

OFFPRINT FROM

*Reconsidering the Concept of
Revolutionary Monotheism*

Edited by

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Winona Lake, Indiana

EISENBRAUNS

2011

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www.eisenbrauns.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reconsidering the concept of revolutionary monotheism / edited by Beate
Pongratz-Leisten.

Proceedings of a conference held in Feb. 2007 at Princeton University.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-1-57506-199-3 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Monotheism. 2. God. I. Pongratz-Leisten, Beate.

BL221.R43 2011

211'.34—dc22

2011010053

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1984.Ⓢ™

Gods and Scholars: Mapping the Pantheon in Early Mesopotamia

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Nicht umsonst haben die Alten das
Pantheon des Vereinbaren den Göttern
oder Ideen vorbehalten, die Kunstwerke
aber zum Agon genötigt, eines Todfeind
dem andern.

—Adorno, *Minima moralia* §47

. . . und Winke sind
Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter.

—F. Hölderlin, “Rousseau”

The Pantheon and Its Sources

It was through the various deities in the pantheon that religion was experienced and public cult performed in Mesopotamia. This pantheon, however, is an archaeological reconstruction predicated on the available sources, which are as diverse as they are inherently uneven: ritual texts, literary compositions, god lists, royal inscriptions, historical texts of various sorts, administrative documents, the onomasticon, and so forth. The inventory resulting from compiling all theonyms attested in all these various sources is called the pantheon of that period or city. Modern scholars are quite aware of the fact that each city or geographical area had its own pantheon and that specific panthea did evolve and change through time.¹ Moreover, each of these corpora

Author's note: The author must thank Beate Pongratz-Leisten for her kind invitation to participate in the symposium at which an earlier version of this contribution was presented and for her thoughtful comments on the subject. For the few abbreviations used throughout this contribution, see the list included at the end.

1. To mention only a few useful studies, see Selz 1995 (Early Dynastic Lagash); Pomponio and Xella 1997 (Ebla); Myers 2002 (Sippar); Beaulieu 2003 (Neo-Babylonian Uruk); Such-Gutiérrez 2003 (third-millennium Nippur) and 2005–6 (third-millennium Adab); Richter 2004 (Old Babylonian period).



(rituals, inscriptions, onomasticon, etc.) may also bear witness to a specific pantheon, and, therefore, the simple addition of all these panthea to construct a single pantheon often entails a simplification of an otherwise sundry religious, devotional, and cultic landscape.² As Komoróczy (1976) noted, the panthea attested in cultic texts, literary compositions, and god lists correspond to different spheres of religious experience.³

Over four decades ago, Leo Oppenheim (1977: 171–83) laid out the problems that made it inadvisable to write a general treatment of “Mesopotamian religion” as a whole. These problems fit into two categories: (1) the nature of the evidence, which, for instance, is particularly rich in regard to the religious practices of the elites but not so for those of the commoners and general populace; and (2) the conceptual barriers that prevent modern Westerners from fully understanding an ancient and culturally alien polytheistic religion.⁴ Nevertheless, a modicum of information about popular religiosity and individual piety is provided by theophoric personal names, even if the onomasticon is always subjected to all sorts of fads and social conventions.

Administrative documents, royal inscriptions, and ritual compositions reflect mostly the domain of the official cult (city gods, royal pantheon).⁵ In contrast, the theological preoccupations of learned scribes shaped god lists and the mythological pantheon of literary compositions. Even if some of the latter may ultimately have stemmed from ancient oral traditions, their mere selection and inclusion in a curriculum or a canon would imply their placement within a specific theological—and theopolitical—framework.⁶ On the other hand, if one is looking for evidence of popular religion and private devotion, the onomasticon seems more likely to give us a glimpse into this sphere of the religious experience.⁷ Moreover, some of these corpora seem to occupy opposite

2. On the various sources and realms pertaining to the pantheon or panthea, see Sallaberger 2004a: 300–305; Richter 2004: 4–23.

3. Komoróczy (1976: 86) argued that “die schriftlichen Quellen, die sich über die Welt der mesopotamischen Götter äussern, müssen zuerst immer unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihrer gattungseigenen Züge untersucht werden; jede Literaturgattung, jede Art von Quellen legt ja von einem selbständigen Gebiet des religiösen Denkens, des religiösen Weltbildes Zeugnis ab.”

4. For different approaches to the matter of cultural translatability of religious categories, see Assmann 1997 and Smith 2008

5. For a detailed study of the official cult during Ur III on the basis of the administrative corpus, see Sallaberger 1993.

6. Marduk’s role in Babylon and the very composition of the *Enūma eliš* provide an example of the political theology shaping the pantheon and its literary reflection; see Lambert 1964, 1984; Sommerfeld 1982; Michalowski 1990.

7. In this regard, Selz (1995: 14) stresses the importance of the onomasticon in spite of the difficulties posed by its study: “Obwohl die Eigennamen von philolo-



3200–2900	Uruk III and Jemdet Naşr	
2900–2340	Early Dynastic I–II Early Dynastic III (2600–2340)	
2340–2150	Sargonic Period	
2100–2000	Ur III	
2000–1600	Old Babylonian	Old Assyrian
1600–1000	Middle Babylonian	Middle Assyrian
1000–	Neo-Babylonian (–539) Late Babylonian (539–ca. 100 C.E.)	Neo-Assyrian (–612)

Basic Sketch of Mesopotamian Historical Periods

ends of the spectrum: the main manifestations of the scribal religious ideology (literary compositions and god lists) on one side and the onomasticon on the other. Thus, an attempt at using the different panthea in early (particularly in Early Dynastic) Mesopotamia in order to distinguish between various registers of religiosity should focus on these two major genres of scribal production (literature and god lists) as well as the deities attested in personal names.⁸

Mesopotamian Lists

Among the cultural traditions of the Ancient Near East, the vast corpus of Mesopotamian cuneiform texts offers a broad array of genres. For a span of almost three millennia, Mesopotamian sites abound in economic and administrative documents, historical inscriptions, and epistolary archives of all sorts. Certain periods, such as the Old Babylonian and the Neo-Assyrian, have yielded a large number of mythological narratives and religious liturgies, as well as stories on legendary kings (Gilgamesh, Lugalbanda, Enmerkar) and fictionalized accounts of historical kings (Sargon of Akkad, Narām-Sîn, Tukulti-Ninurta I). The practical and the literary uses of writing ran parallel to the creation of an extensive body of scholarship, particularly rich in astronomical, astrological, mathematical, medical, and magical texts, including series of various kinds of omens (e.g., liver, house, and celestial omens). In regard to series, listing in itself not only constituted a textual device in accounting documents or a literary trope in poetic compositions but also

gischer Seite die einzig mögliche Quelle für eine Kenntnis der Volksreligion darstellen, wird man nach dem dargelegten Befund kaum auf tiefere Einblicke in sie hoffen dürfen.”

8. For an example of the way the various sources of information about the pantheon interact in the study of its origins, see Archi 1973.



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was a major genre in the world of Mesopotamian textual production. Many realms of scholarship were given written form as lists of entries that followed the sequence protasis plus apodosis (“if A . . . then B”). These series include omens of all sorts, astronomical and astrological writings, and collections of legal formulations.⁹

The epitome of this genre as a mode of textualization can be found in the so-called lexical lists. These lists appear already among the archaic texts from Uruk and Jemdet Našr. There, one finds the earlier witnesses of some lexical lists attested in later periods, the beginning of a tradition that would be copied, expanded, and transmitted for nearly 3,000 years by scholars in Mesopotamia and in all regions in which Mesopotamian cuneiform was used: Susa in Iran; Hattusa (the Hittite capital); various cities in Syria (Ebla, Ugarit, Emar) and Eastern Anatolia (Alalah); and even Amarna, the Egyptian capital during the 18th Dynasty.¹⁰ For instance, the archaic lists include a forerunner of the Early Dynastic lists of professions later on known as LU₂ A (ED LU₂ A), the sign LU₂ corresponding to the Sumerian word for ‘person’. The Archaic LU₂ A list is attested in almost 200 tablets and fragments in the early third millennium only, including 165 from the archaic Uruk period.¹¹ In Early Dynastic II (2700–2600), LU₂ A is attested in several fragments belonging to the corpus of archaic cuneiform texts from Ur. In Early Dynastic III, one can speak properly of the Early Dynastic LU₂ A list (ED LU₂ A), which is well attested throughout southern Mesopotamia (Fāra, Abū Ṣalābīḥ, Lagash, Nippur, and Tell Brak), as well as Ebla in northern Syria.¹² The same Early Dynastic list continued to be copied later on. In the Sargonic period, ED LU₂ A is attested in a hexagonal prism from Lagash and in fragments from Adab and Susa. In Ur III, this list appears

9. On diverse aspects of Mesopotamian lists, their nature, and their relations with other genres, see, for instance, Civil 1987a, 2009; Veldhuis 1997, 2004; Kienast 1999, 2003; Rubio 2003; 2009a: 167–69.

10. For overviews of the Mesopotamian lexical tradition, see Cavigneaux 1980–83 and Civil 1995. Besides the essential series MSL, a useful online resource is Niek Veldhuis’s Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts (DCCLT): <http://cdl.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/>.

11. See ATU 3 pp. 14–18, 69–85; CUSAS 1.9–10; Englund 1998: 83–90, 103–6.

12. See MSL 12 pp. 4–12; MEE 3 pp. 3–25; Arcari 1982, 1983; Krebernik 1998: 316, 327, 340; Michalowski 2003. An ED witness of LU₂ A from Lagash is a small lenticular tablet (DP 337) with the first two entries of the list written twice (ŠITA. GIŠ.NAM₂ / NAM₂.TUKU ‘ruler/namtuku-official’), once on the obverse and again on the reverse, in a typical exercise in which a student copied the model written by a teacher. An ED fragment from Nippur (OSP 1.11) is probably from an exercise tablet as well, although not a lenticular one but, rather, a thick piece of clay (Westenholz 1975a: 14).



in at least two joining fragments from Nippur.¹³ Later on, one also finds about half a dozen Old Babylonian tablets with ED LU₂ A from Nippur and Ur.¹⁴ During the entire third millennium, LU₂ A exhibits a rather homogeneous recensional history (Arcari 1982: 55). In spite of our limited knowledge of LU₂ A for some early periods and places, it seems that the archaic Ur fragments are closer to the archaic Uruk fragments, whereas the Early Dynastic witnesses tend to depart from the archaic examples more often.¹⁵ This justifies the distinction between Archaic LU₂ A and ED LU₂ A. In the Early Dynastic period, the Fāra manuscripts are closer to those from Ebla than to those from Abū Šalābiḥ, which points to some degree of recensional flux.

Lexical lists did evolve through time, often quite substantially. Most of these changes are linked to their function within the educational system. In the Old Babylonian period, the apprentices of scribes would copy lexical texts in an order reflecting an increasing level of difficulty: simple lists of syllabic signs and name lists; the encyclopedic compendium of series of objects, plants, and animals known as HAR-ra = *hubullu* ('debt, loan'), also known simply as HAR-ra or ur₅-ra; the *diri* list, which contains compound signs, whose reading cannot be easily deduced from their elements (*diri* 'to exceed, excess' is written SIA), and so forth. Nevertheless, in spite of the death of Sumerian by the end of the third millennium, the Old Babylonian copies of most lexical lists are still monolingual; the Old Babylonian *diri* list (Proto-*diri*) is one of the few exceptions in already including Akkadian translations.¹⁶ In general, these lists did not begin to add an Akkadian column with translations of the Sumerian entries until several centuries after the death of Sumerian as a spoken language. The early lexical tablets, from the third millennium to the Old Babylonian period, exhibit only one-half of the lexical tradition, the written part (the Sumerian terms), whereas the Akkadian meanings were communicated by the teacher orally and passed from generation to generation within the scribal milieu.¹⁷ The translation column became mandatory only toward the end of the second millennium, precisely when the texts of these lexical lists, until then in flux,

13. The Ur III fragments of LU₂ A correspond to the excavation numbers 6N-T746 + 6N-T747. The abbreviation 6N-T refers to the sixth season of excavations at Nippur.

14. For the Old Babylonian fragments from Ur, see Civil 1983: 1 n. 2; UET 6/3.682, and UET 7.86.

15. Two archaic fragments of ED LU₂ A (CUSAS 1.9–10) are unprovenanced and could perhaps come from Jemdet Našr instead of Uruk.

16. On the death of Sumerian during Ur III, see, for instance, Rubio 2006b.

17. See Veldhuis 1997: 131–35; 1998. On writtleness versus orality in Mesopotamian scribal traditions, see Rubio 2009a.



were fixed and standardized, well after manuscripts of these lists had begun to appear outside Mesopotamia, in places as distant as Hattusa, Emar, Ugarit, Alalah, and Amarna. Still, there is an important exception to the monolingual nature of third-millennium lexical lists: Ebla (Tell Mardih), a city that blossomed during the Early Dynastic III and early Sargonic periods in northern Syria. In this city, in which Sumerian was only a scribal language, there is an important bilingual list known as the Vocabulary of Ebla (*Vocabolario di Ebla*). This vocabulary contains Sumerian words and their Eblaite translations.¹⁸

The importance of lists in the Mesopotamian scholarly and scholastic tradition has led some to use the term *Listenwissenschaft*, which was intended as a pejorative label, as opposed to the allegedly more discursive nature of Greek science.¹⁹ Moreover, Mesopotamian lists have attracted the interest of some anthropologists. In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Jack Goody (1977) turned to Mesopotamian lexical texts as an example of the role played by lists in the conceptual processes leading to the written word and the *domestication* of orality.²⁰ However, lists are a specific symptom of neither literacy nor writing. The *Iliad*, whose compositional prehistory most likely belonged to an oral tradition, articulates some of its narrative knots around lists. In Book II, the Catalogue of Ships (*neôn catálogos*) displays the typical characteristics of Homeric diction. As Edzard Visser (1997) has pointed out in his book *Homers Katalog der Schiffe*, the geographical repertoire of settlements represented in the Achaean contingent was most likely progressively increased by performers trying to appeal to local audiences of the epic. This challenges an essential feature of lists as written devices in Goody's characterization: that the constitutive feature of a list is a boundary with clearly defined limits. Goody's lists are closed enumerations. However, lists tend to behave both as templates and as hypertexts. For instance, in Book IX of the *Iliad*, Achilles responds to the repetitive language of the list of gifts sent by Agamemnon. Since the amount of gifts and responses is finite, this would appear to be a perfect example of Goody's closed lists, and thus, most enumerations in written literary works. However, as Michael Lynn-George (1988: 106–22) has noted, rather than a closed inventory, the list of gifts from Agamemnon and

18. Eblaite is another East Semitic language closely related to the Akkadian dialectal bundle; see Rubio 2006a. On the Vocabulary of Ebla, see MEE 4 pp. 115–343; Conti 1990.

19. For a discussion of the term *Listenwissenschaft* and its shortcomings when applied to Mesopotamia, see Veldhuis 1997: 137–39.

20. On Goody's approach to Mesopotamian lists, see Veldhuis 1997: 140–42.

Achilles' response to the catalog's enumeration are "a verbal storehouse from which the listener may make choices."

Against Goody's assumptions, lists are not necessarily written devices nor is there a sharp dichotomy between orality and literacy. The anthropologist Carlo Severi (2004: 111–184; 2009) has shown that lists of a scholarly or religious nature are not limited to written traditions and that societies without writing can develop essentially pictographic and iconographic modes of listing and archiving knowledge. Furthermore, the same text can have both oral and written incarnations within the same historical and social setting. For instance, as mentioned above, many monolingual lexical lists from Mesopotamia became bilingual within a teaching performance in which the instructor would provide the students with the Akkadian translation of the Sumerian entries. Thus, even schools themselves, to which one goes to learn to read and write, are also the domain of the teacher's speech, a place for the oral schooling in writing.

God Lists and the Mesopotamian Pantheon

Mesopotamian god lists constitute a particularly interesting case of interface between the oral and written domains in the religious realm. The first Mesopotamian god lists are attested in the Early Dynastic period, at Fāra and Abū Šalābīḥ.²¹ Later on, we find god lists in Ur III, the Old Babylonian period, first-millennium Assyria, and peripheral areas such as Sultan Tepe in the late Neo-Assyrian period (ancient Huzirina, near Edessa, in Anatolia).²² These god lists are not all local copies and adaptations of single archetypes or forerunners, as god lists did not constitute a homogeneous scholarly tradition the way that lexical lists did. However, one widely copied god list did become a standard of sorts after the Old Babylonian period. The list known as AN : *Anum* is well preserved already in two Middle Assyrian copies made by the same scribe, Kidin-Šîn, during the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076).²³ There is already a small Kassite fragment of this list (SLT 121). Moreover, the

21. See Krebernik 1986; Alberti 1985; Mander 1986. On god lists in general, see Lambert 1957–71; Litke 1998: 1–6.

22. Within the Ur III corpus, there is at least one god list inscribed on a prism, of which a fragment is preserved (6N-T930), alongside a list of deities and shrines (6N-T620). On Old Babylonian god lists, see Richter 2004: 11–20; Peterson 2009. On first-millennium lists, see Lambert 1957–71: 477–78.

23. On AN : *Anum*, see Lambert 1957–71: 475–77; 1975: 195–98; Litke 1998. As with the bilingual (Sumero-Akkadian) copies of some Sumerian literary compositions found in Nineveh and Assur, the context for the transmission of the list AN : *Anum* to Assyria must be found in the forays into Babylonia on the part of the Assyrian kings Tukulti-Ninurta I and Tiglath-pileser I. See Rubio 2009b: 42.



colophons of the two Middle Assyrian copies of AN : *Anum* mention that Kidin-Sin wrote and collated (*ištur ibri*) these tablets ‘according to the text of an old tablet’ (*ana pī tuppi labīri*); the other Middle Assyrian colophon refers more precisely to an ‘old large tablet’ (*ana pī dubgalli labīri*).²⁴ In fact, in spite of some differences in contents and format, the Old Babylonian god list known as the Genouillac List, attested in one single-column tablet, appears as the forerunner (or at least direct prototype) of AN : *Anum*, a list in double-column format.²⁵ In its later, canonical form, AN : *Anum* includes about 1,970 theonyms accompanied by various kinds of explanations, mostly predicated on relationships and kinship between different deities. Already in the Middle Assyrian copies, one finds an expanded version of AN : *Anum*, which includes a third subcolumn with additional explanations in Akkadian, AN : *Anu* : *ša amēli* (‘An is the name of Anu as god of a man’). It is important to note that AN : *Anum* has nothing to do with a hypothetical process of syncretism, such as the *translatio Graeca*, in which Greek gods were equated with Roman gods on the basis of shared features (e.g., Zeus and Jupiter, Artemis and Diana). AN : *Anum* is actually an explanatory list in which the names given in the right-hand subcolumn are linked to short descriptive statements in the left-hand subcolumn. These brief explanations often establish kinship between deities and so constitute organizational devices that draw genealogies within the Mesopotamian pantheon.²⁶ In other instances, the left-hand subcolumn simply gives the occupation of a deity, provides alternative names, or points to the identification or resemblance between two deities (Litke 1998: 6). In this regard, AN : *Anum* recalls the work of the earlier Greek mythographers, such as Hecataeus of Miletus, Acusilaus of Argos, and Phercydes of Leros, who were preoccupied with organizing and structuring the genealogies of the Greek pantheon, as well as weeding out spurious traditions. In what seems to be the beginning of his *Genealogies*, of which about 40 fragments have been preserved, Hecataeus explains the *raison d’être* of his work: “those things I write, as they seem true to me; for the stories of the Greeks are, as they appear to me, many and ludicrous.”²⁷

24. For these two colophons, see Hunger 1968: 32 (no. 51); Litke 1998: 17.

25. On the relation between the Genouillac List and An: *Anum*, see Jacobsen 1939: 98–99 n. 168; Lambert 1957–71: 475; Litke 1998: 3; Richter 2004: 13–16.

26. The list of the 50 names of Marduk in the sixth and seventh tablets of the *Enūma eliš* was shaped on the materials included in a couple of preexisting god lists, including AN : *Anum* (Seri 2006). The use of lists as templates to generate literary compositions is a well-known trope in Sumerian literature (Civil 1987a; Rubio 2003).

27. Note that the term γελοῖος can be translated literally as ‘laughable’, but it can have either a less-negative sense (‘amusing’) or an obviously pejorative one (‘ludi-



The organizational principles in most god lists from the second and first millennia are mostly theological and mythographic. Deities are listed in sequences that depend on their perceived hierarchy within the pantheon, their relationships with their spouses and relatives, and their interaction with other gods and goddesses as transmitted in mythological and religious compositions. However, the Early Dynastic god lists from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīḥ do not follow these mythographic patterns. The entries are arranged in accordance with three sets of criteria: (1) entries that share a sign in common; (2) entries that exhibit some phonetic resemblance; and (3) entries that share a basic conceptual or semantic association. The first criterion usually overlaps with the other two, to the point that one could argue that the graphic variable constitutes the basic organizational pattern in these early god lists. For instance, one can compare two unrelated passages from the Early Dynastic god lists from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīḥ:

<i>Abū Ṣalābīḥ</i> (IAS 88 iv 5ff.)	<i>Fāra</i> (SF 1 obv. vii 20'ff.)
^d [nin]-šušinak	^d nergal _x (KIŠ.UNUG)
^d nin-ašag	^d KIŠ:PIRIG (= ^d tidnum?)
^d nin-apin	^d pirig-banda ₃
^d nin-šubur	^d pirig-kal (= ^d pirig-lamma?)
^d nin-gal	^d pirig-sag ^d -kal
^d nin-unug	^d UD.KA
^d ni[n-x]	^d UD-sag-kal
^d nin-a:zu ₃	
^d nin-limmu ₂	

In the Abū Ṣalābīḥ list, this section groups together theonyms that start with the sign NIN, which corresponds to an early Sumerian word for 'lord' and 'lady'. In the Fāra list, the same criterion surfaces: theonyms beginning with the animal-head signs KIŠ and PIRIG—both of which look rather similar in the Early Dynastic script—appear consecutively, as do the names with UD, and the transitions from section to section seem to be connected to the last sign in the previous entry (PIRIG, KAL).²⁸

crous, absurd'). See Fowler 2000: 123–24: τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοί τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν.

28. On the signs KIŠ and PIRIG in the Early Dynastic period, see Steinkeller 2004; Mittermayer 2005: 6–10, 22–28. Concerning the reading of KIŠ:PIRIG as tidnum in Early Dynastic texts, see Steinkeller 1992: 246.



The graphemic criterion was also the main rationale in the arrangement of other early lists, such as the list of toponyms known as the Geographical List (*Atlante geografico*), attested at Ebla and Abū Ṣalābīḥ.²⁹ In this respect, it is important to note that, at Ebla, whose corpus has so much in common with that of southern Mesopotamia at this time, there is no real god list. However, in the Vocabulary of Ebla already mentioned, there is an AN section.³⁰ The sign AN, originally depicting a star, was also the determinative preceding theonyms. This AN section includes the names of a number of deities (Nidaba, Enlil, Enki, Inanna) mixed with many other compound signs and sign sequences that happen to include the sign AN, such as an-du₃ ‘shade’ (VE 784) and an-gal₂ (VE 789) ‘to exist’ (Eblaite *i-ša-wu /yiθāwu(m)/*).

There are two major Early Dynastic god lists, one from Fāra and another one from Abū Ṣalābīḥ.³¹ The list from Fāra, attested in a single damaged copy (SF 1), probably included about 600 names, of which only 421 are preserved (Krebernik 1986; Mander 1986: 77–102; Selz 1992: 212–25). Of the preserved names, only 297 are readable in full. The list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, attested in nine different manuscripts (IAS 82–90), all of which are damaged, probably included 430 names, of which only 306 are preserved (Alberti 1985; Mander 1986; 2008: 147–49). Of these 306 preserved names, only 235 can be read in full. If one compares the god list from Fāra to the several manuscripts of the list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, there are 52 names that are identical in both lists, and 28 that are most likely the same although spelled in different ways (Mander 1986: 111–18).³² Nevertheless, there are only three short sequences of entries that are identical in both lists.

29. On the Early Dynastic Geographical List, see Pettinato 1978; MEE 3 pp. 229–39; Steinkeller 1986; Frayne 1992.

30. On the AN section of the Vocabulary of Ebla (VE 780–814), see MEE 4 pp. 287–91; Conti 1990: 189–96; Mander 2008: 19–23.

31. There are other shorter god lists from Fāra, one attested in three joining fragments (SF 1* +3 + 4) and another one in two parallel manuscripts (SF 5 // 6), the latter probably being an offering list (Mander 1978; see below). Many names of deities can be found in a list of theophoric anthroponyms from Fāra (SF 2), as well as in another list of cultic personnel known in manuscripts from Fāra (SF 57) and Abū Ṣalābīḥ (IAS 44–53). There is also a list of toponyms and theonyms attested at Fāra (SF 23 // 24), Abū Ṣalābīḥ (IAS 21–22), Ur (UET 7:80), and earlier on among the archaic texts from Uruk (ATU 3.145–50). See Mander 1986: 71–76, 102–10; Krebernik 1998: 316, 338–39, 341.

32. These 28 names spelled in different ways include Baba, which occurs as ^dba¹-ba₆ in Abū Ṣalābīḥ (Mander 1986: 7) and as ^dba-ba in Fāra (rev. i 13’). In the Fāra list, Mander (1986: 84, 89) reads ^dba^{ku}₆¹, but that should be corrected and read ^dba-ba¹. Krebernik’s (1986: 179) reading ^dba-ba is clearly supported by an examination of



<i>Fāra God List</i> (SF 1)	<i>Abū Ṣalābīḫ God List</i> (IAS 82–90)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 600 names • 421 names preserved • 297 fully preserved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ca. 430 names • 306 names preserved • 235 fully preserved
Names that are identical in both lists:	52
The same names spelled differently:	28
Identical sequences of names:	3

Literary Texts and the Pantheon

God lists are not our only source of information regarding the Early Dynastic pantheon. A number of literary texts are attested during this period (Krebernik 1998: 317–25; Rubio 2009b: 34–37). Alongside a few incantations, the Fāra literary corpus includes a number of proverbs, most of which have duplicates in Abū Ṣalābīḫ (Alster 1991–92). Moreover, there are two compositions mentioning the goddess Sud (^dsud₃), the patroness of Shuruppak (SF 36, 40), as well as several compositions mentioning Ama'ušumgal or Ama'ušumgalanna, one of which is attested also in Abū Ṣalābīḫ (IAS 278), Ebla, and, at least partly, Mari.³³ Whereas at Early Dynastic sites such as Fāra and Lagash, administrative documents are much more numerous than literary texts, at Abū Ṣalābīḫ literature represents the majority of the corpus, which includes a tablet containing a story about Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun, whose plot seems unparalleled in narratives from other periods (IAS 327; Jacobsen 1989). This corpus includes earlier versions of compositions well known in later periods, especially in the Old Babylonian, such as the Keš Temple Hymn (Biggs 1971; Wilcke 2006) and the Instructions of Shuruppak (Alster 2005: 176–94), both preserved in several tablets and fragments from Abū Ṣalābīḫ. Nonetheless, most compositions attested at Abū Ṣalābīḫ are unique, such as the hymnic Self-Praise of Inanna (IAS 329+).

the CDLI photo of SF 1. Moreover, Joachim Marzahn kindly collated the tablet for me and came to the same conclusion.

33. In the Early Dynastic period, Ama'ušumgal or Ama'ušumgalanna was still a distinct god, but his name became identified with Dumuzi by the late Sargonic period. On these Early Dynastic compositions about Ama'ušumgal, see Bonechi and Durand 1992; Krebernik 2003: 165–77; Fritz 2003: 169–75. Note that the fragmentary Mari text does not seem to be a real duplicate. Rather, it contains a parallel passage; it also exhibits symptoms of being intended to be read in Semitic, such as the conjunction *ù* and the word *gu-ra-dum* 'hero, warrior' (Akkadian *qurādu*); see Bonechi and Durand 1992: 153.



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An important subcorpus at Abū Ṣalābīḥ is that of the *zami* hymns (za₃-mi₃, later za₃-mi₂), attested in 21 tablets and fragments. The word za₃-mi₃—spelled with mi₃ (ME) in earlier texts but later on with mi₂ (SAL)—can be translated as the noun ‘praise’. With the determinative for wooden object (GIŠ), ^{gis}za₃-mi₂ means ‘lyre’. The term appears, for instance, in the typical doxologies in colophons of Mesopotamian texts, in which scribes frequently concludevd by referring to the goddess under whose protection they worked, Nidaba: nidaba za₃-mi₂ ‘Nidaba be praised’. The *zami* hymns comprise about 70 sequences, each of which begins with a toponym and ends with the name of the deity of that place followed by the formula *zami* (Biggs 1974: 44–56). It is difficult to call them hymns when in fact 80% of them do not go over two or three lines (Krecher 1992: 292–93). Thus, the label *litany* would probably be more accurate. For instance (lines 186–87):

isin_x(IN) bulug(NAGAR) an-ki
⁴nin-isin_x(IN) za₃-mi₃

Isin, pole of heaven and earth
 –Praise upon Ninisina!

The total number of different deities mentioned in the *zami* hymns is 69. Of these 69 theonyms:³⁴

- 42 occur also in the god list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, the site from which all the *zami* hymns come, but not in that from Fāra.
- 14 occur in the Fāra god list, but not in the Abū Ṣalābīḥ list.
- 27 occur in both god lists.
- 11 do not occur in either list.

Thus, the *zami* hymns and the god list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ show a substantial level of similarity.

The corpus of Early Dynastic literature includes a peculiar group of texts (Krecher 1992). They are written in a unique orthography labeled UD.GAL.NUN because this is the way the name of the god Enlil (^den-li₂) is spelled in those texts; that is, in this spelling, UD = DINGIR, GAL = ĒN, and NUN = LIL₂. Unfortunately, most of the other sign cor-

34. For these figures, see Mander 1986: 120–26. Note that the Abū Ṣalābīḥ list includes several damaged entries that begin with ⁴nin-X(-X) (Alberti 1985: 71; Mander 1986: 25, 27, 30). The figures given here appear not to add up: 42 + 14 + 11 are not 69. It is impossible to know if the Abū Ṣalābīḥ lists included at least two additional names occurring in the *zami* hymns: ⁴nin-e₂-ku₃, attested in the Fāra list (SF 1 obv. ii 13), and ⁴nin-tu, perhaps unattested in the Fāra list, although the latter also exhibits many similarly damaged entries with ⁴nin-X(-X) (SF 1 obv. ii 25; iii 12–14, 22–23; iv 12; v 1’–5’, 24’–30’; vi 1–2, 9, 30–32; vii 1, 10–11).



respondences remain murky, if not completely unknown, so they yield very little information in regard to the pantheon. Moreover, rather than a cryptography, all these apparently substitutional mechanisms may well reflect an early attempt to devise an alternative orthography for Sumerian texts.³⁵ It is worth noting that no UD.GAL.NUN text has been found at Ebla. All of them date to the Early Dynastic period and come from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīḥ.

Lagash (modern al-Hibā) and neighboring Girsu (Telloh) are well known for their large administrative archives from the third millennium. Nevertheless, a few Early Dynastic literary texts do come from these two sites. For instance, a small tablet from Girsu, originally labeled as if it were a royal inscription of Urukagina (Ukg. 15), contains a cosmogonic narrative referring to a primeval time: u_4 -ba en-ki nun-ki nu-sig₇ ‘at that time, the “lords of the earth” and “princes of the earth” did not exist’ (ii 3; Sjöberg 2002: 229–39). At Lagash, one finds two literary texts characterized by their inventories of field names, canals, and cultic places (Marchesi 1999). Within the same enumerative framework, there is another Lagash composition that combines names of canals, deities and their epithets, fish, and snakes, which seems to constitute a collection of riddles without answers, as opposed to the later Old Babylonian riddles, which do include answers.³⁶ The riddles contain a total of 20 readable names of divinities, 14 of which are followed by an epithet. Of these names, at least 8 also occur in the god list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, 9 in the list from Fāra, and 9 in the *zami* hymns from Abū Ṣalābīḥ. The overlap between the 4 sets of names is rather substantial.³⁷

35. Sometimes the UD.GAL.NUN correspondences are rather simple, such as when sign shapes are modified, or similar-looking signs are used instead; for example, AB is substituted by NISAG because the two look alike (Krecher 1992: 297–98). Moreover, Krecher (1992: 299) has tentatively identified the general mechanisms involved in UD.GAL.NUN orthography: (1) changes in vowels, normally toward the back of the mouth (the suffix -bi ‘its’ written as -BU₈); (2) changes in consonants; (3) omission, addition, or alteration of final consonant; (4) transposition of consonant-vowel or vowel-consonant sequences; and (5) insertion and addition of an extra syllable. These mechanisms often co-occur: nun written BU (2, 3); an written UD (1, 3); the suffix -zu/-zu₅ ‘your’ written -IŠ (1, 2, 5); nir written NAGAR (1, 5).

36. For an edition of the riddles from Lagash, see Biggs 1973. Marchesi (1999: 3) prefers to classify this composition simply as a literary enumeration. For the Old Babylonian riddles, see Civil 1987b.

37. See Mander 1986: 129–31. Of the 21 theonyms attested in the Lagash riddles, this table includes 20, because a damaged name has been omitted (obv. v 8’). Concerning Nin-girim, the spelling of the /girim/ element varies: A.BU.HA.DU in the Lagash riddles but A.MUŠ.HA.DU in the *zami* hymns and in the Fāra god list (Krebernik 1998–2001: 363–64).



<i>Lagash Riddles</i>	<i>Abū Ṣalābīḥ God List</i>	<i>zami Hymns (Abū Ṣalābīḥ)</i>	<i>Fāra God List</i>
^d nanše	X	X	X
^d hendur-sag			X
^d r ⁿ in [?] 1-nu-nir			
^d nin-gur ₇	X (?)		X
^d nin-gir ₇ -su	X	X	X
lugal-NE AN.X[(.X)]			
^d nin-ur ₄	X	X	
^d LAGABxGAL			
^d nin-girim _x		X	X
^d sanga-unug	X	X	X
^d lamma-ša ₆ -ga	X	X	
^d nin-kišib		X	X
lugal-e ₃ -duru ₅ -la ₂ -X			
^d ig-alim			
^d nin-gublaga		X	X
^d r ^{IM} -amar [?] 1-ban ₃ -da			
^d pa-bil ₃ -sag	X		X
^d nin-tu		X	
^d nin-ur ₄ -DU			
^d ašgi	X	X	

From Early Dynastic Nippur comes one of the best-known Sumerian literary works of this period, the so-called Barton Cylinder (named after its first editor). This 20-column cylinder contains a composition concerned with the interruption of food supplies for Nippur after the primordial creation of fertility, in which Enlil and Ninurta are prominently featured (Alster and Westenholz 1994). There are other literary fragments from Nippur, one of which mentions Enlil, his son (the Storm-god, Ishkur), and a fox (Schwemer 2001: 166, 179–80). From Adab (modern Bismāya), we have a composition mentioning Nanshe (Krecher 1992: 287–88) and, more importantly, a version of the Instructions of Shuruppak (Alster 2005: 195–203). There are also a couple of isolated Early Dynastic literary texts from two other major sites, Ur and Uruk.

The Syrian periphery has yielded some examples of Sumerian literature. There is a Sumerian composition referring to Enki that was found at Tell Beydar, ancient Nabada (Sallaberger 2004b). Besides the duplicates of the Ama'ušumgal hymn mentioned above, Ebla has also yielded a royal hymn of sorts (Krebernik 1997). Nevertheless, not all the



Early Dynastic literary texts are in Sumerian. For instance, a hymn to the Sun-god, Shamash, is attested at both Ebla and Abū Šalābīḥ (Krebernik 1992). At Ebla, the composition is written with a mixture of Sumerograms and syllabically spelled Semitic words. At Abū Šalābīḥ, it is written mostly with Sumerograms, but a number of Akkadian words do surface in syllabic spelling (e.g., the preposition *in*).³⁸

Ebla (ARET 5.6 i 6-ii 2)	Abū Šalābīḥ (IAS 326 i 8-13)
<i>ne-si-gi-im</i>	NI ₃ .SIG
𐎗EN.KI	𐎗EN.KI
<i>ì-lú rí-sa-dím</i>	DINGIR AN.[X [?] .]X
<i>nu-ru₁₂-um</i>	UD.UD DAG.DAG
<i>zu-bū-um</i>	
𐎗a-šum	HUŠ
BIR ₅ .BI ₂ .IR	BIR ₅ .BIR ₅
gišNIG ₂ .KAS ₇ .AK	NIG ₂ .KAS ₇
AB.ZU	ABZU (ZU.AB)
<i>in</i> A ₅ (NI).NUN.GA	<i>in</i> A.NUN
GAL.SUHUR	MAŠ ₂ .SAG

‘Prince Ea, god of rejoicing, burning light, fierce shining, splendor (?) of Apsû, leader among the Anunna gods’.³⁹

Texts, Contexts, and Panthea

The archaeological context of the Early Dynastic god lists can shed some light on their genesis and function. The Fāra god list was found in a house known as XVh (Martin 1988: 86–91, 161). Between one-third and one-half of all the Fāra tablets were recovered in this specific house.

38. Krebernik’s (1992: 73, 81–82) transliteration and translation are followed here. For a slightly different approach, see Lambert 1992: 60. Earlier discussions of the actual language of the two versions (Eblaite vs. Akkadian) need to be reassessed in light of the nature of the Early Dynastic East Semitic dialect continuum (Rubio 2006a).

39. As Krebernik (1992: 132) points out, gišNIG₂.KAS₇.AK (Ebla) // NIG₂.KAS₇ (Abū Šalābīḥ) seems to be the Sumerian term for the noun ‘account’ (nig₃-ŠID or nig-kas₇; ŠID = kas₇), which corresponds to *nikkassu* in Akkadian. The translation ‘splendor’ is tentative. In spite of the determinative for wooden objects (GIŠ) with which it appears in the Ebla text, this can hardly be the word equated with Akkadian *māhišātu* and *uttuku* in lexical lists, both of which mean ‘abacus’.



The lot of house XVh on trench XIII includes lexical texts as well as documents pertaining to allotments of donkeys, fields, and other items, and lists of rations. This multiroom house seems to have functioned as an official scriptorium that produced both scholarly texts and economic records for the state. The scholarly nature of the house is stressed by the fact that 36 lexical and literary texts—6 of which are in UD.GAL.NUN orthography—were found here, far more than in any other findspot at Fāra (Martin 1988: 89).

In the case of the god list from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, of the 9 different textual witnesses, 7 come from room 31, 1 from room 11, and another one from room 21.⁴⁰ These 3 rooms are very close to each other, and all of them have yielded a large number of scholarly tablets and fragments (Biggs 1974: 4). Concerning the *zami* hymns, all of the 21 manuscripts come from the same room, room 31, precisely where the majority (7 out of 9) of the pieces of the god list were found (Biggs 1974: 89, 102–8). As in the case of Fāra, the findspot of the manuscripts of the Abū Ṣalābīḥ god list points to a scholarly context.

As has been seen already, the pantheon from which Early Dynastic god lists and literary compositions draw seems to be, by and large, one and the same. However, the vast majority of Early Dynastic texts are neither scholarly nor literary: they are economic and legal documents, normally full of theophoric personal names. Thus, the question is to what extent the pantheon attested in the onomastic materials agrees with the pantheon of literary and scholarly compositions. In Fāra, we can compare the theophoric names of the many individuals mentioned in documents, the gods mentioned in lists of offerings, and the entries in the god list. There are probably 7 Fāra lists pertaining in one way or another to offerings, 4 of which could be considered major documents (Mander 1978).⁴¹ These lists mention a total of 56 deities, of which only 15 appear in the major god list (SF 1)—that is, their level of agreement

40. For findspots, see Biggs 1974: 98–109. The witnesses of the god list found in Room 31 are IAS 82 (AbS-T 200+207), 83 (AbS-T 206–10), 84 (AbS-T 209), 86 (AbS-T 208), 87 (AbS-T 212a), 88 (AbS-T 212b), and 90 (AbS-T 211). Moreover, IAS 85 (AbS-T 139e) was found in Room 11, and IAS 89 (AbS-T 63) in Room 21. Note that AbS-T is the abbreviation for the Abū Ṣalābīḥ excavation numbers, whereas IAS refers to the publication numbers.

41. Two of these lists (SF 5 // 6) are duplicates; SF 6 contains 28 of the 51 theonyms listed on the obverse of SF 5, in the same order. Neither list includes any mention of specific rations or offerings, so they can be regarded simply as god lists (Krebernik 1986: 167; 1998: 338). However, both SF 5 and SF 6 end with a clear indication of the total number of deities listed, including the accounting term *šu-nigin₂* ‘total’ in SF 6. The last line of the obverse of SF 5 is: 51 dingir-dingir ‘51 deities’. SF 6 ends with *šu-nigin₂* 28 dingir ku₆-gu₇ ‘a total of 28 fish-eating deities’. (The end of the reverse of SF 5 is damaged.) Moreover, the reference to



is only 26%. This figure is substantially lower than, for instance, the 60% coincidence found when one compares the Abū Ṣalābīḥ god list with the *zami* hymns from the same site (42 out of 69 names). If one introduces the onomastic materials, then the numbers are even slimmer. There are only 12 theonyms that appear in all sets of sources. Moreover, 14 names appear in the offerings and the onomasticon but not in the god list SF 1 at all (Mander 1978: 14–15).

<i>The Fāra Panthea</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering lists: 56 deities, of which only 15 also appear in the Fāra god list • Fāra god list SF 1: ca. 600 names, of which 421 are preserved 			
Deities attested in the god list, the offering lists, and the onomasticon 12	Deities attested in the offering lists and the onomasticon but not in the god list 14	Deities attested in the god list and the onomasticon but not in the offering lists 4	Deities attested in the god list and the offering lists but not in the onomasticon 3

These figures seem to point to the existence of up to three panthea at Fāra. The pantheon represented in the god lists and literary texts is scholarly in nature. The pantheon of the offering lists and cultic texts is that of the official cult. Finally, the theophoric personal names bear witness to both the mainstream tendencies of the official cult and the individual preferences of popular religion.⁴²

The situation is even more dramatic at Abū Ṣalābīḥ. Compared with Fāra, Abū Ṣalābīḥ has yielded very few administrative texts: some 35 fragments and tablets (Biggs 1974: 96–97; Biggs and Postgate 1978). However, we do have a decent number of personal names: those of the scribes who copied the many scholarly and literary texts and frequently added colophons with their names (Biggs 1974: 34–35; Visicato 2000: 50–52). The Abū Ṣalābīḥ onomasticon is unique among Early Dynastic corpora in containing as many Sumerian names as Semitic names. Among the names attested in the colophons of lexical and literary texts, 41 are Sumerian and 44 Semitic; in the administrative texts, 33 are Sumerian and 27 are Semitic (Pomponio 1991: 146).⁴³ Moreover,

fish-eating seems to point to offerings. The very limited agreement between these lists (SF 5 // 6) and the major god list (SF 1) also sets the former apart from the latter.

42. In the case of Ebla, Archi (1996: 142–43) has shown that the theophoric names and the pantheon attested in cultic and religious texts correspond to two different systems.

43. Krebernink (2002: 50–51) argues that early Sumerian names are connected to the social and religious milieu rather than to the carrier of the name and that



the Sumerian personal names from Abū Ṣalābiḥ contain 14 Sumerian theonyms, of which only 6 appear in the god list from the same site (Mander 1986: 128–29). The most common elements in the Semitic names are *il* and *ilum*; for example, *en-na-il*, *il-sù-ma-lik*, *uš-mi-il*, *a-lum-ì-lum*, *ì-lum-ma-lik*, and so on (Mander 1986: 126–28). Di Vito (1993) considers these third-millennium *il* and *ilum* names to be referring to a personal god under whose tutelary power the newborn is being placed by the very act of name-giving. Moreover, Di Vito considers this element to be evidence of the cult of a personal god among the Semites in Early Mesopotamia. This assumption is predicated on an automatic identification between the language of a name and the language of this name's bearer, as well as an immediate connection between language and ethnicity. Neither assumption is without problem.⁴⁴ For instance, after the death of Sumerian as anyone's true mother tongue during the Ur III period, the Old Babylonian onomasticon still included a large number of Sumerian personal names, especially among priests and cultic personnel (Stol 1991: 197–98).

Oppenheim (1977: 199–200) had argued that the personal god could be a wildcard for any god, and thus it could refer to Dagan or Ea, as well as to a protective spirit or a daimon. However, Jacobsen (1970: 37–38) regarded the personal god as an expression of private religiosity and of the relationship between an individual and the whole realm of the sacred. Moreover, Albertz (1978: 138–39) argues that, whereas

the Sumerian verbal forms are resultative or stative, whereas Semitic names would reflect 'events' (*Ereignisse*). It is true that certain naming patterns and name types occur in Sumerian but not in Akkadian, and vice-versa; for example, imperative verbal forms are very rare in Sumerian but not so in Akkadian. However, these differences do not need to point to contemporaneous varieties of relationship with the divine but are most likely related to earlier cultural traditions and even linguistic constraints. For instance, the preference for the stative or resultative predicate constructions in the anthroponyms, as exhibited by Sumerian, is predominant in Indo-European languages as well. In the case of Mesopotamia, the variable may also have been chronological: the ending *-a* in Semitic anthroponyms may be regarded, among other things, as a predicate ending or as the marker of absolutive case. The latter would then be a remnant of an absolutive–subject marker system, which would have functioned in early Semitic, as happens in other Afroasiatic branches (Rubio 2006a: 133–34). On the finite verbal forms attested in Sumerian personal names, see Limet 1968: 76–87.

44. These sorts of assumptions recall Roberts's (1972) attempt at reconstructing the earliest Semitic pantheon of Mesopotamia, which disregarded the linguistic complexity and often hybridity of many names. For instance, what would be the language label of a theophoric name with a Semitic verbal form but with a Sumerian deity (i.e., a theonym with a clear Sumerian etymology)? Any label would reduce the nuanced nature of the evidence. For reviews of Roberts 1972, see, for instance, Milard 1974; Westenholz 1975b; and Nakata 1979.



the official pantheon included a plethora of deities, the individual experienced only a functional unity, the person's own god, the god who protected and helped her or him. Nevertheless, it is impossible to know whether these theophoric names implied an incipient or latent henotheism of sorts, as Albertz (1978: 73, 139) would have it. What seems clear is that there are many contexts, especially later on, at Emar and Nuzi in which these *il* and *ilum* names refer to the tutelary deity of a family. For instance, in Nuzi we find references to 'the (household) gods' (*ilānu*) and 'the spirits of the dead' (*eṭemmu*), which seem to correspond to 'the (household) gods' (*ilū*) and 'the dead' (*mētū*) at Emar (van der Toorn 1994; 1995; 1996: 222–23).

In light of the comparisons made between the pantheon to which different sources bear witness, it can be argued that the Early Dynastic god lists were scholarly constructs, in large part detached from both personal religiosity and public cult. This should come as no surprise. If one turns to Greek and Roman literature, a substantial number of variants in the stories do not seem to stem from local versions but from their appropriation and literary elaboration by poets and mythographers. Even though many myths had been standardized or canonized during the Hellenistic period, Roman poets still felt as free as the Attic tragedians to introduce personal variations on traditional stories.⁴⁵

In Mesopotamia, the god lists belong not only to a scholarly tradition but also to the same sphere of literary texts, and Mesopotamian literature was, first and foremost, the business of scribes. Most Sumerian literature as it has come to us consists of scribal artifacts, whose life was confined to the realm of scholars and schools. This cannot be separated from the nature of Mesopotamian scholarship in general. The endeavors of Mesopotamian scholars were not predicated on true empirical observation. Whether dealing with law or with astronomical omens, Mesopotamian scholarship was not concerned so much with what was observed as with what could hypothetically be observed.⁴⁶ The same applies to the scribal manufacture of a written pantheon. It is commonplace to distinguish between official cult and popular religion. The pantheon of the official cult inhabits offering lists and ritual texts, whereas the deities of popular religion surface in the onomastic materials. To these two panthea, one should add a third, the pantheon of the scribes, which for the most part includes practical awareness of the other two, along with a large number of gods and goddesses whose main role was to fill the interstices of sacred narratives and to shape

45. As Cameron (2004: 271) puts it, "no less than the Greek tragedians, Ovid felt entirely free to handle traditional stories any way he pleased."

46. For references on this matter, see Rubio 2009a: 168–69.



divine genealogies within the confines of a world made of clay. As the plurality of deities defines polytheism, so does the variety of panthea embody the scribal processing and creation of intellectual discourses and religious landscapes.

Abbreviations

- ATU 3 Englund and Nissen 1993
IAS Biggs 1974
SF Deimel 1923

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Offprint from:
Beate Pongratz-Leisten, ed.,
Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism
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Beate Pongratz-Leisten, ed.,
Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism
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