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FRECHETTE, C.G. — Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian Šuillas). An investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meanings of the Rubric. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, 379, Ugarit Verlag, Münster, 2012. (25 cm, XX, 316). ISBN: 978-3-86835-046-3. € 78,-.

Since their edition given by L.W. King in his *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* (1896), the Hand-lifting Prayers are well known in Assyriology. The clay tablets have as title *Šuilla*, “the lifted hand”; the book reviewed here names such titles a “rubric” (p. 1, 107 ff., 122 f.). Since the beginning, the word often was translated “prayer”, “supplication” and lifting the hand was seen as no more than just a gesture of praying and many saw no difference between the *Šuilla* and the very similar “Gebetsbeschwörung” (here “incantation prayer”). Best known are the books by W.G. Kunstmann (1932), W.R. Mayer (1976) and A. Zgoll (2003), gratefully — and critically — used by the author. He takes the “rubric” more literal and sees as background the disrupted

relationship with the (personal) god or goddess. Lifting the hand provides “emphasis” to the situation in being a formal salutation to the deity, hoping that a favourable relation will be restored. That is why the prayer begins with a long laudatory address. This emphasis is absent in incantation prayers. The scene has the structure of an audience between man and god and the offerings to the gods are equivalent to greeting gifts to authorities (p. 143). In order to illustrate this the book turns to iconography where man and god meet in an exchange of gestures, but not as equals (“asymmetry”) (p. 55-88). The Akkadian idioms for praying and its gestures are investigated (p. 33-50). Then, returning to the *Šuillas*: in many prayers the hand-lifting occurs first in sequence which already shows its importance (p. 17); it is a real act. Earlier writers followed the form-critical method current among Bible scholars which is rejected (p. 116 f.), as is their taxonomy of prayers (p. 109-120). The author develops seven criteria (“tendencies”) that distinguish the *Šuilla* from incantation prayers (p. 133-140). They are:

(1) only one deity is addressed, (2) the address to the deity is lengthy, (3) elevated speech, (4) the introduction of an intermediary is avoided, (5) complaints or petitions express a specific concern, (6) reconciliation with the deity is sought, (7) general welfare is connected with private reconciliation.

The procedure of the ritual is described (p. 149-152) and it is striking that making a gesture with the hand is rarely mentioned: well, it was an obvious element, prior to the prayer, already evident in the “rubric” (p. 153 f.).

Some *Šuillas* are incorporated in complex rituals, like *bīt salā’ mē*, *bīt rimki*, *namburbi*’s, dream rituals, anti-witchcraft rituals, etc. They are given special attention (p. 166-222).

The main thesis of this book is repeated several times, in particular in “Overall purpose and rationale” (p. 158-160) and in the Conclusion (p. 226, 228). One quote: “Even if one were successful in ritually washing away the destructive miasma that one had contracted by means of experiencing an omen or a dream, one remained vulnerable to further malicious influences as long as one’s relationships with the gods remain disrupted. It is emphasis on this fundamental manifestation of evil that accounts for the fact that Akkadian *Šuillas* were enacted to address a variety of situations” (p. 226).

Three appendixes conclude the book: terms for “hand-lifting”; instructions for recitation; list of *Šuillas* prayers; comparison of six features in well preserved texts. The Indexes are extensive and that on Subjects is particularly helpful.

We could only stress some main lines of thought in this book. It is clear that the author is an expert, in view of the detailed discussions of special problems encountered or the refutation of possible objections. He has seen everything. What is more: the book is innovative and forceful.

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