
The ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia have always enjoyed much less popularity among the general public than ancient Egypt with its impressive pyramids and other monuments. An exception might be found at the level of literary achievements where Mesopotamia scores high. This new translation of the Gilgamesh epic—the author prefers to call it a ‘verse rendition’—will further improve the public’s acquaintance with Mesopotamian literature. For the aim of this edition is very positive: ‘This fascinating tale, so significant to Western thought, deserves a beautifully poetic, readable presentation that will capture the interest and provoke the minds of our students’ (L. J. Bolchazy, editor, on p. x). As a matter of fact, it can be said that Danny P. Jackson has succeeded, in general, in producing a text which is highly readable, fluently rhythmical and displaying grandeur. He is well assisted by Thom Kapheim, who has delivered some very expressionistic woodcuts catching the spark of the moment.

However, the strength of this book—making the epic of Gilgamesh accessible to the undergraduate student and the general public—is also its weakness. The section ‘Rendering’ (65 pages) is supplemented by an additional 77 pages of prefaces, introductions and pictures. The poetic liberties claimed by Jackson make it impossible to use this book as a work of reference vis-à-vis the original text. Columns and lines on the original tablets and in the ‘rendering’ are not easily reconcilable. In addition to this, the translator frequently uses hyperlinear verses, which cause confusion when numbering the lines. It never became clear to me whether the ‘rendering’ was based on the original (=Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian...) text or on an earlier, e.g. English, translation. No bibliographical reference as to this is made.
Another example of the simplifying approach is the *Glossary*, in fact a list of names. The author has thought it necessary to add a (pseudo-) phonetic transcription to the usual spelling of the names. I wonder whether giving in addition to *Anunnaki* a 'phonetic' *Ah noo nah’kee* (93) or finding a very English sounding *You fray’teez* in addition to *Euphrates* (94), is not doing more harm than good. A last remark of general importance is that the translator, although his intention was to bring us poetic grandeur (cf.x) and attractiveness (xxxviii), misses occasionally the right tune. A few examples—there are more—will illustrate this. There is an oxymoron-like ‘She fathered Enkidu’ (4, 1. 80). What others call ‘votaries’, Jackson calls ‘bishops’ (38, line 176). The absurd ‘birds—bords—burds’ (74, line 51) is not needed by the original text. A counting out or nursery rhyme (‘One, two, three, alarie ...’ 80, lines 203 sqq.) can be found where *Gilgamesh* is overwhelmed by an ominous sleep. When Enkidu dies and is buried, he is mourned for by *Gilgamesh* not only in the English ‘Goodbye, dear brother’, but also in Latin, Bengali, Amharic, Gaelic and a weak Hebrew (51-52, lines 153 sqq.). This flatters the linguistic bump of the translator rather than contributing to the solemnity of the occasion. There is also an odd contrast between a certain bashfulness about calling a temple harlot a temple harlot (xxxviii and 6 line 119) and the rather daring style in some episodes: ‘if he (= Enkidu) ... leaves the herd to mate’ (6, line 123); ‘...into your scented bush’... (9, line 168); and most of all the ‘Broadway lyrics’ (as announced on xxxviii) in the answer of *Gilgamesh* to the erotic proposals made by *Ishtar* (34-36). In comparison with this, the original text can be considered as an example of *pudeur*.

Some details deserve attention as well. The map (vi) omits not only Babylon, which might be partially excusable as this city does not play any role in the epic, but also Nineveh, where an important part of the epic was found in the royal Assyrian library. The bibliography (xliii) looks rather poor and does not include basic editions of the epic. It does not include some very useful and easily accessible books such as G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1980 or later) and H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (Thames and Hudson,
London, 1962 or later) either. Ashurbannipal was king of Assyria from 668 to 627 B.C., so that he could not have had a library ca. 700 BC (xxxix). If Boghazköy is situated in ‘Turkey’ and not in ‘Asia Minor’ or ‘Anatolia’, then Megiddo is to be found in ‘Israel’ and not in ‘Palestine’ (xxxix). To be concerned with dying (xli) is not an innovation of our century. Even discarding antiquity, the 14th and 15th centuries AD in Western Europe were the period of the danses macabres. Finally, the accusation of lack of [international] cooperation (in the field of Assyriology?) (xxxvii) is not based on any reality. There is not only the yearly Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, where Assyriologists from all over the world meet to exchange views and knowledge: there are also the projects such as the Toronto based comprehensive edition of Royal Inscriptions, the Rome-based Ebla research and the Paris- and Strasbourg-based Mari enterprise, in which scholars from different nationalities are involved.

All criticism uttered above refers to shortcomings which are easily redressable in a next edition. Having done so, the authors and the publishers will guarantee for this book the place of honour which it surely deserves.

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