May the Grass Grow Long: Hierarchy and Destruction in Ancient Mesopotamian Lamentation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many of the texts which form the backbone of this brief paper reside in a class of composition that eludes facile categorical definition. Indeed, as "there is no absolute scholarly consensus on a list of [ancient Near Eastern] texts that might be described as 'historical' or 'historiographic' writing", my analysis of Mesopotamianmyths, poems, and city laments must focus on a particular *use* of evidence.[1] Rather than embarking upon a quest for chronological certainty, this work will employ an emic perspective with a cultural insight as its goal. In this manner, I hope to ascertain how local populations conceived and perceived their own social order. So while the sources I employ may be "of doubtful value for the program of an *histoire événementielle*, they will —if approached on their own terms—tell us a great deal about the social and political matrix of early Babylonia, through their vision of history as a symbolic or mythical reality".[2] The place of hierarchy and disaster in that native vision of history is what this essay seeks to unearth.

Through an holistic treatment of nine ancient Near Eastern literary works, I aim to provide a portrait of a key Mesopotamian conceit: the interaction of ruin and social order. Breaches of hierarchical norms precipitate suffering in the poems, dialogs, and myths which form the first half of my examination, and sorrow is often expressed as a disintegration of status and society in the city laments which are treated in the latter portion of this paper. Ties between rank, religion, and cross-hierarchical cooperation become clear as we progress from a focus on individual suffering to an examination of the fall of cities as chronicled in the Laments for Akkad, Eridu, and Uruk. As I will argue, these reckonings of disaster ultimately reinforce the centrality of hierarchy and its divine backing in the self-expressed functioning of Mesopotamian civilization.

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[1] Kurt A. Raaflaub and Piotr Michalowski, "The Presence of the Past in Early Mesopotamian Writings," in *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 143-168, 145.

[2] Piotr Steinkeller, "Mythical Realities of the Early Babylonian History (or the Modern Historian and the Native Uses of History Past)," in *History, Texts and Art in Early Babylonia: Three Essays* (Boston, Massachusetts: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2017), pp. 167-197, 167.

It is necessary to preface this paper with an acknowledgment of the nature of our sources. Virtually every document we possess from my arena of inquiry—the ancient Near East—can be attributed to the hands of an elite member of society, a fact we can expect to be reflected in the texts' ideological leanings.

It would, nevertheless, be unwise to assume that these writings were the nefarious tools of jaded and conniving rulers used exclusively for propagandistic purposes. Mesopotamian elites did not live in a realm of secular rationalism while their impoverished counterparts labored under Orwellian delusions. As I argue below, the ideological implications inherent in the texts were woven throughout every sector of Mesopotamian life. The ideas contained in these works did not belong to one echelon alone; to suggest that (say) *Enuma Elish* was an antediluvian opiate of the masses would be to impute modernizing assumptions onto ancient evidence—assumptions with distinctly Orientalist overtones. Belief was held in common; arguments to the contrary risk depicting rulers and their courts as uncommonly cruel, conniving Eastern despots in the Herodotean tradition.

I focus, then, on "mythological history as a subject in itself".[3] What the Mesopotamians thought of calamity matters more to my inquiry than any factual reconstruction of collapse ever could. For while the latter would no doubt provide compelling evidence of social disintegration and its concrete role in the fall of states and cities, it can only tell us so much about the deeper structure and significance of ancient Near Eastern hierarchy. For that, we must listen to the Mesopotamians themselves.

2. *THE POEM OF THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER*

Like all the texts explored throughout this paper, the Babylonian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* foregrounds a particular sort of trouble.

In the *Poem*, a pious man contends with an unexpected, unexplained malady of ill fortune, seeking the reason behind his woeful fate. At first glance, this questioning of cause may appear to speak more of a cross-cultural human desire to fathom the unfathomable than a socially mediated construction of calamity's roots and remediation, but a distinctly Mesopotamian conception of suffering's nature remains at its core. Even when the origin of woe is undetermined, pain is tied with order's absence.

Much of *The Righteous Sufferer*'s anguish is expressed through a detailing of various physical pains, but our protagonist's greatest fears revolve around the wrath of elites ("the king, incarnation of the gods, sun of his people, / His heart hardened against me" he cries), a loss of proper position (a usurper says, "I ousted him from his command!"), and an inability to fill his prescribed role.[4] Disaster is described as an expulsion from hierarchy, and the fear of social ostracization is detailed in terms which imply a wildness, a disorder or unreason. "They parceled my possessions among the rifraff," complains the sufferer: "[t]he sources of my watercourses they blocked with muck, / they chased the harvest songs from my fields". They "let another assume my duties, / And appointed an outsider to my prerogatives".[5] The hardship of the sufferer recalls a terror of disorder housed within the loss of social place, social status. Calamity *is* exclusion or expulsion from hierarchy. And in its most extreme incarnations, it is the taking away of urban security. For the righteous sufferer, lamentation entails a loss of status—and a loss of civilization itself.

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[3] Steinkeller, "Mythical Realities", 178.

[4] Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1995), 301, 303.

[5] Foster, *Distant Days,* 303.

3. *THE BABYLONIAN THEODICY*

While *The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* provides a view to the mechanics of Mesopotamian woe, its lack of causational reasoning is notable. To the rescue comes *The Babylonian Theodicy*, an ambivalent philosophical dialog which allows us to establish an idea of what deeds and doings were seen to be *deserving* of punishment.

Like the *Righteous Sufferer,* the *Theodicy* as a whole emphasizes the baffling nature of its subject's distress and equivocates about the fundamental reasons behind said sorrow, but the second voice in the dialog (that of the sufferer's friend, a tough but sympathetic interlocutor) intercedes to end the suspense. The friend offers up an explanation of origin, stating that the sufferer has "[s]purned property, . . . besmirched every code".[6] The friend's primary reaction is to rationalize misery as being a necessary result of the sufferer's having "cast off justice, [...] scorned divine design", and disregarded "the sound rulings of [his] goddess".[7] Though the sufferer shortly thereafter disputes this explanation, the friend's words are indicative—and are, I argue, a good measure of general social attitudes towards bad luck. While the document as a whole may appear hostile to the vagaries of a hierarchical status quo,[8] the work can't help but evince a conservative train of thought. Its very hedging reifies status and status' central role in disaster: in condemning dominant Mesopotamian cultural instincts, the text must mention them—and mention them it does. The voice of the friend serves this function. And in the eyes of the friend, sorrow is a result of chaotic, antisocial action. A dereliction of duty or violation of proper social place is an impiety, an offense against the gods—and against the foundation of society, cities, civilization.[9] If we are to believe this construction, Mesopotamian mourning and its relations with ruin were conceived as a two-way street. In the *Theodicy,* disaster is not only *attended* but *caused* by hierarchical turmoil: wild behavior reaps what it sows. A negative feedback loop of social disorder brings pain, chaos, ruin.

4. *ENUMA ELISH*

> The rebellious human spirit, as seen in the story of the Flood, has no place in this poem, where the highest good for man is to discover and understand his place in the divinely ordered universe.
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> - Benjamin Foster, *From Distant Days* (9)

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[6] Ibid., 316.

[7] Ibid., 319.

[8] See Foster, *Distant Days,* 321 for the dialog's discussion of primogeniture's ills.

[9] Foster, *Distant Days,* 319; 321.

As a Mesopotamian "story of world origins and world ordering", it is fitting that concerns with status and social order are evident throughout the text of *Enuma Elish*.[10] The Babylonian creation epic is "admirable in providing a unifying concept of existence: . . . order pervades both nature and society".[11] Order and disorder are social; contraventions of hierarchy require great authority and divine justification; and wrong is redressed by right done in the proper place, by proper agents acting in their proper roles.[12]

Like the apparent ambivalence of the *Babylonian Theogony*, the hierarchical struggles of *Enuma Elish* may appear to indicate a Mesopotamian acknowledgment of unrest or a discontent with a stratified status quo, but the text as a whole is clear in its conservatism. While the intent of the *Babylonian Theogony* may have been subversive, it provides evidence that the primary societal instinct when faced with incomprehensible punishment was to blame suffering on unruly, impious, improper behavior. *Enuma Elish*'s seemingly countercultural motifs (vertical conflict, divine rebellion) similarly reflect a status bound system—one that existed on account of heavenly action.

As *Enuma Elish*'s narrative proceeds, the suffering of humans occupied in lowly, tiresome toil is justified by the revelation that those jobs originally belonged to the gods, and the chaos of the destruction and lamentation which attends a disorder of divine hierarchy sends a clear message. Earthly order is *good* because the gods made it, but when the gods are loose and without leadership, anything goes.[13] Without stable rule, disaster ensues. Without the Babylonian god Marduk at the head of the pantheon, in his proper and deserved place, there is naught but sorrow. "The shepherd, herdsman should pay attention, / He must not neglect the Enlil of the gods, / Marduk, / So his land may prosper and he himself be safe".[14] The implication, of course, is the necessity of a strong Babylonian king, a proper proxy for Marduk.

This elaboration upon religion's role in the creation of cosmological (and terrestrial) hierarchy provides a clearer picture of the divine backing invoked by *The Babylonian Theodicy* and *The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer.* According to the *Theodicy* and the *Righteous Sufferer*, violations of hierarchical norms both cause and accompany disaster: from *Enuma Elish* we may scry a detailed understanding of religion's role. If order is

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[10] Ibid., 191.

[11] Ibid., 191.

[12] Cf. Foster, *Distant Days*, 16. As in *Enuma Elish*, so too in *Atrahasis*.

[13] Foster, *Distant Days,* 11-22.

[14] Foster, *Distant Days*, 50.

established by the gods, it is good; if the leader of a city or a state is associated with an element of the divine, a refusal to follow that leader's dictates is both a transgression of hierarchy *and an impiety*.[15] Belief and order are inextricable. That sacrilege accompanies disaster is, then, only to be expected.

Through this process, the roles of society's upper echelons—occupied by the divine and its human intermediary, the king—also come into focus. The necessity of god and king in *Enuma Elish* thus illustrates the function of the highest tiers of Mesopotamian hierarchy; in *Atrahasis*, the import of the lowly becomes clear. But before we turn to the story of the Flood, another relevant text presents itself for analysis: *The Poor Man of Nippur.*

5. *THE POOR MAN OF NIPPUR*

Like *Enuma Elish*, *Nippur* is at its core a treatment of order and its lack. As in the story of the Flood (as we shall see), an emphasis on status-bound responsibility forms a central strand of the story's plot. And like the city laments which will be explored the latter portion of this paper, *Nippur*'s conception of suffering hinges on a disorder of hierarchy. The fundamental cause of pain is a refusal to follow (or follow through on) socially dictated duties to the community.

Nippur opens with a description of the plight of a poor man, Gimil-Ninurta, who "has no gold, as befits mankind", whose "insides burned, craving meat and good drink"; "Every day for want of a meal, he went to sleep hungry."[16] His sorry predicament, a crisis of subsistence precipitated by a failure of the social contract, is attributed to the neglectful behavior of a local governor—a governor under the authority of the king.

It is soon revealed that the malevolence of *Nippur*'s governor is rooted in disobedience of a hierarchical nature. If the Mesopotamian social matrix, ordained by the gods and upheld by the king, is meant to account for the subsistence of all, the failure of the governor to ensure the well-being of Gimil-Ninurta is in effect a breach of proper status and the duties it entails. By "order of the king", after all, it is required that "[p]rinces and governors give just verdicts".[17] To persecute an impoverished man is to disregard the law of the land. Hierarchy and its divine scaffold are contravened twice over when the system fails the poor: in his refusal to follow the king's orders, the governor assumes the power of an office far above his rank, and in his denial of

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[15] Cf. *Enuma Elish*'s treatment of Marduk and *The Cursing of Akkad*'s portrait of Naram-Sin as explored in sections 3 and 6 of this paper.

[16] Ibid., 357.

[17] Ibid., 359.

subsistence for a citizen of his city, he jeopardizes the functioning of a social system with heavenly origins.[18] How could suffering not befall the insubordinate?

Gimil-Ninurta's choice of reprisal, to give the governor his deserved comeuppance with the blessing of the king, is therefore less iconoclastic than it may seem. Like the *Babylonian Theogony* and *Enuma Elish* before it, this tale of harm and redress allows a view to another angle of the same status-bound core. However uneven Mesopotamian hierarchy may have been, it was understood to provide subsistence for the rich *and* the poor. For the truth, as we come to see, is that the population of dependent laborers which formed the base of the great Near Eastern social pyramid was as necessary as the king. Avoidance of disaster required the cooperation of all.

6. *ATRAHASIS* and *THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH*

This arrangement of reciprocal need is nowhere more evident than in *Atrahasis*, the seventeenth-century tale of the Flood.[19] While *Atrahasis*, like *Enuma Elish*, provides further corroboration of the characteristic Mesopotamian fear of chaos and its various social expressions, the facets of the text I examine here will focus on one specific aspect of this schema: mutual dependence. Without buy-in from the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, there is no path away from calamity. For when the gods comprehend the implications of their diluvial deed, the sorrow they have inflicted upon humanity—*their labor force*—returns to haunt them:

> The annunaki, the great gods,
> Were sitting in thirst and hunger. . . .
> Like sheep, they filled a streambed,
> Their lips were agonized with thirst,
> They were suffering pangs of hunger.[20]

The divine, it becomes clear, demands the work of its mortal counterparts for its very survival, just as the king requires the cooperation of his laborers to sustain a stable city, just as the poor were seen to have need of the justice and administration of the king. These Mesopotamian reckonings of mutual dependence recognized that the breakdown of one element in a comprehensive sociopolitical and economic hierarchy meant the fall of all. Ruin, by necessity, would ensue.

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[18] Cf., of course, *Enuma Elish*.

[19] Ibid., 52.

[20] Ibid., 73-4.

Participation of the poor and its ties to hierarchy and disaster are also evidenced in *Atrahasis*' story of the Ark. The tale's flood-myth hero, Atrahasis, is positioned to require a specific sort of status-bound cooperation in order to perpetuate *humanity itself*. His boat was built only when "[t]he elders [...] / The carpenter [carried his axe], the reed-worker [carried his stone]. / [The rich man carried] the pitch, / The poor man [brought the materials needed]".[21] Each man brought what he ought: the reed-worker carried his stone, the rich man carried the pitch, and the poor man secured the rest. A notion of collective responsibility, collective harm, and collective benefit emerges before our eyes. Each plank of the boat and brick in the wall is imperative; one cannot stand without many. Cooperation is conceived in the best interest of all, god and man alike.

While *Atrahasis* and the later *Epic of Gilgamesh* share much in the way of chaos, order, hierarchy, heroism, and floods, it is their common discussion of this cross-hierarchical social cooperation and the effects of its absence which proves central to my analysis of calamity and order.

Gilgamesh opens with a telling of troubles. The king of Uruk, the titular Gilgamesh, has harmed his people, and the vagaries of the unruly ruler leave his subjects in a state of disaster. As in *Atrahasis*, things fall apart when the gods or the people neglect their dictated duties—and the same goes for the king.

The woe of *Gilgamesh*'s Uruk is expressed as a collapse of proper behavior:

> The young men of Uruk [Gilgamesh] harries without warrant,
> Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father.
> By night and by day his tyranny grows harsher.[22]

And so is the sorrow of *Atrahasis*:

> When the fifth year came, daughter saw mother go in,
> But mother would not open her door to daughter.
> Daughter watched the scales when mother
> was sold into slavery,
> Mother watched the scales when daughter
> was sold into slavery.[23]

However different the trappings of these disaster-descriptions may be, core similarities remain: the rules of social interaction and obligation do not function as they should (king assaults subject, mother sells daughter). Status breaks down, people are not kept safe—and that reality by necessity extends to the gods, the king. As in

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[21] Ibid., 72.

[22] A. R. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 3.

[23] Foster, *Distant Days*, 66.

Atrahasis, *Gilgamesh*'s Mesopotamian deities depend upon the dependent. Like the breakdown of family depicted in the flood myth, *Gilgamesh*'s treatment of the king makes it clear that violations of the social contract can only end in misery: Gilgamesh's infamous, quixotic quest for immortality renders him ineffective and unremembered before a realization of proper place is reached.[24] For in the end, Gilgamesh's search for eternal youth is the ultimate act of hierarchical transgression: a mortal man cannot be a god. However mighty, a king is a king and nothing more—a king, we should note, who requires his people.

Lamentation in *Atrahasis* hinges on the destruction of an entire race, while the central sorrow of *Gilgamesh* stems from a more personal calamity (the loss of a beloved and the existential panic which ensues), but the communal depredations of the flood (*Atrahasis*) and the king's behavior (*Gilgamesh*) share a commonality of redress. Acceptance of status and its ark-building implications saves humankind in the former; a king's acknowledgment of his own less-than-divine rank in the latter is the element which brings peace.[25] Once again, it is proper place and its proper practices which allow for the restoration of order, the cessation of lamentation. That *Atrahasis*, *Enuma Elish*, and *Gilgamesh* all share similar conceptions of sorrow's expression and identity, then, seems almost unnecessary to note. In their sorrow Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu are sans order, sans city, sans civilization. Grief is attended—as in the flood myths as well as *The Poor Man of Nippur* and *The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*—by hierarchical disintegration and its woeful implications for the state of civilization.[26] And these native constructions of chaos and calamity are only strengthened and scaffolded by the literature which follows in the course of this essay: the city lament.

7. CITY LAMENTS

City laments, of which I shall discuss three, provide a more concrete, literal link between disaster and hierarchy than this paper has yet explored. In these laments, grief hews to the destruction of status systems *because a polity falls*. Civilization itself is put to the test, and its literal failure is telling. And while the causes of calamity are not always transparent (cf. *Righteous Sufferer*), impiety-as-disobedience features prominently, and destruction is expressed as an ailment of social order. Healthy hierarchy is required for the existence of a

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[24] George, *Gilgamesh*, 99.

[25] Ibid., 97-9.

[26] See George, *Gilgamesh*, 3; 63-71 for relevant characterizations of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

city: the inverse brings complete collapse. The critical nature of a stable, pious status system could not be more clear.

We begin, then, with the fragmentary *Lament for Eridu*. Four lines are missing from the opening of the document, but the first fully fleshed sentiment we read is one of divine dispossession. The "mother of E-m[?], holy Damgalnuna, left her city.........n Eridu everything was reduced to ruin, was wrought with confusion".[27] Given what we know of hierarchy and leadership by way of *Gilgamesh*, *Nippur*, *Enuma Elish*, and *Atrahasis*, we may infer that the loss of a god renders a polity like a headless chicken, blundering around blindly, causing and receiving ruin. So, it seems, would be the case. The curse "cast down [Eridu's] ziggurat.......into a heap of debris....... The house was defiled.[28] Corpses are mutilated, offerings are neglected, and "the hired man and the governor," the priests and priestesses—those of differing rank—are thrown together in the chaos.[29] Strangers are in the house, and wildness encroaches upon what once was city:

> The *ukulu* bird, bird of heart's sorrow, [made its nest in the] palace. The area became entangled in wild thornbushes.....[30]

There is no place for hierarchy in a godless, uncivilized land. The implied inverse of this sentiment is, of course, an affirmation of hierarchy's centrality to urbanized, pious life.

The Cursing of Akkad, our second text, opens with a portrait of heavenly favor, but like the fortunes of Eridu, the fates of the eponymous Akkad soon take a turn for the worse.[31] A description of surplus (the goddess "Inana filled Agade's stores for emmer wheat with gold, she filled its stores for white emmer wheat with silver") detailing the sumptuous, civilized luxuries acquired by the city gives way to unease. The "foreign lands [which] rested contentedly, [the people who] experienced happiness" were faced with a "disquieting message from the temple: "all Agade was reduced to trembling".[32] What follows is a sequence of divine

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[27] "The Lament for Eridug," Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 2003, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.6#, lines 11-18.

[28] "Eridug," Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, lines 39-47

[29] Ibid., lines 58-65.

[30] Ibid., lines 78-99.

[31] "The Cursing of Agade: Translation," Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 2001, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr215.htm, lines 1-9.

[32] "Agade", Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, lines 57-65.

revocations: Ninurta retakes his crown jewels, Utu his eloquence, Enki his wisdom, Anu his fearsomeness, and Inana her weapons.[33]

> The life of Agade's sanctuary was brought to an end as if it had been only the life of a tiny carp in the deep waters, and all the cities were watching it. Like a mighty elephant, it bent its neck to the ground while they all raised their horns like mighty bulls. Like a dying dragon, it dragged its head on the earth.[34]

Akkad's current king, Naram-Sin, embarks upon a mission of revenge, demolishing the Ekur (temple of the god Enlil) in an attempt to thwart the fate that has been decreed: "[h]e put axes against its top, and the temple, like a dead soldier, bowed its neck before him".[35] This act of sacrilege has everything to do with hierarchical norms: the gods are the top, as Gilgamesh's lesson informs us. Naram-Sin's insubordination presumes a divine authority held by a mortal, which cannot be.

The religious components of this disobedience deserve discussion. Naram-Sin, the trailblazing prototype of Mesopotamian self-deification, and his predecessor Sargon were treated with considerable ambivalence in ancient Near Eastern literary traditions.[36] Naram-Sin's image was that of Gilgamesh sans reform: the reorganization of social order required to fit a king into the hierarchical place of a god did not sit well within the existing Mesopotamian *weltanschauung*. It is this act of disruptive innovation which appears to have earned Naram-Sin his woeful place in *The Cursing of Akkad*. The text's attribution of the literal destruction of the Ekur to Akkad's king acts to reify Naram-Sin's figurative impiety.

Akkad's mythological attribution of temple desecration to Naram-Sin therefore has a real and reasonable backing within the mythological tradition. Both kings (Sargon and Naram-Sin) had acted against an established hierarchy, divine or otherwise; both kings' perceived mishandlings of Akkadian affairs were imputed to Naram-Sin. That the fall of a city and its attendant social structure is expressed as a collapse of heavenly order and divinely-dictated civilization is, then, only to be expected. And this rationalization of Akkad's demise further elucidates the place of belief in the Mesopotamian mind—and in Mesopotamian social structure. Nothing in this, to paraphrase Sophokles, was not god.

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[33] Ibid., lines 66-76.

[34] Ibid., lines 77-82.

[35] Ibid., lines 100-119.

[36] Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East: Ca. 3000-323 BC* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 73, 75, 78.

As in *Gilgamesh,* the role of holy wrath in Akkad's troubles has everything to do with civilization and its hierarchical organization. As the lament progresses, we learn that the city is deprived of agriculture, rationality, order (a veritable checklist of self-described Mesopotamian necessities).[37] "As if it had been before the time when cities were built or founded, the large walled tracts yielded no grain, the inundated tracts yielded no fish, the irrigated orchards yielded no syrup or wine".[38] Out of an impious rejection of proper place comes a complete loss of the prerequisites for urban life. The hierarchy and religion which backed it were, it is clear, considered by those behind the creation of *The Cursing of Akkad* to be both central and utterly necessary to civilization itself: without obedience to god and order, *all* systems were not go. "In those days, oil for a shekel was only half a litre, grain for one shekel was only half a litre, wool for one shekel was only one mina"; the economic basis for a civilized, stratified existence could not stand without its social and spiritual backing.[39] The societal structures which ensured fiscal stability were at risk—and the same went for life itself. "People were flailing at themselves from hunger"; ravenous dogs would wait on the streets to devour their masters. All reason was abandoned. "Honest people were confounded with traitors, heroes lay dead on top of heroes, and the blood of traitors ran upon the blood of honest men".[40] What a telling, emblematic image indeed. Every aspect of Akkadian existence, from religion to agriculture to economy, was tied in this text to hierarchy and its heavenly scaffolding.

One specific element of Akkad's wretched fate demands particular attention. Among the god Enlil's primary punishments is the infliction of a foreign people upon the city. Enlil "brought out of the mountains

> those who do not resemble other people, who are not reckoned as part of its land, the Gutians, an unbridled people, with human intelligence but canine instincts and monkey's features.[41]

It is these people who are held responsible for the fallow fields and falling walls. And while this foisting of blame onto the backs of the so-called Gutians may appear to transfer some focus away from Naram-Sin's breach of the divine social contract, the nature of the 'Gutians' serves to reinforce the strength of a hierarchical

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[37] Cf. George, *Gilgamesh,* 148.

[38] "Agade", Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, lines 149-175.

[39] Ibid., line 176.

[40] Ibid., lines 176-192. Cf. "The Lament for Sumer and Urim," Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 2003, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.3#, lines 104-111: "traitors would lie on top of loyal men and the blood of traitors flow upon loyal men." Moral hierarchy, it seems, was not ignored.

[41] Ibid., lines 149-175. See also "The Lament for Sumer and Urim," Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 2003, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.3#, lines 143-154; 225-234.

explanation: the bogeyman of the Akkadian lament were men with little order to speak of. As agents of chaos and destruction, what better than a semi-nomadic mountain people with a social matrix nigh incomprehensible to the meticulously ordered Mesopotamians?[42] Depictions of a structureless, heretical people destroying the divine framework of Akkad form a conveniently symmetrical picture: the locating of Naram-Sin as heretic-in-chief and inclusion of Gutian raiders act to bind together threads of religion, civilization, and hierarchy. That the infliction of a literal plague of *un*civilization (the Gutians) is positioned as an exercise of *divine* wrath further underscores the place of belief in ever-present ideas of social order—and in order's absence. A lack of civilization indicates a lack (or disorder) of hierarchy; a lack of hierarchy indicates a lack of gods. And in the end, the city is no more:

> On its canal bank tow-paths, the grass grew long. On its highways laid for wagons, the grass of mourning grew. . . . On its plains, where fine grass grew, now the reeds of lamentation grew. Agade's flowing fresh water flowed as brackish water. When someone decided, "I will dwell in that city!", he could not enjoy the pleasures of a dwelling place. When someone decided, "I will rest in Agade!", he could not enjoy the pleasures of a resting place![43]

Urban community has fallen into ruin.

The *Lament for Uruk*, like that of Akkad, contains a reckoning with heavenly disfavor in its early stanzas. Echoes of *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* appear in its treatment of punishment ("mortal man multiplied to become as numerous as the gods", reads the fourth line), but the element of real concern to us is the nature of Uruk's woe. As is by now to be expected, destruction cleaves to disorder of a social sort. Good sense leaves the city, and "mob panic" reigns.[44] After an extended section of fragmentary text, the narrative resumes with a description of madness incarnate:

> The faithful cowherds themselves overturned every single cowpen. The chief shepherds themselves burned every sheepfold. . . they drenched the fields with water, they turned the city into a swamp.[45]

Uruk's *own citizens* are implicated in her fall. Hierarchically dictated duties are not merely abandoned, they are *inverted.* Revolt leads to the ruination of the city—an ultimate condemnation of disordered disobedience. As in *Atrahasis*, every man must do what he ought; the alternative is quite literally the local collapse of civilization itself. Even the gods are expelled, and must resort to an undignified, decidedly un-Mesopotamian nomadic

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[42] See Van De Mieroop, *A History*, 76.

[43] "Agade", Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, lines 272-280.

[44] Ibid., lines 21-7.

[45] Ibid., lines 10-20. Also cf. lines 100-111.

exile: "all its most important gods evacuated Unug, they kept away from it. They hid out in the hills and wandered about in the haunted plains".[46] That the pinnacle of Uruk's social matrix is lost and forced to live *like the loathed Gutians* (again invoked in lines 51-65) once again indicates a preoccupation with proper hierarchical roles and the effects of their absence. The toppling of Uruk is total, from the top (the dispossessed gods) to the bottom (the rebellious masses). "Oh, Sumer! Alas—your spirit! Alas—your structure! Alas—your people!"[47]

8. A CONCLUSION

The literal collapse chronicled in these three preceding city laments provides a concrete tie to which my analysis of disaster and its reflection in actual civic disintegration may be affixed. In the laments for Akkad, Eridu, and Uruk, the multidimensional roles of hierarchy and religion in the proper functioning of every aspect of civilization are fully realized—and are associated with a literal collapse of society and its religious grounding. But the insights provided by the poems, dialogs and flood myths discussed in the first half of this paper are no less critical. In *The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, disaster results in the instability of an individual's status. In *The Babylonian Theodicy*, calamity is not only expressed as a hierarchical turmoil: it caused by it. In *The Poor Man of Nippur*, *Enuma Elish*, and *Gilgamesh*, the outline of a Mesopotamian conception of cross-hierarchical cooperation and common dependence becomes clear—as does the role of religion in social security and security's absence.

From these many Mesopotamian treatments of disaster, an holistic image of self-described structure emerges. Sorrow is attended and caused by breaches of hierarchy. Social order is back-ended by religion; status-based disobedience constitutes impiety. Robust systems of rank are central to well-being, cities, existence itself; a lack thereof entails a revocation of divine favor and the collapse of urbanized life in its entirety. The import of hierarchy is clear: a stable, pious social matrix functioning to the benefit of each echelon was all but imperative. For in the ancient Near Eastern mind, a disorder of status could bring nothing but ruin.

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[46] Ibid., lines 21-33.

[47] Ibid., lines 44-50.

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