shown to indicate a female 'swimmer', although both arms are outstretched and the figure is not offering a breast, whereas a breast is definitely being offered on the Tyche of Palmyra; possible examples come from the reigns of Augustus and Severus Alexander.[71] It is known from texts that the New Year festival for Bel and Nabu at that period was celebrated in Edessa in the month of Nisan, when the same festival was traditionally held in Babylon.[72] In Edessa it is known from textual evidence that the Christians did not destroy the pagan altar that stood in the centre of the city, nor did they abolish the festivals dedicated to Nabu and Bel, Babylonian gods, that were centred around it. New Year festivals were celebrated in Babylonian style also at Palmyra and at Dura Europus.[73] Probably at the festivals in each of those cities the defeated force for chaos was the female Tiamat.

One can connect the Old Babylonian temple façades with the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, because at Tell al-Rimah two stone sculptures depicting the face of the monster

[67] HILL 1922, *BMC*, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, 142 and Pl. XXIII no. 8.

[68] HILL 1922; WROTH 1899, *BMC*, Galatia, Cappadocia, Syria; listed in each volume under the city names: Carrhae (Harran), Edessa, Nisibis, Rhesaena (Resh 'Aina), Singara; Samosata, Antioch, Laodicea ad Mare, Damascus, Demetrias.

[69] WROTH 1899, *BMC*, Galatia, Cappadocia, Syria, 166 no. 131 = Pl. XX no. 10; 168-169 no. 146 = Pl. XX no. 13.

[70] I have not done a complete search for the numismatic evidence, but relied on the British Museum catalogues quoted here, and MØRKHOLM 1991.

[71] E.g., WROTH 1899, *BMC*, Galatia, Cappadocia, Syria, Pl. XX no. 13; Hill 1922, 104 no. 80 = Pl. XV no. 9; 106 no. 94 = Pl. XV no. 11.

[72] SEGAL 1970, 52-53; DRIJVERS 1980, 30-31 and nn. 46-49.

[73] DRIJVERS 1980, 63-65; 98.

Humbaba,[74] one of them found *in situ* to the right of the antechamber inside the temple entrance, evoke a connection with Tablet 5 of that epic (Fig. 2.19). The heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu approached the cedar forest in great fear and trepidation, having been warned of great danger. Their approach can be compared to that of the worshipper who stood at the foot of the steps leading up to the shrine at Ur, likewise at Tell Haddad. Humbaba was appointed by the head of the pantheon, Enlil, to guard the cedar forest and the cedar mountain, "dwelling-place of gods, shrine of Irnini, with pleasant shade, full of abundance and delight", with the fragrance of cedar and the aromatic *ballukku*-tree. This is the vocabulary of an arboretum. But it was also a place of darkness and foreboding, "the secret abode of the Anunnaki [gods of the Underworld]",[75] "the dark garden of the steppe".[76] The awe with which the heroes approached the forest is like the awe that fills a pious worshipper as he approaches the holy of holies.

In the temple at Rimah, however, Humbaba guards date-palms, not cedars. This suggests that the cedar tree might be a symbolic alternative to the date-palm tree. In a literal understanding, the decoration of that temple, by comparison with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, has mixed its imagery: Humbaba should guard cedars, not palm trees. There may have been a preference for the 'male' cedar for temples dedicated to male deities, according to the information described earlier, or there may have been reasons still unknown for the choice of tree. It is relevant to note that Sumerian versions of the episode locate the forest to the east of Mesopotamia, in the Elamite area, whereas the standard version in Babylonian shifts the location to the Lebanon, a change that shows how flexible the stories were.

A recently discovered text in the museum of Sulaimaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan fills a gap in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and shows

[74] HOWARD-CARTER 1983, 69-71.
[75] GEORGE 2003, 264-265, Old Babylonian version.
[76] EDZARD 1990, 185, line 56.

that the song of birds, the sounds of insects such as crickets, and the racket of monkeys entertained Huwawa in his forest.[77] One may reflect upon the fact that "it was in and around the temples [of Mesopotamia] that complicated, sophisticated musical performances . . . took place".[78] This characteristic can be compared with the scene on an Assyrian relief of the 7th century BC showing Ashurbanipal with his queen reclining in a garden while musicians play beneath the trees.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* has a description of a quite different garden in Tablet 9. After the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh roams the earth in despair until he reaches the twin mountains where the sun rises: "There were scorpion-men guarding its gate." Eventually he is allowed through the gate. A badly damaged sculpture found washed out from the temple at Rimah may relate to this episode. It consists of a composite creature with wings, feathered legs, and two tails, one of which is a scorpion's tail; but its head is missing.[79] If the identification as a scorpion man is correct, it would add to the Humbaba sculptures a connection with the *Epic*, but since the head is lacking, a different demon made of composite elements is more likely.[80]

When the hero has travelled through a long, dark tunnel he emerges into the sunlight in a garden where gemstones replace fruit:

" [he] came out in front of the sun.
[ ] brightness was everywhere.
All kinds of [thorny, prickly] spiky bushes were
visible, blossoming with gemstones.
Carnelian bore fruit
Hanging in clusters, lovely to look at,
Lapis lazuli bore foliage,
Bore fruit, and was delightful to view."[81]

[77] Al-Rawi & George, forthcoming.
[78] Kilmer 1993-1997, 467.
[79] Postgate, Oates, & Oates 1997, Pl. 8b, caption "scorpion-man".
[80] Howard-Carter 1983, 71-72, "winged demon".
[81] *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet IX, col. v, trans. Dalley 1989, 99.

In the next few lines, which are very damaged, other stones are mentioned, some not identified, as well as haematite, turquoise, and sea-shell. In contrast with the dark, forbidding aspect of the palm-themed approach to shrines, the colourful brightness of the gems seen by Gilgamesh as he emerged from darkness can be compared with the sight of the innermost sanctum, where the statue of the deity is adorned with jewels. Representations of trees in gemstones, coral, sea-shells, and shining bronze or copper, which are found in Mesopotamian temples from an even earlier period, are not necessarily related to Elamite practices. They are the indigenous inspiration for the jewel-garden which a worshipper might glimpse as he stood on the steps at the entrance to the symbolised temple-forest, looking up towards the magnificently adorned statue of the deity in the holy shrine. There is no suggestion that the Akkadian versions of the Gilgamesh epic derive from Elamite culture, although in the Sumerian stories the hero and Enkidu travel eastwards into the Zagros mountains rather than westwards into the mountains of the Lebanon. The passage illustrates the value placed on foliage and fruit in a garden with trees, with their colour and shine, and implies a link with the statues of deities in their shrines.

The tradition of using date-palm motifs around a temple was still known at Aphrodisias on the Meander river in the Roman period, when a *stratêgos* of the 1st or 2nd century AD made a palm grove and dedicated it to Aphrodite, presumably the same as the 'place of palms' that was rebuilt as a sanctuary of nymphs in the so-called South Agora.[82] The palms were likely to be the Cretan palm, *Phoenix theophrasti*, which is normally coastal. They were probably transplanted as mature trees, which do not send out basal offshoots as young trees do, so they would not have interfered with nearby paving. A Semitic aspect of Aphrodite there is indicated by her Phoenician epithet, Adoneia ("Mistress"), and Aphrodisias took the name of

[82] REINACH 1906, 107.

Nineveh, in recognition of eastern tradition. This may help to account for the choice of palms for a grove dedicated to Aphrodite in a region where neither the date-palm nor the Cretan palm was likely to flourish. The design indicates that the tree's original symbolic role in religious architecture had not yet died out. The trees are thought to have surrounded a huge pool, according to an inscription that dedicates it to one Ampelius.[83] To install palms there, so much trouble was taken that the symbolism of that particular tree must still have been of importance.

Looking at the design of the temple to Hephaistos in Athens, one can see the pillars outside and inside the main temple building in an arrangement that has a similarity with that of the temples at Tell Haddad and Tell al-Rimah, as well as the temple of the New Year Festival at Ashur.[84] This observation supports the Near Eastern comparisons made by Thompson for the temple of Hephaistos. Giulia Caneva has drawn attention to the unexpected fact that the date-palm is one of the best attested trees in ancient Rome, and Kourou opines that the Near-Eastern palm tree is "a pure loan from the Near East" in Greek art.[85]

To conclude with the essential points: two patterns of date-palm trunks, representing male and female by an artistic convention, are found as mud-brick façades on Mesopotamian temples for a short time in the early second millennium BC. They were probably inspired by the later-known temple groves of Elam, a powerful state that dominated Mesopotamia at that time, and reflect the concept of sacred groves preserved in monumental architecture. The religious symbolism of the palm frond, identified in a ritual connected with the Babylonian *Epic of Creation*, became a symbol of victory over chaos and the rule of law and order. Transmitted thence through

[83] WILSON, forthcoming.
[84] THOMPSON 1937.
[85] CANEVA, *infra*, 330; KOUROU 2001, 37.

Babylonia, Assyria, and Phoenicia into classical art and architecture, the symbolism of the tree and the frond persisted also in the Roman Near East, where rituals derived from Babylonian and Assyrian practices continued well into the Christian era. Beyond regions where the tree flourished, the palm of victory remained a standard feature of Hellenistic and Roman iconography.

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DISCUSSION

R. Taylor: Regarding the image of the Tyche of Antioch and its cognates, what might be the meaning of the proposed original idea behind them? The combination, in a single image or idea, of a supreme god visibly dominating a water deity with the symbolism of the palm tree conspicuously present: how did these three elements resolve into a meaningful whole? You began with reassurance that the idea of a specifically salt-water god, such as Tiamat, could readily be commandeered for the representation of bodies of fresh water.

S. Dalley: In Babylonian mythology, sea/salt water is female, Tiamat, and fresh water is male, Apsu, but they are both forces for chaos, a primeval couple who beget many children and let them run riot. So if, as I maintain, Eutychides adapted an essentially Mesopotamian group of elements for Antioch, the river Orontes could be regarded as a force for chaos when uncontrolled. The Tyche, however, clearly has him under control, so the fresh water can be used for good. The Tyche of Palmyra found at Dura Europus dominates a female offering the breast, even though the pose of Tyche is modelled on that of Eutychides' design.

É. Prioux: Votre interprétation qui fait dériver la représentation de l'Oronte d'une représentation de Tiamat a des implications passionnantes. Eutychidès pourrait être, si l'on suit l'opinion de P. Moreno, celui qui a mis au point le premier exemple (ou l'un des premiers exemples) de divinité fluviale couchée avec sa statue de l'Eurotas.[1] C'est de manière contemporaine,

[1] Voir *supra*, n. 55.

toujours suivant l'hypothèse défendue par P. Moreno, qu'aurait aussi été mise au point (par un artiste dont nous ignorons le nom) l'iconographie du dieu Nil que nous connaissons par la statue colossale retrouvée dans l'Iseum Campense et conservée dans les Musées du Vatican. On pressent donc qu'Eutychidès et ses contemporains ont créé pour des contextes et des commanditaires donnés différentes formes de représentations des dieux fleuves et qu'Eutychidès jouait un rôle particulièrement actif dans ce processus d'invention. Si votre hypothèse sur la source d'inspiration dont dérive la représentation d'Antioche et de l'Oronte est juste, on peut supposer qu'il a conçu, en l'occurrence, une représentation spécifiquement adaptée aux Séleucides, en reformulant dans un langage iconographique grec des schémas iconographiques élaborés au sujet de Tiamat. Chez les Lagides, rivaux des Ptolémées, l'idée selon laquelle le prince se caractérise par sa capacité à dominer à la fois la mer et les fleuves est bien présente: Théocrite en fait état dans son *Éloge de Ptolémée II*. Les Lagides commanditent aussi, avec la statue du Nil, une image bilingue qui repose sur un jeu de mots égyptien — nouveau-né se disant en égyptien "homme haut d'une coudée", ce qui explique que le dieu Nil soit représenté entouré de nouveau-nés. Il pouvait donc être intéressant pour les Séleucides de commanditer une statue faisant appel à une autre forme de bilinguisme et affirmant la domination qu'eux-mêmes exerçaient — à travers la figure d'Antioche — sur les fleuves et la mer.

S. Dalley: I like this idea of a 'bilingual' image, to be interpreted according to the culture of the viewer, but with adaptations for each particular reception. The Eurotas river was particularly prone to damaging floods, as was the Orontes. The foundation cylinder of Seleucus and Antiochus with Stratonice, written in Babylonian cuneiform, and recent information about the Babylonian-style coronation of Antiochus III, show that those particular rulers did not try to suppress or supplant Mesopotamian culture but made use of it, and Eutychides would

have gone along with that policy. The imagery on much later Roman coins from a number of great cities across the Fertile Crescent, combined with textual evidence of the early Christian period, shows that themes from the Babylonian-derived New Year festival remained meaningful throughout the Hellenistic period and the Roman Empire. One must not lose sight of the fact that a palm of victory, the foot placed on the defeated, and the mural crown are Mesopotamian symbols. I think comparisons with Ptolemaic combination of images will be fruitful, but for a scholar with strengths different from my own.

R. Taylor: I feel slight discomfort with the dissonance of an imagery that simultaneously seemed to recognize water as a threat and a blessing. I acknowledge Dr. Prioux's point that human (especially kingly) domination of natural features can be represented with similarly aggressive gestures, but it seems troublesome, in a specifically Mesopotamian context, for a god to be represented in such a way as to emphasize destructive or threatening aspects of water (presumably flooding), while simultaneously celebrating a product of its beneficial powers, the palm.

S. Dalley: This would be in keeping with the essential duality of Mesopotamian thought. For instance, gods are vengeful and merciful at the same time, as many hymns in Babylonian cuneiform show; the legendary Flood, source of near-universal destruction, was caused by the Tigris and Euphrates, which in other contexts were the life of the land. Although the fresh water god, Apsu, is a figure of chaos in the *Epic of Creation*, a tank representing him was a major installation in many temples, possibly equivalent to the pond in Egyptian gardens. Scholars often state that such dualism belongs to specifically Persian thought, but it largely entered Persia through Manichaean religious philosophy, which arose primarily in southern Babylonia. I wouldn't say that the statues celebrate a product of the palm, but that the palm frond is there to represent

the climax of a New Year ritual, at which a version of the *Epic of Creation* was recited, as a symbol of victory over water/chaos, renewing the prosperity of the land. The idea of victory is also demonstrated by the goddess' foot placed on the defeated figure.

A. Marzano: About Tell al-Rimah and the floor/walls coloured in black: do we know what was used? Is there any possibility that it was a pigment that changed colour due to the chemical reaction with the soil that buried the structure?

S. Dalley: In the words of the excavator, the floors "were covered with a black plaster, coloured with an admixture of finely ground charcoal, while oval patches of black colour had been applied to the jambs of nearly all the doorways of the original building, features presumably of some ritual significance".[2] So there can be no doubt about the ingredient for the black colour. However, at this period, in a sentence in the prologue to Hammurabi's law-code, describing the sanctuary of the Sun-God's consort Aya at Sippar (on the Euphrates not far north of Babylon), the king claims to have "decked with green the chapels of Aya". But there is no further information, so paintwork or potted plants are among possible interpretations.

B. Bergmann: It is curious that the spatial relationships — particularly of topography — on the Assyrian reliefs cannot be decoded or diagrammed in an intelligible way, whereas the three-dimensional, carved 'forests' with their black surfaces seem to invoke movements and epiphanies conveyed in literary accounts (e.g., Enkidu reaching the edge of a forest). The Assyrian relief showing Susa presents such a challenge. It would be helpful to know why our access to the visual codes in the reliefs is so difficult.

[2] POSTGATE, OATES, & OATES 1997, 23.

S. Dalley: We have very little of architectural remains and their relationship to gardens at any period for comparison. In particular, the scene showing a view of Susa in low relief cannot be compared with excavated buildings and walls, because remains of that period there were not found in excavations. The New Year Festival temple at Ashur is the main source, but it is not up on a citadel. Are frontal aspects aligned with side views? Are moats or shores set directly next to walls as a convention? How do we distinguish city and palace or temple walls at Susa, when we have no city-plan from the period of the picture? Bird's-eye views are easy to distinguish, and are occasionally found on reliefs, but they are mainly restricted to forts and tented camps. Besides, artistic conventions of 1800 BC are not necessarily those of 650 BC.

K. von Stackelberg: With Gilgamesh's 'jewel garden' and the temple tree trunks with mother of pearl and other semi-precious stones, I see a connection with the Egyptian practice of taking organic garden elements and transmuting them into inorganic simulacra (for example, the jewel collars based on flowers). We consider these to be utterly different substances, so what logic underpins this conceptual interrelationship between precious/semi-precious stones and trees/flowers? Might it have something to do with the comparable value of items? Or are there other factors to be considered?

S. Dalley: The value of the materials, transported from far away, is surely important, as you suggest; probably also the use of colour, and the fact that colours do not fade in stone and metal, so symbolically they preserve flowers, leaves, and trees for eternity. One needs to bear in mind that the pillars in the Ubaid temple are more than a millennium earlier than the known texts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, but the symbolic values are probably unchanging in that culture.

K. von Stackelberg: Is it possible that the function of the black paint is to create some kind of illusionistic effect through

the manipulation of light? When we move from light spaces to dark, or even when we look from a light page to a shadowy space, our eye often overlays the colour green or red onto perception. Might the worshipper at the mouth of the shrine experience an evanescent moment of greenery?

S. Dalley: I would need to know much more about the physiology of the retina, etc., to be able to answer this! But I wonder if it is too sophisticated an approach to colour to interpret the use of black in those Babylonian temples in this way.

G. Caneva: Sarebbe interessante capire se i resti di colore nero rilevati sulla superficie esterna potrebbero avere un significato simbolico di riferimento all'idea della rinascita, oltre che all'idea dell'ombra collegata all'allegoria di un bosco.

S. Dalley: I do not know of evidence for black colour as a symbol of rebirth in this culture, but we have very little colour preserved on Mesopotamian objects in general (in contrast to Egyptian), so maybe it is possible. However, burial shrouds were red, presumably symbolizing some kind of rebirth. If the connection with the Gilgamesh episode is correct, it is hard to envisage symbolism of rebirth rather than supposing that the colour black indicates the fearful aspect of a dark forest. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, themes of rejuvenation and immortality (rather than rebirth) arise in a much later episode of the narrative.