
Rosetta

Konstantopoulos , G.; Jan J.W. Lisman. *Cosmogony, Theogony, and Anthropogeny in Sumerian Texts*. Vol. 409 of *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013)

Rosetta **18**: 80 – 83

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue18/Konstantopoulos.pdf>

**Jan J.W. Lisman. *Cosmogony, Theogony, and Anthropogeny
in Sumerian Texts. Vol. 409 of *Alter Orient und Altes
Testament*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013, pp. 422. ISBN 978-3-
86835-095-1. \$115***

*Reviewed by Gina Konstantopoulos
Institute for the Study of the Ancient World*

The present work is a publication of the author's 2013 doctoral dissertation, completed under the similar title "At the beginning... Cosmogony, theogony and anthropogeny in Sumerian texts of the third and second millennium BCE." Though the title has altered slightly from dissertation to monograph, the core contexts of the work remain very similar, and the dissertation's original title stands as a more accurate reflection of the monograph's contents, as Lisman's work concentrates on texts from Abū Ṣalābīḥ ca. 2500 BCE continuing through to the Kassite period, though the majority of his analysis is rooted in works no later than the Old Babylonian period. Lisman outlines his aims from the very outset of his work, presenting five central considerations for the present study: 1) a discussion of texts concerning origins and beginnings, in light of the present dearth of such studies; 2) constructing a comparative map of Sumerian as opposed to Akkadian motifs within these texts; 3) revisions and editions, as necessary, of all existing translations; 4) the creation of a diachronic survey of these texts; and 5) the interpretation of mythological aetiologies through the lens of structural analysis.

Having outlined the contextual aims of his work, Lisman divides the work structurally into four chapters, with the addition of several post-chapter excursus, and an epilogue, before continuing with editions of the different texts he has discussed in his work. The introduction contained in chapter one presents a basic overview of past work on Sumerian cosmologies. Lisman introduces his diachronic aims from the very outset, by presenting a brief sketch of the different periods pertinent to his study, before moving through the particular scholars who have introduced and discussed such topics before,

particularly the relevant works of van Dijk, Pettinato, and Lambert, identifying the works of each with the themes of "the cosmic motif," anthropogeny, and theogony, respectively. The chapter halts abruptly, as little of the author's own thought on these three scholars is seen before moving immediately into the next chapter. Though the summary of the work of previous scholars is sound, the rough edges of Lisman's work show through at points such as these.

In the following two chapters Lisman introduces the bulk of his evidence, in the form of Sumerian texts (chapter two) and god lists (chapter three). Lisman presents his text with the aim of discussing their content and not "in a philological way" (23), which stands as the aim of the text editions contained in the work's appendix. First and foremost, it must be noted that the author's work is extensive, and his dedicated work in collecting and compiling these various texts is a boon to future work on cosmologies, and is to thus be commended. Each text is first presented and then discussed in brief, with particular aspects considered in the author's analysis and the texts treated as a whole following section 2.2 (64). It is only here that Lisman discusses the texts diachronically as compared with one another, and this is cursory when compared to the discussion of the texts as individual elements. Thus, though the texts are presented thoroughly, the works are not given their full temporal context, with all that that entails and in comparison to each other. This is a deficiency seen with the texts as discussed individually, for example, when Lisman presents his first text, IAS 114 (23), with the commentary that the particular actions of the heavens and earths are seen in an Akkadian Neo-Assyrian text. Given the great distance between these two examples, more of the author's own reasoning and analysis behind presenting them in concert with one another would be welcome. The author's translations of texts are predominantly correct but with slightly stilted or curious word choices, such as the following translation: ama-ĝu₁₀ mud mu-ĝar-ra-zu i-ĝal₂-la-am₃ as "My mother, when the creature which you have suggested exists." Although the essence of the line is similar, rendering the latter half as "...you have established comes into being" would present both a smoother English translation and a more accurate translation of the Sumerian.

Lisman begins his chapter on divine names and gods lists with a brief sketch of the work of previous scholars, before presenting and discussing the texts themselves, most of which, in contrast to the texts of the previous chapter, are from the second millennium BCE. Lisman acknowledges the potential pitfalls of "'backward reading' – the use of later text materials to explain older ones" (104) as well as his own means of working around the concern – an essential point as much of his own analysis in this chapter focuses on the god list An=Anum. What follows is a discussion of the many of the particular gods found within both An=Anum and the other divine lists.

Chapters two and three serve as the foundation for chapter four, wherein Lisman focuses on his own analysis, particularly concerning the diachronic development of these cosmogonic themes over the course of the texts studied. Lisman proceeds once more through the texts in chronological order, organized by period but following several central themes, such as the role and actions of the heavens and earth (an and ki) within the texts, and the function and identity of groups of seven associated with different pairings of deities, the former taking precedence in the discussion. From section 4.5 onwards, the author introduces Akkadian creation myths, principally *enūma eliš*, in what is an interesting but regrettably brief discussion. In a similar vein, though the closing sections within the epilogue concerning comparative cosmologies in the ancient Near East outside of Mesopotamia are interesting, the excursus intrudes on Lisman's own analysis, which merits more focus at the close of his work.

Roughly the latter half of the work is devoted to text editions and, secondarily, god lists. Although many of the abbreviations used, both here and throughout the work, are fairly standard within the conventions of Assyriology, the inclusion of an overall list of abbreviations would not go amiss. While my previous comment on the nature of Lisman's translations stands, the commentaries on the text editions in this section are welcome additions. In his presentation of the divine lists culled from the texts discussed in chapter three, Lisman has also presented their meanings, as he terms it (353-62). This itself echoes the author's first discussion of the meanings of particular divine names in chapter three (118). Though interesting, in both instances they merit greater

discussion as to their own significance and as to how the author arrived at several of the translations.

The scope of Lisman's work is extensive, speaking to the depth and exhaustive nature of his own research. His work is meticulously structured, with the segments of his overall argument slotting together into a cohesive whole. Although Lisman's work has undeniable rough edges, both in the author's writing and his own Sumerian translations, which are likely rooted in the work's close connection to its origins as a dissertation, it is nevertheless an exhaustive and valuable collection and presentation of the available evidence that both supports the analysis of the author and serves as a point for future work on the topic.