Opening the Tablet Box

Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

COHERENCE AND FRAGMENTS:
REFLECTIONS ON THE *SKL* AND THE *BOOK OF JUDGES*

Jack M. Sasson

Vanderbilt University

> The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there
>
> L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953)

1. *Chronicles of Past Dynasties*

Just under 4000 years ago, a Mesopotamian scribe by the name of Nūr-Ilabrat (nin-šubur) collected diverse traditions into his own recension of a cuneiform document recalling past dynasties. His work was one of many similar efforts, before and after him, with prototypes going back at least to the Ur III dynasty a century earlier.[1] But Nūr-Ilabrat was more thorough in producing his version and it will serve me well for these comments. We label what he created the *Sumerian King List* (*SKL*), but nothing about this title quite fits: The language is certainly Sumerian, but the culture producing this version may not have been. The document mentions many kings, but that is not its major aim. Its format is that of a list, but it was designed to promote an argument. This argument was largely parabolic: Kingship, an institution that governed the gods, was brought down to earth as a gift from heaven so that human beings might conduct their affairs in a purposeful fashion. Nūr-Ilabrat was likely operating from Isin during the reign of its last king Damiq-ilišu.[2] Cycling backwards from Isin and from Sin-māgir, the last king of Isin known to

---

[1] Most often cited is WB 444, manuscript "G" in Glassner 1993: 137–142 (French); 2004: 117–126 (English). Composite of diverse recensions is available at http://etcsl.orinst .ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.1.1#, with a translation at ⟨cdli.ucla.edu/P384786⟩. Some very fine studies on the *SKL* include Michalowski 1983 and Wilcke 1989.

[2] Other versions were crafted later, one of which (CBS 19797 [= Glassner's "D"]) was obviously drafted in Larsa and mentions all of Damiq-ilišu's years. An extract (MS 1686) from a fuller list gives slightly different numbers for the reigns of some Isin king, but ends by citing 5? years for Damiq-ilišu. Its final line reads "Hand of Ur-sin, up to Damiq-ilišu"; see Friberg 2007: 232–243.

have died still ruling it, Nūr-Ilabrat eventually invoked two dozen cities, recalled 140 kings, and covered almost 275,000 years. His knowledge was stunningly precise, for he can tell us that after the Flood, the Kish dynasty lasted 23,310 years, 3 months and 3½ days.

This slightly decorated sketch of the *SKL* is useful, since the historical as well as historiographic issues it raises sharpen when set in parallel with those brought out in the Hebrew *Book of Judges*. Such matters are always of major interest to our profession, and I am hoping that with his catholic taste in all literatures that are ancient my friend Ben might enjoy this comparative musing on two vestiges from the ancient world despite their gaps in time, place, and culture.

1.1. *History: Nūr-Ilabrat's and Ours*

Nowadays, few defend Nūr-Ilabrat's reliability as a historian, not just in events that were too distant from his own days, but even in details that he may have known from actual records. We can challenge him because in recent decades we too have recovered many documents that bear on the information he is plying. We have myths, legends, scribal material, contemporaneous inscriptions, and living documents from which to tease out any reality evoked in the testimony. Moreover, we have mighty computers that crunch evidence and spit out synchronisms Nūr-Ilabrat could scarcely control. Therefore, we are often better at the business of history charting than he is.

It is really too bad that we cannot say the same about our capacity to control the history of Israel, let alone that of the *Judges* period. The land that God has promised the patriarchs and matriarchs is nothing like the soil of Mesopotamia. So far, it has delivered negligible documentation on all those personalities we know so well from Scriptures and from the movies. In fact, were it not for Mesopotamian and to a lesser extent Syro-Phoenician sources, we might not be able to authenticate many kings from Israel or Judah.

This condition gives us much grief; so over the last centuries we have sought to counteract this dearth of testimony: We have tried to produce "a better text" of the Old Testament by collating our earliest Hebrew witnesses, from Qumran and elsewhere, and by inspecting ancient translations. We have marshaled a formidable panoply of ancient languages and used poetics to restore Hebrew passages into pristine shape. We have identified criteria by which to discriminate among portions of Hebrew narratives, theology, and law while allocating them to diverse documents.

We have placed these documents into a linear progression that unlocked a development for Hebrew thought. We have categorized Scripture generically, evoking contexts for them by comparison with ancient Near Eastern parallels. We have evaluated the cobbling of diverse traditions into narratives with explicit messages. In more recent decades, we have invested into archaeology; we have sampled anthropology; we have experimented with sociology; we have gendered the texts for more inclusive conclusions; we have tried structuralism, narratology, ideologism, and applied to biblical research every literary tool conceived in France or any Slavic country.

Yet, despite all this effort, we have not managed to capture Israel's true history in a satisfying way. Today, we are better at evaluating the historical worth of Nūr-Ilabrat's baroque constructions than most details found in the Bible. We have come to realize that for Nūr-Ilabrat, no less than for the redactor of *Judges*, historical reliability was never the major goal; rather it was the bolstering of self-images. A major difference, however, is while Nūr-Ilabrat has few followers with a stake in his credibility, the Bible remains iconic in our culture and a fixture in academia, and so rarely lacks for talented defenders.

Still, the sharpest exchanges just now on the *Book of Judges* are not about its historicity, for the most responsible scholars have stopped arguing the issue. Rather, most discussion today is about how *Judges* acquired the shape familiar to us today. There used to be a time not long ago, when the opinion of Martin Noth, who died in 1968, carried much weight. During the Second World War, Noth had proposed that *Judges* belonged to a sequence of material that was compiled a generation or so after the fall of Jerusalem (586) by a historiographer he would label the "Deuteronomistic Historian."[3] Suffice it to say that currently there are several competing theories on how and why this material was processed over centuries. Some simply offer minor adjustments to Noth's hypothesis.[4] Others want to dispense with it, precisely because in their opinion *Judges* does not fit.[5] The current trend, however, is to find several phases of Deuteronomistic manipulations and editing, much affected by the political situation then in effect, from Assyrian hegemony to Macedonian

---

[3] Römer (2005) reviews the complicated story of how this theory was formulated and what has happened to it since its launching in 1943. See also Latvus 1998 and the nice collection of essays in de Pury et al. 2000.

[4] See Liverani 2003: 292–307.

[5] Guillaume 2004: 261.

control, and heavily influenced by their literary styles. Most influential were the proposals of Richter 1963 and 1964 who distinguished Northern narratives with *mōšî'îm*, "saviors," from those with *šōfeṭîm*, "judges."[6] The covenantal phraseology in the Book of Deuteronomy is said to draw on late Assyrian treaties and the military descriptions in Joshua are said to be inspired by Assyrian reports. *Judges* is shown to be a pastiche, its language and ideology betraying centuries of manipulations since the last days of the Northern Kingdom until the Hellenistic era. Its core, however, is thought to be set in Achaemenid Yehud, when Judahites regrouped in their land but lacked their own monarchs.[7]

Many of these suggestions are enticing; for me, however, they tend to privilege a polyglot, cosmopolitan, yet impressionable Hebrew narrator or redactor with much too easy access to the same ancient lore that we have collected in our library shelves. Ironically, when it comes to knowledge about his own past, we limit this narrator's choice to traditions found elsewhere in Scripture. We therefore conjure up a Hebrew narrator who reprocesses routinely inherited traditions, but pilfers tastefully from Near Eastern literature. This leaves us with a dilemma: We are very good at internal analysis, assigning dates and loci to traditions in *Judges*; but without uncovering a nice cache of reliable extra-biblical Hebrew records, confirming these proposals will continue to be debated.

1.2. *The Conceits of History*

Let us come back to Nūr-Ilabrat and the *SKL*. Given his incredible numbers for dynasties and his assimilation of mythological figures, it is very reasonable for us to question his historical reliability. Yet we must not doubt his success in generating meaning from his compilation. A threefold conceit inspired his effort: *His first assumption* is that about two hundred and seventy thousand years ago the gods took interest in human affairs. They invented cities and gave them kingship as an organizing principle. Because Nūr-Ilabrat does not speculate about the origins of gods and humans before that event, he gives us the false impression that his work is less mythically driven than more juicy examples of the genre.

---

[6] The matter is not as clear cut as one would like, since at 2:16–18 verbal roots for both are juxtaposed in the argument for sending judges. Additionally, both the first (Othniel) and the last (Samson) judges are known by both terms (or by derivative formations), as are several of the "minor" judges (See Table). Writing about the same time (1963), Beyerlin separated traditions by the formulation of Israel's outcry against oppression.

[7] See most recently, Guillaume 2004.

The second of Nūr-Ilabrat's conceits is that the gods would never offer kingship to more than one city at any one time even though the kings themselves may not belong to the same family. We are not dealing here with dynasties in each city because the kings themselves need not belong to the same family. As we shall see, this is an important principle in the *Book of Judges*. Here, Nūr-Ilabrat drew a sharp distinction between kingship, which is a divine gift, and dominion, which is a human achievement. So when we accuse him of ignoring prominent cities such as Lagash or Umma, he might insist that political power exists in many places at the same time; but legitimate authority belongs in just one.

The third of Nūr-Ilabrat's assumptions flows from the second, and it holds that no earthly power could be dominant forever. Just as in heaven power cycled from one god to another, so too earthly dominion moved from one city to another, matching the temple where the ascending god lived. Nūr-Ilabrat used an oddly mechanical language for the transfer of kingship: One city loses it before another picks it up. Yet, in choreographing these transitions, the gods can have favorites. Uruk receives control five separate times, Kish four, and Ur three. A deluge is even sent; but (luckily) just once. As to why the gods could not endow one city eternally, we turn to literary documents. The shift of power on earth is inexorable, scripted in heaven, and hardly influenced by human virtues or vices, jubilations or laments. Here is what the god Enlil brutally tells his son Nanna (Sin) in the Sumerian *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*:

> The verdict of the assembly cannot be turned back,
> The word commanded by [the god] Enlil knows no overturning:
> Ur was granted kingship, it was not granted an eternal reign.
> Since days of yore when land was founded and people multiplied,
> Who has ever witnessed a reign of kingship that has maintained
>   preeminence?
> [Ur's] kingship has indeed been long, but is now drained ....[8]

2. *The* Book of Judges

Nūr-Ilabrat's assumptions can be profitably matched with the principles controlling the framing of *Judges*. The first of these has to do with his restricted vision of cultures. Nūr-Ilabrat may have been encyclopedic about the flow of power over the millennia, and simply avoided focus

---

[8] Michalowski 1989 59 ll. 364–370. Dobbs-Alsopp (1993, 2000) explores the relationship between the Mesopotamian and biblical displays of the genre.

on anything but cities and kings. In truth, he was forced to be compact because of his writing medium. Clay tablets do not staple, glue, or bind together very well. The narratives that flow into more than one tablet are comparatively rare because they were a burden to retrieve. Nūr-Ilabrat was cleverer than most, increasing space by writing eight columns on a four-sided prism. Even then, however, he had room for only minimal insertions, such as when telling us that Etana ascended heaven, that Lord Mebaraggesi subdued Elam, that Gilgamesh's father was a specter, and that Sargon's was a cupbearer.

While Hebrew redactors did not share Nūr-Ilabrat's constraints because they worked on papyrus and on leather, their vision of the past was no less artificial. They may not have been fixated on cities and kings, but, in what came to be the received form of the Pentateuch, they linked traditions about a God who obsessed only about Israel. By giving that God a seventh-day respite from creating the cosmos (Gen 1), these redactors had him observe the Sabbath, an institution that was uniquely theirs; and so from the beginning they took ownership of history by forging a creation etiology that had meaning only through their experience. In revealing that history, the Hebrew is no less self-assured than is Nūr-Ilabrat, with knowledge so comprehensive as to report on God's innermost thoughts and with control of events so confident as to embed recurrent manifestations of the same experience over the course of generations.

The *second* of Nūr-Ilabrat's conceits is that the gods would not want power to be owned by more than one city, although they might quite readily allow it to occur several times in the same city. In *Judges*, we find an adaptation of this notion. The Hebrew term for what we conveniently translate as a "judge" is *šōfeṭ*, based on a root that has to do with making and imposing authoritative decisions. When the Mari tablets were found, we learned about many *šāpiṭum*s, administrators who derived their power by representing the king in the provinces. To enforce royal authority, they had access to *bazaḫatum*s, "armed contingents." From the same archives, we also discovered the *merḫûm*s, tribal leaders with such authority that Mari's last king, Zimri-Lim, depended on them to confirm and then stabilize his rule. The Hebrew *šōfeṭ* actually combines features from both the *šāpiṭum* and the *merḫûm*, with the Hebrew god as the king to whom they owe allegiance.[9]

---

[9] On the Mari vocabulary, see Durand 2008 and Reculeau 2008.

Table. The Judges of Israel

ENEMY	NATION	YEARS	JUDGE [J]udge (šōfēt) [S]avior (môšîʿaʾ)	TRIBE	TYPE	PEACE	TEXT
Cushan-rishatayim	Aram-Naharayim	8	Othniel [J/S]	Judah	"warrior"	40 [LXXA:50]	3:7–11
Eglon	Moab+Ammon/Amalek	18	Ehud [S]	Benjamin	"tyranicide"	80	3:12–30
	[Philistines		Shamgar [S]	"Ben-Anath"	Canaanite?]		3:31
Jabin Sisera	Canaan / Hazor Haroshet-haggoyim	20	Deborah [S] Barak	[Ephraim] Naphtali	"mantic" unmotivated	40	4:1–5:31
Oreb/Zeeb Zebah/Zalmunna	Midian/Amalek	7	Gideon /Jerubaal [S]	Manasseh	"skeptic"	40	6:1–8:32
	intra (Shechem)		Abimelech [S]	Manasseh/Shechem	"putschist"	3	9:1–57
			Tola [S/J]	Issachar		23	10:1–2
			Jair [J]	Gilead	30 sons	22	10:3–5
	Ammon/Ephraim	18	Jephthah [J]	Gilead	landless	6 [LXXB: 60]	10:6–12:7
			Ibzan [J]	Asher?	30 sons; 30 d.	7	12:8–10
			Elon [J]	Zebulun		10	12:11–12
			Abdon [J] [Bedan?: LXX: Barak]	Ephraim	40 sons; 30 grandsons; 70 donkeys	8	12:13–15 1 Sam 12:11
	Philistines	40	Samson [S/J]	Dan	"dolt"	20+	1 Sam 7:6

Once the election of leaders becomes the focus of *Judges*, power is transferred twelve times (Shamgar must not be regarded as a true judge), equivalent to the idealized number of tribes. (See TABLE.) But rather than coming from all twelve tribes, judges are said to originate from just eight of them (Judah, Benjamin, Joseph, Naphtali, Issachar, Asher, Zebulun, and Dan), perhaps ten if we do not subsume Ephraim, Manasseh, and Gilead under Joseph, their eponymous ancestor. Ephraim and Gilead each repeat twice; the rest are restricted to once. The tribes that receive judgeship are drawn from the matriarchs Leah and Rachel, wives of Jacob, and include their surrogates Zilpah and Bilhah. However, a good half of the judges are assigned to Joseph or his descendents (Manasseh and Ephraim). There is also good coverage of Israel's traditional enemies: Canaan, Philistines, Amalek, Moab, and Median. For good measure, we have Aram-Naharaim that might reflect Syro-Aramaic powers. Most striking, however, is the Northern setting for most of the *Judges* narratives. One of them, the story of Gideon from Manasseh and of the failed dynastic succession of a son with the cue-name Abimelech ("the king is a father") may well belong to dislocated narratives about the foundation of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. If so, a conjecture would be that they parallel equivalent but better-known Judean stories featuring Saul and David. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the concept of a United Monarchy was conveyed by narratives about Saul and David, thus providing an umbrella for both kingdoms. Gideon and his son lost their primacy as royal ancestors.

It is probable, therefore, that in drawing up the list of tribes that contributed judges, the effort was to broaden the selection as much as possible. Missing from the roster are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Gad. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are the first three children of Leah, and they famously lost to Judah, their fourth brother, the opportunity to produce a king for Israel. Gad will not appear in *Judges*, while Simeon (at Judges 1) and Reuben (at Judges 5:15–16) will have minor mention there. Brief anecdotes are attached to five judges: Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. What we are told about them basically replays a fixation on the number of children they had (30 and 40) and the number of donkeys they owned (30 and 70). These numbers hardly lead to developed narratives; but they do sharpen the drama that will overtake the ruler that is sandwiched between these five judges. Moreover, it is certain that the compiler thought of them as unit, not just because they all lack the normal details and expansions applied to a judge, but because the odd numbers allotted to their rule amount to 70 years, a figure suggesting completeness of

group or time units. This number is the same in the Septuagint, suggesting that it antedates the adjustment of lifetimes allotted to the ancestors that occurred during the Maccabean period. Again, it is worth noting that the length of Jephthah's rule is not part of this sum.

The remaining judges, seven of them (eight if one includes Barak) receive more sustained narratives, each complete by itself, not needing background from those preceding them. As such, they could easily be shuffled from one context to another without seriously harming the overall compilation, not unlike the earlier portions of Nūr-Ilabrat's, for that matter. Striking is the observation that no judge shares the personality or characteristic of the others: Othniel is a warrior, Ehud is a terrorist, Deborah is an augur and a woman at that, Barak is a diffident leader, Gideon is a skeptic in the mold of Abraham, Abimelech is an opportunist, Jephthah has self-doubts galore, and Samson is a mindless hulk. These observations on the characters of the major judges might tell us something about those editing inherited tales; above all, however, they reinforce a sustained trait about the Hebrew God: His unpredictability and his tendency to empower the unexpected.

The third of Nūr-Ilabrat's assumptions proposes that no earthly power could be dominant forever. Invariably, after it is bestowed to one city, kingship is withdrawn and awarded to another city. The influence of any god rises and abates in consonance with the decision of the pantheon. Hebraic theology, however, suppresses overt hints of polytheism, and its literature upholds the conviction that any covenant must be eternal because it comes from the only God that ever existed. Throughout Scripture, there is the exhortation to love God fiercely because he alone is god; yet, incongruously, there is also the call to resist the lure of other gods because, Israel is warned, Yahweh is jealous and unforgiving. This is stated succinctly in Deut 6:12–15; but the lesson is found in most layers of Hebraic lore. There is also a remarkable passage in Deut 31 (16–21) from which I offer this quote:

> The LORD said to Moses: You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake me and break my covenant that I made with them. Then my anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide my countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, "Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us" … Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be my witness against the people of Israel …. For I

> know what plans they are devising even now, before I bring them into the land that I have promised on oath.

In this and similar passages, we may find a parallel to Nūr-Ilabrat's belief in the fragility of power and the inevitability not so much of change as of succession. Yet, for all of Israel's inconstancy and its incapacity to keep to the one true god, her faults are not premeditated; rather, they derive from a character that her own God stamped into her DNA. We might wonder about such a Calvinistic expression of predestination. Yet, if we are into psycho-history, we might propose that by making Israel's deficiencies primordial, its historians sought to explain why God's chosen could hardly compete with pagan neighbors. The argument is that God did promise a land in Canaan; but that Israel must keep earning it, repeatedly and painfully, long after its ancestors captured major portions of it.

The *Book of Judges* affirms this Sisyphean goal by setting events in spirals: Israel sins; an angry God unleashes enemies; Israel begs for mercy; God empowers a combative leader; Israel takes control, but soon weakens its devotion, with the expected divine reaction. *Judges* devotes Chapter Two to argue for this sequence, but the idea is embedded elsewhere in *Judges* and in Scripture.[10] Most striking is the contention that predestination is not just for Israel, but for its God as well, echoing what we learn from the Mesopotamian laments. We have the pathetic anecdote of a God who does not know how to break the cycle. We are told that right after Judge Jair dies, Israel resumes sinning. It absorbs its deserved punishment and begs God for respite. This time, he simply refuses to soften: "No. I will not deliver you again," he says, "Go cry to the gods you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress!" (Judges 10:13–14). In fact, but for the unfortunate episode that involves Samson, just before Jephthah, the God of Israel simply pulls out of the rescue business and the brunt of the final chapters of *Judges* is to argue the case for a new vision of reality.[11]

---

[10] The most succinct version, in fact, is given in a grand poem attached to the returning exiles in the days of Nehemiah (9:26–28): "Defying you, [the Israelites] rebelled; they cast your teaching behind their back …; they committed great impieties. You delivered them into the power of their adversaries who oppressed them. In their time of trouble they cried to you; you in heaven heard them, and in your abundant compassion gave them saviors (*môšî'îm*) who saved them from the power of their adversaries. But when they had relief, they again did what was evil in your sight, so you abandoned them to the power of their enemies, who subjugated them. Again they cried to you, and you in heaven heard and rescued them in your compassion, time after time."

[11] See Sasson Forthcoming.

3. *Shifting and Retaining Frames*

In shaping a logic for the new institution, the failings of the old one are made transparent. In the final chapters of *Judges*, the redactor becomes uncharacteristically obtrusive; that is, rather than let the flow of narrative influence our judgment, he forces his opinion on us. Four times in this relatively brief coda, we are told *bayyāmîm hāhēm ʾēʸn melek bĕyiśrāʾēl*, "In those days there was no king in Israel." Lest we imagine that this condition was desirable, at both its first (at 17:6) and at its final (21:25) occurrence, the following phrase is added: *îš hayyāšār bĕʾēʸnāʸv yaʿăśēh*, "every man could do as he pleased." In Israel, no less than in Mesopotamia, anarchy was a dreadful prospect.

This notice about the consequences of disorder is striking, for it displays the conflicted attitude biblical historiographers had about the God of Israel and his control of history. Later, when Samuel is about to give Israel its first king, he is cited as reminding his (skeptical) audience that, in God, Israel already has the only king it ever needs. He pointedly treats his listeners to the longest refresher on the *Book of Judges* preserved in Scripture, dwelling on the security provided by such champions as Gideon and Jephthah (1 Sam 12:8–11), but eliding over the many intervals of misery and neglect.[12] The redactor of *Judges* knew better; for the repeated notices about the lack of kingship in Israel are made backdrop to acts that jell into an increasingly sordid portrait of a failed state: Just after 17:6, one man establishes his own shrine and hires a Levite to be his *ʾāv* and *vĕkōhēn*, so an advising priest. One tribe seeks new territory, abandoning for no good reason its God-defined space (at 18:1). As a consequence of a single sordid act in which a woman is raped and

---

[12] 1 Samuel 12:8–12: "When Jacob came to Egypt, your fathers cried out to the Lord, and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. But they forgot the Lord their God; so He delivered them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the king of Moab; and these made war upon them. They cried to the Lord, 'We are guilty, for we have forsaken the Lord and worshiped the Baalim and the Ashtaroth. Oh, deliver us from our enemies and we will serve you.' And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Bedan [LXX: Barak] and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the enemies around you; and you dwelt in security. But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was advancing against you, you said to me, 'No, we must have a king reigning over us'—though the Lord your God is your King." Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) is more succinct (46:11–12): "The judges, too, each one of them, whose hearts were not deceived, who did not abandon God: may their memory be ever blessed, their bones return to life from their resting place, and their names receive fresh luster in their children!"

dismembered (19), another tribe comes to embody evil, aggression, and doom. This tribe is Benjamin. In *Judges*, it is destroyed; but a remnant survives from which to revive. Discriminate readers of coded biblical conventions need not go far before sensing that that the experiment in giving rule to Israel via God-selected judges had ran its course. Kingship will not be far ahead.

Nūr-Ilabrat might not have sympathized with this radical shift from one political institution to another. To the last, even as in his world power was shifting unpredictably, he betrays little doubt about the eternity of kingship, for his culture had come to it since time immemorial. The last king he cites, Sin-māgir, ruled 11 years, a speck of time when compared to the 28,800 years of Alulim, the first king on his list. Yet there is no hint that Nūr-Ilabrat invested divine approval in Sin-māgir any less than in Alulim. As he compiled his work, Nūr-Ilabrat may not have known then that Isin was to fall to Larsa (although some have suggested that he did his work there); but he might have witnessed Sin-muballiṭ of upstart Babylon taking control of its territory. Neither Babylon nor Larsa was featured earlier in his list; yet there is no reason to imagine that Nūr-Ilabrat's confidence in the future of a divinely affirmed kingship was any less firm than what it was in its past. This certainty in the viability and perpetuity of the institution may in fact be Nūr-Ilabrat's most sustained conceit. Had he read the *Book of Judges*, he might have simply smiled at the tortuous path that brought his Hebrew colleagues to the same conclusion. But he would also have missed the best part of their story.

Bibliography

Beyerlin, W. 1963. "Geschichte und Heilsgeschichtliche Traditionsbildung im alten Testament: Ein Beitrag Zur Traditionsgeschichte von Richter 6–8." *VT* 13: 1–25.

Dobbs-Alsopp, F.W. 1993. *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblica et Orientalia 44). Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.

———. 2000. "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments." *JAOS* 120: 625–630.

Durand, J.-M. 2008. "Environnement et occupation de l'espace: Les nomades." *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Fascicules 77–78. Pp. 298–324. Paris: Letouzey & Ané.

Friberg, J. 2007. *A Remarkable Collection of Babylonian Mathematical Texts: Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection: Cuneiform Texts I* (Sources and Studies in the History of Mathematics and Physical Sciences). New York: Springer.

Glassner, J.-J. 1993. *Chroniques Mésopotamiennes*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

———. 2004. *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Writing from the Ancient World). At-
lanta: Scholar's Press.

Guillaume, P. 2004. *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges* (JSOTSup. 385). London: T&T
Clark.

Latvus, K. 1998. *God, Anger and Ideology: The Anger of God in Joshua and Judges
in relation to Deuteronomy and the Priestly Writings* (JSOTSup. 279). Sheffield:
Sheffield Academic Press.

Liverani, M. 2003. *Israel's History and the History of Israel*. London: Equinox.

Michalowski, P. 1983. "History as Charter: Some Observations on the Sumerian
King List." *JAOS* 103: 237–248.

———. 1989. *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Mesopota-
mian Civilizations 1). Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

Pury, A. de, T. Römer, and J.-D. Macchi (eds.). 2000. *Israel Constructs Its History:
Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (JSOTSup. 306). Sheffield:
Sheffield Academic Press.

Reculeau, H. 2008. "Environnement et occupation de l'espace: Les sédentaires."
Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible, Fascicules 77–78. Pp. 325–357. Paris:
Letouzey & Ané.

Richter, W. 1963. *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch*
(Bonner biblische Beiträge 18). Bonn: P. Hanstein.

———. 1964. *Die Bearbeitungen des "Retterbuches" in der deuteronomischen
Epoche* (Bonner biblische Beiträge 21). Bonn: P. Hanstein.

Römer, T. 2005. *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*. London: T&T Clark.

Sasson, J.M. Forthcoming. "Jephthah: *Chutzpa* and Overreach in the Portrayal
of a Hebrew Judge." Festschrift contribution.

Wilcke, C. 1989. "Genealogical and Geographical Thought in the Sumerian
King List." In DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A. *Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg*
(Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 11), H. Behrens,
et al, eds. Pp. 557–571. Philadelphia: University Museum.