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Review: David T. Sugimoto (ed.) 2014. *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar – Astarte – Aphrodite*. Fribourg, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis. Pp XIV & 234 pages. 65,00 CHF (approx. £42.00). (ISBN 978-3-7278-1748-9 (Hbk)).

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The question of the connection between these three goddesses is fairly undisputed; it has been common academic practice to assume some connection between Ištar, Astarte and Aphrodite, either culturally or linguistically. This book, formed of papers from a conference of the same name, claims to create an open discussion between the academics from the different fields of Mesopotamian, Syrian and Greek ancient history and archaeology, with the hopes that the discussion will lead to conclusions about connections between the deities. As a Sumerologist with a specific interest in Inanna and female deities, the reviewer was keen to see what light this volume could shed on the nature of goddesses in question. It achieves this with varying degree of success. The articles chosen for review from the collection are the two Ištar articles and one of the Astarte articles, as their context is most closely related to the reviewer's own research.

Ištar and Other Goddesses of the So-Called “Sacred Marriage” in Ancient Mesopotamia

Eiko Matsushima p1-14

The focus of this article is the ‘Sacred Marriage’, a topic that is hotly debated. It takes the Sumerian ritual, and compares it to the other divine marriages in Mesopotamian mythology. Some of the conclusions are interesting and require further thought, such as the author's argument that statues were used in the performance of Sacred Marriage rite and that female deities were used to increase the political power of the kings. They also allow us to see further comparisons that need to be made between Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian attitudes towards women. Having said this,

certain conclusions – or the lack thereof – show a defeatist attitude that is not conducive to academic discussion. There are misunderstandings about a great deal of the debate surrounding the Sacred Marriage, which seem to stem from a lack of primary and secondary research. Evidence of this can be seen in a reliance on Sefati's translations of the so-called 'love songs', which is an issue because of his biased translations of the texts, as well as Matsushima's failure to reference Jacobsen¹ in a discussion on ritual as drama. Matsushima also has a habit of looking at the culture of the Sacred Marriage through the filter of Assyrian and Babylonian culture, which is unwise if one is attempting to understand Sumerian culture itself, rather than the Assyrian perception of the Sumerians. Referring to Inanna and Ištar consistently as the same deity prevents an understanding of the development of the nature of the goddess through different periods. This has led to a jumbled idea of what each goddess represented to those that worshipped her. As a study into the Sumerian Sacred Marriage, the reviewer would advise researchers to look elsewhere for opinions on practice and purpose, although it is certainly worth reading if one wishes to learn more about the possible dramatic elements of the rite. It is more useful as a comparison between divine marriages in Mesopotamia, owing to its discussion on divine marriages in the second and first millennia, although it is questionable whether that was its intention.

As part of a discussion on the role of Ištar, this article can be useful. That is, if the reader is sufficiently informed to distinguish Inanna from Ištar. It does, however, focus more on the comparison between the two types of marriage, and as such may not be entirely relevant to the topic of Ištar –Astarte – Aphrodite.

“In the Shadow of Thy Wings”: A Review of the Winged Goddess in Ancient
Near Eastern Iconography

Akio Tsukimoto p15-31

This is principally a list of winged goddess figures throughout western Asia. Little to no analysis is present within the article itself, leading to confident statements that are

¹ Jacobsen, T. 1975, 'Religious Drama in Ancient Mesopotamia' in Goedicke, H. and Roberts, J.J.M. (eds.) *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, Baltimore and London. P 65-97. This is one of the fundamental discussions on sacred rite as drama and a good source for thoughts on Sacred Marriage.

unsupported by argument. Interesting discussions that could have been held on the identification of the figure are omitted, either because the author finds the discussion unimportant due to his certainty that she is Ištar, or because he prioritises the catalogue over the discussion. For this purpose it can be said to be very useful. A large number of sources representing the winged deities are collected here, and for the purposes of studying the winged deity, this will be valuable. Having said this, the images of the artefacts are grainy, and it is difficult at times to see details. Better copies can be found with a quick google search and, as other images throughout the book are of better quality, it is unclear if this is an editing or a printing issue. Another discussion that is almost entirely omitted from the article is the reason for the permeation of winged female deities and how and why we can see this in a wide range of cultures. While Tsukimoto hints at this discussion on the last page, by making comparisons to text and depictions of YHWH and the Madonna, it is not built upon. We do see some argument in the concluding statements, but these are not supported by the evidence discussed within the article.

Assuming that Tsukimoto is correct and these figures at least start out life as Ištar, this discussion would be very relevant. An examination of the evolution of the iconography of Ištar, along with where it was appropriated and why would be very interesting when looking at the development of the goddess. Unfortunately, due to the lack of analysis and argument, this article does not truly fulfil its potential and it is therefore up to others to use this evidence to discuss the goddesses' 'transformation'.

Atthart in Late Bronze Age Syrian Texts

Mark S. Smith p33 – 85

The reviewer found this article initially dense and impenetrable. As an article in a multi-disciplinary book, it did very little to provide context to the goddess Atthart, or the large number of texts and discussions to which it made reference. The start of the article did not seem to follow any order, and this was also seen in the conclusion, where a figure depicting a pottery shrine was featured without any discussion.

Having said this, once the article got going, it was interesting. From section 2 onwards it was divided with subtitles, by subject, and this was much easier to follow.

Each subsection was summed up adequately and, even though a layman may not understand the intent and importance of each text individually, their significance to the larger discussion could be clearly understood. Throughout the article translations were provided alongside transliterations, and discussions were held on the translations. This would be extremely useful to those coming to this catalogue for the translations or linguistic appraisals. In fact the article is useful to a wide range of people, as all points and debates are discussed thoroughly, with footnotes and references leading to further study on all of the sections and subsections. Although to someone looking at it for comparisons to Inanna and Ištar it may seem slightly dense, and at times the footnotes invade the page, this thorough catalogue was interesting and informative.

With sections entitled 'religion and cult devoted to the goddess', 'the goddess as a figure of hunting and warfare', 'the goddess' relations to other deities', 'the goddess' attribute animal' and 'Athtart's contacts with goddesses of other regions', it is not difficult to see how this could be valuable. Comparisons are made to Assyrian, Canaanite, Phoenician, Egyptian, Greek, Ugaritic, Emaric, Mari, Israelite and Biblical texts, making this a useful catalogue for anyone wanting to look at the similarities and differences between the goddesses in question.

On reading the book as a whole, there is a sense of the evolution and relationships between these deities. One could argue that the topic was most adequately presented in the final article, 'Before Kypris was Aphrodite' by Stephanie L Budin, which is the only article truly focused on the 'transformation' of one goddess to another. Two other articles, *"In the Shadow of thy Wings"* and *Astarte in New Kingdom Egypt*, also focused on the evolution of ideas. The rest of the articles are more focussed on their own particular deity, with Matsushima and Cornelius' "Revisiting" Astarte in the Iconography of the Bronze Age Levant' being the least relevant to the wider debate.

The editing of the volume is patchy. The 'List of Contributors' at the beginning is very useful for the reader and the order of the volume is sensible; it is presented chronologically, allowing the reader some sense of context when studying the contents. However, the four sections outlined in the preface cannot be seen within

the book itself, making it difficult to see the change of topics as one reads. This is especially difficult with Astarte, as she is the subject of several of these sections. There was no evidence of the titular goddesses in the index, which makes it difficult to see which articles reference multiple goddesses in comparison. This may be to reduce the size of the index, but it should be compensated in some way in order for it to be practical to those studying comparisons between particular goddesses. Even more frustrating is that the emphasis is not evenly spread between the three deities. Those interested in studying Aphrodite will be disappointed to find only one article of nine discusses her in any great depth. Another disappointment is the use of English. The preface claims that the English of non-native speakers was checked, but frequently the language feels awkward or incorrect. The most amusing example of this is the reference to a depiction of 'a female genital'.

Transformation of a Goddess is best used by those seeking to broaden their already existing knowledge of these deities. It is particularly of use to those interested in finding material and literary evidence of Astarte, and for those looking for further reading on her. Those hoping to use this book to learn about the development of these deities will be disappointed to learn that an entire reading will provide only the vaguest sense of how Ištar came to be associated with Aphrodite, through Astarte. The Mesopotamian articles show that further research and discussion is needed into these areas by these scholars and the wider field. As such, the reviewer would recommend this book only to those with an already deep understanding of Ištar, Astarte and Aphrodite, looking for further discussion and evidence, and not to those new to the field.