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James W. Watts

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Ancient Non-Greek Rhetorics

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Carol S. Lipson
Roberta A. Binkley

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James W. Watts

Texts from many ancient cultures describe and prescribe ritual behavior. They also invoke ritual acts and omissions to explain the course of past history and to promise future punishments and rewards. In fact, very many texts assert that ritual performance is the most determinative factor in the success or failure of rulers and nations. Ritual rhetoric therefore pervaded royal propaganda, as well as temple texts. It also provided the principal rationale for criticizing the status quo.

Human rituals tend to be accompanied by a concern with "doing it exactly right," as has often been remarked (Freud 1907; Staal 1979; Smith 1987). Ironically, that concern does not preclude the ubiquity of ritual improvisation and criticism (Grimes 1990). Roy A. Rappaport (36–37, 124–26) has emphasized the role in all ritual performances of the criterion of ritual invariance on the one hand and, on the other hand, the inevitability of both historical change and individual choice.

Ancient Near Eastern texts reflect this common human concern for ritual accuracy. They depict ancient kings justifying their ritual practices on the basis of supposedly invariable tradition and, frequently, on the basis of old ritual texts. Thus, the ritual rhetoric of ancient texts not only provides a window into the rhetorical practices of ancient cultures. The texts themselves were also ritual products—written, read and manipulated to shape ritual performances and to pronounce judgment on the performers.

In what follows, I will first survey the use of ritual rhetoric for persuasive purposes in texts of diverse genres and cultures of the ancient Near East before considering the persuasive function of ritual texts *per se*. I follow Aristotle and Kenneth Burke in defining rhetoric in terms of persuasion because this definition grounds the rhetorical analysis of many ancient Near Eastern texts in one of their most obvious features:

an explicitly stated intention to mandate and/or prohibit certain behaviors on the part of their readers or hearers. On the basis of persuasion, rhetorical analysis of non-Western texts can bypass the quagmire of debates over whether particular texts are, or are not, "literary" and how Quintilian's criterion of "speaking well" can and should be applied to written documents. By starting with persuasion and with texts that state their persuasive goals explicitly, the cross-cultural study of rhetoric finds a firm footing. Once the rhetorical role of ritual has been observed there, it can be evaluated better in the less explicitly persuasive contexts of ritual texts and their ritual use.

Of course, the category "ritual," like "rhetoric," does not reflect an indigenous ancient Near Eastern category. It is, rather, a modern heuristic device for distinguishing and describing certain kinds of human behavior. Ritual theorists disagree among themselves about the definitions and limits of ritual. I find most useful the description of ritual proposed by Jonathan Z. Smith, who argued that rituals draw attention to, and make intentional, otherwise ordinary practices. Thus, ritual turns everyday routines such as washing oneself, entering and leaving a room, and eating meals into deeply meaningful practices by focusing attention on them, formalizing them and, often, by prescribing exactly how they get done (Smith 1987a, 193–95; 1987b, 109; see also Bell 1997, 138–69). Rituals are often religious, but not inherently so. Though ancient rituals usually involved deities or other supernatural spirits in one way or another, many rituals did not (e.g., compare the various Akkadian incantations translated by Foster 2005, 954–1014.) Conversely, though prophets usually demanded ritual payments to the temples of their patron deities, sometimes they required kings to honor their gods by enforcing justice instead (see Mari letters A. 1121/2731 and A. 1968, tr. Níssínen 2003, 19–20, 22). Thus, the categories of ritual and religion overlap to a great degree, but are not congruent either for antiquity or modernity.

By "ritual texts," then, I mean texts that describe or prescribe rituals. By "ritual rhetoric," I refer to a wider range of statements that invoke either ritual behavior itself or the institutions that sponsor ritual behavior (temples, priesthoods, etc.) for persuasive purposes. My argument is that ritual rhetoric, like the categories "political rhetoric" or "legal rhetoric," provides a useful lens for understanding certain themes in persuasive discourse. "Ritual rhetoric" does not here refer to the persuasive impact of the ancient rituals themselves. That is lost to us; all we have left are texts that mention rituals. Therefore all we can reconstruct is the rhetorical use to which those texts put rituals. It is beyond the ability of modern historians to reconstruct whether or not the authors' persuasive purposes matched those of any of the people who performed or witnessed these rituals (Watts 2007, 1–36). Ancient texts, however, frequently employ ritual rhetoric for explicitly stated reasons. I will therefore start with the wider category of ritual rhetoric to lay the basis for understanding the rhetoric of ritual texts per se, as well as the ritual uses of the texts themselves.

Ritual Rhetoric

The standard justifications made by ancient kings to legitimize their rule were that they established peace in the land by repelling enemies, and that they built and/or restored temples, their furnishings and their rituals. Ritual spaces and practices often played as big a role in political propaganda as did military successes. The two themes were frequently conjoined: warfare established the conditions (wealth from booty and trade), as well as the rationale (thanksgiving to the gods) for celebrating and elaborating temple cults, and ritual sometimes provided the pretext for warfare (to return a stolen god to its temple, or to punish a regime for neglecting its gods). Thus, ritual rhetoric reinforced political claims to power.

Royal inscriptions do not always base their claims to a divine right to rule on the kings' activities in temple building and ritual supplies, but they do so often enough and from enough different periods and places to regard this as a standard theme of royal ideology. Philippe Talon (2005, 113) noted about Neo-Assyrian annals that "the inscriptions themselves are part of a well-attested ritual. They represent, in themselves, a ritual by which the king conforms to the ideal model of the perfect monarch." Examples of using ritual rhetoric for political legitimacy, however, extend far beyond that particular period and genre.

The preface to Hammurabi's law code (eighteenth century Babylonian; all dates in this article are BCE) enumerates the king's achievements by matching his military successes with temple building and cultic establishments (Roth 1995, 71–142). In the same period, Iahdun-Lim, King of Mari, claims among other things that "For his own life he built the temple of the god Shamash, his lord . . . May the god Shamash, who lives in that temple, grant to Iahdun-Lim, the builder of

his temple, the king beloved of his heart, a mighty weapon which overwhelms the enemies (and) a long reign of happiness and years of joyous abundance, forever" (tr. Douglas Frayne in *COS* 2.111). The Poetical Stela of the Egyptian king Thutmose III (fifteenth century) has the god Amun declare his responsibility for all of the king's victories and concludes with the quid pro quo: "I gave you protection, my son, . . . who does for me all that my *ka* desires. You have built my temple as a work of eternity . . ." (tr. Lichtheim 1976, 2:38). The Kadesh Battle Inscription depicts Ramses II citing his support of Amun's temples (including "I brought you all lands to supply your altars, I sacrificed to you ten thousands of cattle, and all kinds of sweet-scented herbs") to appeal for the god's intervention at a desperate point in a thirteenth-century battle (tr. Lichtheim 1976, 2:65).

The annals of the Hittite king Mursili II (fourteenth century) establish a cause-and-effect relationship between religious devotion and military success. They begin by telling how he came to the throne as a child, then say,

> while I had not yet gone against any of the enemy foreign lands who were in a state of hostilities with me, I concerned myself with and performed the regular festivals of the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady. I held up my hand to the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady, and said as follows: " . . . the enemy foreign lands who have called me a child and belittled me, have begun seeking to take away the borders of the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady. . . ." The Sungoddess Arinna heard my words and stood by me.

Then, in several battle reports, the turning point is narrated in this way: "The Sungoddes of Arinna, my lady, the victorious Stormgod, my lord, Mezzulla and all the gods ran before me." He concludes by vowing that "Whatever more the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady, repeatedly gives to me (to do), I will carry it out and put it down (on clay)" (tr. Richard H. Beal in *COS* 2.16).

Similarly, Nabopolassar's commemorative inscription for his restoration of Babylon's walls (seventh century) begins his autobiography with:

> When I was young, though I was the son of a nobody,
> I constantly sought the sanctuaries of Nabu and Marduk my lords. My mind was preoccupied with the establishment of their prescriptions and the complete performance of their rituals. . . . The Assyrian, who had ruled Akkad because of divine anger and had, with his heavy yoke, oppressed the inhabitants of the country, I, the weak one, the powerless one, who constantly seeks the lord of lords, with the mighty strength of Nabu and Marduk my lords I removed them from Akkad and cause (the Babylonians) to throw off their yoke.

He concludes with the advice, "Any king . . . do not be concerned with feats of might and power. Seek the sanctuaries of Nabu and Marduk and let them slay your enemies" (tr. Paul-Alain Beaulieu in *COS* 2.121; see Talon 1993 on the self-deprecating rhetoric of Nabopolasser and other Neo-Babylonian kings).

This ideology also appears in the sun-disk tablet of Nabu-Apla-Iddina (ostensibly ninth century Babylonian, but probably a sixth century forgery). It begins by describing the ritual chaos created by a foreign invasion after which the god's "ordinances were forgotten, and his appearance and appurtenances disappeared, and no-one saw (them) anymore." The inscription then narrates developments over three reigns in which offerings were established, abandoned, then re-established, while the image remained lost. Finally, it introduces Nabu-Apla-Iddina "who to avenge Akkade, (to) settle cult centers, (to) found divine daises, (to) form forms, (to) perfectly perform (cultic) ordinances and laws, (to) establish offerings, (and to) make bread offerings lavish, the great lord Marduk, a just scepter, (and) performing shepherdship of humanity, had placed in his hand." Then follows the story of how he restored the lost knowledge of the proper appearance of the image of Shamash and sponsored the statue's recreation. The last half of the inscription consists of detailed grants of provisions to the priest of the Sippar temple, and ends with the names of witnesses and curses against anyone who might revoke the king's grants (tr. Victor Hurowitz in *COS* 2.135). Thus, the rhetoric of royal authority is used to justify temple and priestly prerogatives, as in most of these texts.

Most royal commemorative and dedicatory inscriptions content themselves with recounting the king's building activities and grants of land and tax exemptions to the temples and their priesthoods. A few go further and claim royal authority for the conduct of rituals and the

amounts of offerings. Thus, Nur-Adad (nineteenth century) crowns his achievements of restoring the city and temple at Ur by building a bread-oven and cauldron to cook food for the gods that "he made for him (the god Nanna) and for his own life. He restored the traditional cleansing rites" (tr. Douglas Frayne, in *COS* 2:99A). Kurigalzu, a Kassite king of Babylon (later second millennium), records that "3 kor of bread, 3 kor of fine wine, 2 (large measures) of date cakes, 30 quarts of imported dates, 30 quarts of fine(?) oil, 3 sheep per day did I establish as the regular offering for all time" (tr. Foster 2005, 366). Azatiwata, the eighth-century king of a smaller Phoenician town, established a more modest calendar of annual offerings: "therein I caused Tarhunza to dwell, and every river-land will begin to honor him: by the year an ox, and at the cutting (?) a sheep, and at the vintage a sheep," and followed this with an ambitious prayer: "Let him bless Azatiwata with health and life, and let him be made highly preeminent over all kings" (tr. J. D. Hawkins, in *COS* 2.21). A stela of Nectanebo I, one of the last native kings of Egypt in the fourth century, after a hymn celebrating the king because he "supplies the altar, heaps the bowls, provides oblations of all kinds" and after quoting a decree specifying incomes for the temple of Neith from import taxes at Naucratis, then continues, "And one shall make one portion of an ox, one fat goose, and five measures of wine from them as a perpetual daily offering . . . My majesty has commanded to preserve and protect the divine offering of my mother Neith and to maintain everything done by the ancestors, in order that what I have done be maintained by those who shall be for an eternity of years" (tr. Lichtheim 1980, 3:88–89).

It is not just texts having to do with the establishment or restoration of temples that emphasize ritual rhetoric. Ritual rhetoric also plays a prominent, sometimes predominant, role in royal annals and lists of royal decrees, such as those from Egypt in the third millennium BCE Whether that is the case because ritual concerns dominated royal propaganda in general, or whether it is due to the accidents of preservation favoring temple records written on stone is hard to say. Nevertheless, the preserved decrees attest to royal concerns with ritual activity; e.g., a twenty-fourth century stela of Pepy II from Abydos: "[My majesty has commanded the offering of half] an ox, a *meret*-jug of milk, and one-eighth portion of an ox for every festival therein (the temple) for . . ." followed by a list of priests and statues (tr. by Strudwick 2005, 106). Several annalistic records from this early period include (e.g., the

sarcophagus of Ankhesenpepy) or even emphasize (e.g. the Palermo Stone) ritual concerns to the point of quoting edicts regulating the amounts of offerings, just as in the temple inscriptions. Even if the precise ratio of ritual rhetoric to other themes in early Egyptian royal propaganda can never be known, its dominance in the extant texts suggests its considerable importance.

Nevertheless, self-justification through ritual decrees was not the exclusive prerogative of kings, though it does show up most often in royal texts. In some times and places, lower officials in the ruling hierarchy, or even collective ruling entities, utilized the same rhetoric to buttress their claims to power. For example, the citizens of Xanthos, together with the local Persian satrap, share credit for restoring the temple and rites of the temple to Leto in a fourth century Lycian inscription (Metzger 1979). Ritual rhetoric extended far beyond political considerations, at least of the temporal kind. It regularly supports appeals for an after-life in the admiring memory of human and divine readers (Talon 2005) or, in Egypt's more elaborate eschatology, justifies passage to a glorious afterlife with the gods, even to the point of sharing their offerings. Thus the sixth-century physician and bureaucrat, Udjahorresne, claims credit for convincing the Persian king to sponsor the restoration of temples and their rites in Egypt, which he then carried out himself. His tomb autobiography records these achievements as evidence that he is deserving of a rewarding afterlife (Lichtheim 1980, 3:36–41). Of course, such eschatological desires also buttress claims to power in this life by justifying the privilege and wealth necessary for an adequate tomb, so the desire for an afterlife does not displace the function of ritual rhetoric in reinforcing the political status quo.

Kings did not just command others to make offerings to the gods; they also depicted themselves as models of piety. Their inscriptions frequently narrate their ritual behavior. Thus, ritual rhetoric informs royal narratives, in addition to being the subject of royal decrees. To cite just some representative Egyptian examples: the Annals of Thutmose III (fifteenth century) report that immediately after winning a battle, "his majesty proceeded to the offering storehouse. Giving offerings to [Amun]-Re-Harakhty consisting of oxen, fowl, short-horned cattle. . . ." Another annal reports Thutmose's motivation for lavishing gifts on the god's temple "that I might compensate him (for) his protection . . . on the battlefield" (tr. James K. Hoffmeier, in *COS* 2.2A,

2.2B). When Akhenaton dedicates his new city of Akhet-Aten in the fourteenth century, he reports that "A great offering was caused to be presented—consisting of bread, beer, long- and short-horned cattle, (assorted) animals, fowl, wine, fruit, incense and all sorts of good plants—on the day of founding Akhet-Aten for the living Aten" (tr. Murnane 1995, 83). A first millennium Egyptian forgery of an inscription supposedly by a third-millennium ruler has him claim that, "I made purification; I conducted a procession of the hidden ones; I made a complete offering of bread, beer, oxen, and fowl, and all good things for the gods and goddesses in Yebu whose names had been pronounced," in order to model proper worship in the Khnum temple at Elephantine and justify its claims to considerable land holdings, tenants, and tithes (Famine Stela, tr. Lichtheim 1980, 3:94–103). Inscriptions from all over the ancient Near East often reinforce such verbal descriptions of royal piety with iconographic depictions of the king performing ritual worship before the god. These include several inscriptions already mentioned above, such as the stela of Hammurabi's law code and the Naucratis Stela of Nectanebo I.

Similar ritual rhetoric shows up in non-inscriptional genres, as well. Epics use narratives to model ideal ritual behavior by kings or venerable ancestors—a somewhat less overt, but probably just as effective, means for enculturating support for the political and religious status quo. A widely known example of such model ritual behavior occurs at the end of the flood story, when the heroic ancestor who has survived the flood (Atrahasis or Utnapishtim in Babylonian accounts, Noah in the Bible) builds an altar and makes animal offerings to the god/s (Atrahasis, the Gilgamesh Epic, and Genesis 9). The Ugaritic epics portray pious kings providing elaborate offerings. Daniel conducts a seven-day ritual of food offerings, libations, and obeisance to appeal for divine aid (Parker 1997, 51–52). The god El orders Kirta to prepare for a military expedition by making offerings:

> Enter [a shaded pavilion]. Take a lamb [in your hands]: a lamb of sa[crifice in] your right, a kid in them both—all your available (?) [food]. Take a pig[eon], bird of sacrifice. Pour wine into a silver basin; into a gold basin, honey. Ascend to the top of the lookout; mount the city-wall's shoulder. Raise your hands toward the sky. Sacrifice to Bull El, your Father. Adore Baal with your sacrifice, Dagon's son with your offering (tr. Edward L. Greenstein in Parker 1997, 14, 51–52).

The epic then recounts Kirta fulfilling the divine command word-for-word to show his fidelity, and as a result, the campaign succeeds in its objective. His later failure, however, to fulfill a vow of offerings to another deity causes him to contract a terrible illness, so the epic illustrates both the promise and peril of ritual performance. Though the Hebrew Bible does not contain the self-aggrandizing royal rhetoric of commemorative inscriptions, its stories do characterize the piety of favored kings by telling of their ritual accomplishments: David's in bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 15–16), Solomon's in building and dedicating the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 8:62–64; 2 Chronicles 7), Josiah's by reestablishing the observance of Passover (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 35)—all accompanied by lavish offerings. Revered ancestors are also characterized by their ritual piety: Abraham makes the covenant with God through offerings (Genesis 15) and circumcision (Genesis 17), and his fidelity is tested by a command to offer a child sacrifice (Genesis 22); Hannah fulfills her vow by offering a bull as well as devoting her son (1 Samuel 1); Job's superlative piety emerges from his offerings on behalf of his children (Job 1). This technique of narrative characterization has, of course, exactly the same method and purpose as do stories of a king's acts of piety in a royal inscription. The narrative epic or prose contexts, however, generalize their examples as idealized types for non-royal as well as royal emulation.

Gods mandate specific ritual instructions far less often in ancient Near Eastern texts than one might expect from the frequency of such divine commandments in the Bible (Exodus 12–13, 25–31, Leviticus 1–17, 23, 25, etc.) and from the quotation of Kirta above. In narratives, as well as inscriptions, deities tend to command wars and building projects far more often than the details of ritual worship. These texts depict humans responding on their own initiative with appropriate worship, which emphasizes their special piety. The suspicion that this represents an idealized pattern finds confirmation from a few textual hints of a more directive ritual rhetoric at work orally in royal courts. Letters from Mari in the eighteenth century and Assyria in the eighth century report to the royal court the preaching of prophets to the effect that the king should provide or increase royal supplies to particular temples. Thus, one prophet appealing for a land grant

to a temple speaks for the god Adad, saying, "Am I not Adad, lord of Kallassu, who raised him (the king) in my lap and restored him to his ancestral throne? . . . Should he not deliver (the estate), I—the lord of the throne, territory and city—can take away what I have given. But if, on the contrary, he fulfils my desire, I shall give him throne upon throne" (tr. Nissinen 2003, 18). A fourth-century Egyptian inscription reflects the fact that King Nectanebo I's cultic actions and decrees originated in prophetic advice. It describes him as the one "who convokes their prophets to consult them on all the functions of the temple; who acts according to their words and is not deaf to their advice" (tr. Lichtheim 1980, 3:88). Such references confirm that religious officials wielded considerable influence over ritual conduct. Prevailing rhetorical norms, however, hid the role of priests and even prophets behind the voice and authority of kings or, sometimes, of gods. For example, though Egyptian ritual texts were always under the control of lector-priests in the temple libraries, over time they were increasingly credited to the authorship of the god Thoth (Schott 1963 and 1972). The Pentateuch's presentation of priestly texts through a divine voice exhibits Israel's distinctive manifestation of this widespread convention of ancient priestly rhetoric to hide behind royal and divine voices (cf. Metzger 2004, 177–78).

Despite these examples of ritual rhetoric in royal inscriptions and epic narratives, which could be multiplied many times over, this rhetoric is hardly universal in historiographical and epic texts from the ancient Near East. Even many royal annals and chronicles emphasize mostly political events (e.g. the Annals of Thutmose III), and battle scenes vie with depictions of ritual worship in royal iconography. The relative importance of ritual themes waxed and waned; Sallaberger (2005) has charted the increasing emphasis on ritual in Mesopotamian texts between 2500 and 1500 BCE Naturally, a focus on temple rites appears more frequently in temple foundation inscriptions than in other kinds of texts.

A rhetoric that claims divine approval because of the king's ritual piety creates, however, the potential for political attacks on the king to take the form of ritual criticism. Ritual theorists have come to realize that using ritual criticism to undermine political and religious elites has been as common in human societies as using ritual to reinforce the status quo (Grimes 1990, 17–18; Rappaport 1999, 36–37, 124–26). A number of texts from a variety of ancient Near Eastern cultures take

full advantage of this opportunity to blame their countries' military, social and climactic misfortunes on the ritual infidelity of particular kings. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that ritual rhetoric provides the principal vehicle for political criticism in the extant texts.

The notion that gods get angry and abandon their usual abodes, thus bringing calamity on the land, finds mythic expression in stories of droughts being caused by the absence of storm gods who must be found and convinced to return (see the Hittite myths on this theme in Hoffner 1990, 15–29). Where specific deities become associated with particular cities and their ruling dynasties, a claim that the god is absent becomes political commentary. A regular theme in Babylonian royal inscriptions narrates the departure of the gods, especially Marduk, from Babylon out of anger at the city's inhabitants and, especially, its former kings. The current king claims divinely sanctioned rule in order to return the statue of Marduk to Babylon and restore his worship properly (see the inscription of Nabopolassar quoted above and, for more examples, Foster 2005, 360–64, 374–91). Similarly, Nabonidus (Babylon, sixth century), in celebrating his rebuilding of the Ebabbar temple at Sippar, includes among his titulary titles "the caretaker of the Esagil and Ezida" (two temples in Babylon), then begins the historical section by narrating that:

> Ehulhul, the temple of Sin in Harran, where since days of yore Sin, the great lord, had established his favorite residence—(then) his heart became angry against that city and temple and he aroused the Mede, destroyed that temple and turned it into ruins—in my legitimate reign Bel (and) the great lord, for the love of my kingship, became reconciled with that city and temple and showed compassion. In the beginning of my everlasting reign they sent me a dream. . . . Marduk spoke with me: "Nabonidus, . . . rebuild Ehulhul and cause Sin, the great lord, to establish his residence in its midst."

The king politely objects that the temple site lies in Medean territory, but the gods prophesy that the Persian king Cyrus will scatter the Medes and so allow the work to commence. Thus, the inscription explains not just the royal succession, but also the ebb and flow of national frontiers on the basis of divine concerns for the reestablishment

of ritual institutions and practices. For this and several other temples, Nabonidus is scrupulous to follow the foundation deposits (designs) of earlier kings whom he names. In one case, he adds that "the regular offerings and the (other) offerings I increased over what they were and I established for her." The king's motives become explicit in the prayer he recites when the temple has been completed: "As for me, Nabonidus, king of Babylon, who completed that temple, may Sin, the king of the gods of heaven and the netherworld, . . . make my ominous signs favorable. May he lengthen my days, extend my years, annihilate those hostile to me, destroy my foes" (tr. by Paul-Alain Beaulieu, in *COS* 2.123A).

The tendency to blame national misfortune on ritual misconduct could be sharpened into political attacks on particular kings. Kings themselves employed ritual criticism prominently to attack their predecessors and rivals (Talon 1993). The Persian king Cyrus used this rhetoric against Nabonidus by citing the Babylonian's impieties to justify the Persian conquest of Babylon:

> An incompetent person was installed to exercise lordship over his country. . . . for Ur and the rest of the sacred centers, improper rituals [ ] daily he recited. Irreverently, he put an end to the regular offerings. . . . By his own plan, he did away with the worship of Marduk, the king of the gods.

Marduk then "searched for a righteous king whom he would support. He called out his name: Cyrus, king of Anshan." Cyrus claims to have taken the city without a fight, then:

> I daily attended to his worship. . . . I returned the (images of) the gods to the sacred centers (on the other side of the) Tigris whose sanctuaries had been abandoned for a long time. . . . I increased the offerings [to x] geese, two ducks and ten turtledoves above the former (offerings) . . . (tr. by Mordechai Cogan, in *COS* 2.124).

Note the similar pro-Cyrus ritual rhetoric of "The Verse Account of Nabonidus" that lampoons Nebonidus as saying:

> "I shall omit (all) festivals, I shall order (even) the New Year's Festival to cease!" . . . He (continues to) mix up the rites, he confuses the (hepatoscopic oracles). . . . To the most important ritual observances he makes an end (tr. A. Leo Oppenheim, in *ANET* 312–315).

The need to legitimize rulers clearly fueled such propagandistic uses of ritual criticism in royal inscriptions. It also led to the composition of "apologies" by kings convicted of their sins against the gods (usually for treaty violations; see Talon 2005 for Neo-Assyrian examples). On the other hand, literary texts written in scribal schools provide a much wider range of explanations for historical change. Some attest to a divinely-ordained cycle of history (e.g. the Prophecies of Neferti, early second millennium Egypt, Lichtheim 1973, 1:139–45, or the Epic of Erra and Ishum, ninth or eighth century Babylonian, tr. Stephanie Dalley in *COS* 1.113), and some simply bemoan human betrayals (Instruction of Amenemhet I, early second millennium Egypt, Lichtheim 1973, 1:135–39) or even the inexplicable nature of catastrophe (Complaints of Khakheperre-Sonb and the Admonitions of Ipuwer, early second millennium Egypt, Lichtheim 1973, 1:145–63; also Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible, mid-first millennium). Historians have tried to link such literature with periods of severe social disruption, but the flowering of works exploring the theme of social chaos may have more to do with developments in the literary histories of particular ancient cultures than with historical events (Lichtheim 1973, 1:149–50).

Nevertheless, even in literary works that admit the influence of uncontrollable and possibly random forces, ritual provides hope for exerting some control over them. The Instruction to Merikare (late third millennium Egyptian) quotes the earlier instruction of King Khety in a context that gives a variety of reasons for the course of events, but the quotation focuses on ritual: "He who is silent toward violence diminishes the offerings. God will attack the rebel for the sake of the temple. . . . Supply the offerings, revere the god, don't say, 'it is trouble,' don't slacken your hand. He who opposes you attacks the sky" (tr. Lichtheim 1973, 1:105). Another example, the Babylonian Erra epic, despite its depiction of extravagant and irrational divine violence on humans, concludes by recommending the reading, recitation, reproduction, and veneration of the epic itself as apotropaic rituals to ward off the catastrophes that it describes. Thus, ritual rhetoric resonates widely even in wisdom and epic literature.

In the propagandistic contexts of royal inscriptions, however, ritual rhetoric exacted a political price: by depicting the king's religious piety

in terms of royal sponsorship of temple cults, it ceded influence to ritual specialists—the priests of those same temples. Priests not only appealed for royal support on that basis (see the prophecies cited above), but they also influenced or even wrote chronicles of royal history that evaluated kings purely on the basis of their support for particular temples. Thus, the Weidner Chronicle (sixth century Babylonian) explains the fortunes of a long list of kings by their treatment of the Esagila, the temple of Marduk (Glassner 2004, 263–69). Its lesson is summed up succinctly: "Whosoever offends the gods of this city, his star will not stand in the sky." Then it describes the actions of a succession of rulers who interfered, for example, with fish offerings to Marduk or restored them, or modified Marduk's drink-offerings or preserved their original amounts, in each case explaining their loss or gain of kingship on that basis. Many Neo-Babylonian chronicles, according to Glassner (77), "favored a political line of reasoning that no longer guided the conduct of a ruler but told him what he could or could not do."

In Israel, at around the same time, similar thinking produced a fierce critique of Israel's and Judah's kings in the form of the books of Kings in the Hebrew Bible. The history approves only those kings notable for their singular devotion to YHWH, the god of the Jerusalem temple: David who brought the ark and Tabernacle to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6), Hezekiah who purged the Jerusalem temple and outlying cultic sites of idolatrous elements (2 Kings 18:3–8), and Josiah who also reformed the temple and suppressed outlying cults (2 Kings 22–23). Some other kings get mixed reviews in words similar to 2 Kings 12:3–4: "Johoash did what was right in the sight of YHWH all his days, because the priest Jehoiada taught him. But the high places [illegitimate sanctuaries] were not taken away . . ." (cf. 1 Kings 15:11–15; 22:43). Most of the kings of Judah and all the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel are condemned, however, "as doing evil in the sight of YHWH" because they sponsored illegitimate temples and rites (e.g. 1 Kings 12:25–33). Though various stories chronicle the moral and political failings of Israel's kings, the explicit evaluations of this book's narrator emphasize exclusively ritual concerns.

Ritual, thus, frequently provided political justifications for royal rule, for military conquest and rebellion, and for priestly critiques. It is sufficiently widespread in the surviving texts to suggest that the mere mention of ritual activity was meant to presuppose a divine-human quid pro quo, even if it is not spelled out. (Aristotle noted that a typical rhetorical argument, the *enthymeme,* employs unstated presuppositions.) Scholarship on ancient historiography often comments on its religious cast (e.g. Glassner 23: "Theology was the end, history the means to the end"). Rhetorical analysis sharpens this observation by noting the persuasive motive for postulating ritual causality behind historical events: here lay the basis for asserting human control over events, and therefore also for assigning specific human blame. Ritual rhetoric presented a catch-all explanation for past events, while the rituals themselves provided a means for controlling the future. This understanding of ritual causality created an ideological basis for political critique.

Royal examples modeled rituals' effects for common people as well. Everyone could try to control the vicissitudes of fate by tending the needs of the gods to the best of their abilities and resources. The tilt toward royal interests in the extant texts probably reflects the conditions of these texts' production and preservation more than it reflects differences between the ritual interests of royalty and commoners. The royal and priestly historiographic texts demonstrate the high stakes felt by ancient peoples in ritual accuracy: not only the city and the dynasty, but also one's health, wealth, and life (and, often, afterlife) depended on ritual accuracy and fidelity. These historiographic texts can therefore help us understand the social situations and rhetorical settings in which ritual texts, more narrowly defined, were written and used.

Ritual Texts

In contrast to the overtly persuasive intentions behind royal inscriptions, temple dedications and even many chronicles, ancient Near Eastern ritual texts usually contain far fewer indications of their rhetorical goals. The category "ritual texts," as used by translators and interpreters, is very heterogeneous and undefined. It usually contains collections of spells, omen lists, lists of offerings, festival calendars, regulations of priests' incomes, and temple inventories, as well as detailed instructions for performing particular rites. Individual texts often contain mixtures of several of these elements. Scholars usually categorize such texts functionally as "archival" or "didactic" texts, in distinction from historiographic or literary texts. We have already seen, however, that similar ritual topics also appear in these other genres and were used to reinforce their rhetorical goals. That observation suggests that ritual texts had persuasive functions, as well, and that the rhetori-

cal role of didactic, and even archival, texts in ancient cultures requires serious reconsideration.

Ritual texts reveal their rhetorical purpose most obviously when they exhort their hearers or readers to perform their instructions. Such exhortations to ritual performance are, however, surprisingly rare outside the Bible (e.g. Exodus 12:1–20; Leviticus 17:1–16; 18:2–5; Deuteronomy 12:1–31). They do commonly appear in the publicly accessible areas of ancient Egyptian tombs, where inscriptions ask for prayers and offerings for the deceased. Thus, an inscription in the tomb of Paheri (fourteenth century) urges, "Just so may you recite the offering prayer in the manner found in the writings, and the invocation offering as spoken by those long dead just as it came from the mouth of God" (Foster 2001, 176–77). A few non-funerary rituals also enjoin their performance: for example, ritual instructions to accompany recitation of lamentations for Isis and Nephthys (Ptolomaic period Egyptian) conclude, "You shall not be slack in reciting this book in the hour of festival" (Lichtheim 1980, 3:116–121).

Somewhat more common in ancient Near Eastern ritual texts are blessings on those who perform or sponsor their ritual stipulations. Thus, several lines further in the prayers of Paheri, reward is promised for the recitation: "Goodness is yours when you perform it, for [you] discover [that it earns] you favor" (Foster 2001, 177). The famous spell 125 of the Egyptian Book of Coming Forth by Day (the so-called "Book of the Dead") concludes, "He for whom this scroll is recited will prosper, and his children will prosper," etc. (Lichtheim 1976, 2:132). Similarly, an Ugaritic drinking rite (fourteenth or thirteenth century BCE) promises that the god will bless a worshiper who offers libations: "Your success he will ask of *Ba'lu*. To what you have requested he will bring you . . ." (tr. Pardee 2002, 193–95). The Marseilles tariff (Punic, fourth century) promises sanctions for ritual transgressions: it mandates monetary fines for non-compliance with its stipulations (*COS* 1:98; *ANET* 502–503).

Sometimes, texts connect the reason for performing a particular ritual with its promised outcome. In a Babylonian text containing several different rituals, one or two ominous omens introduce some of the ritual instructions which then conclude, "If you do all this, no evil will approach the king" (tr. A. Sachs, in *ANET* 340). Other texts, while providing no motivation for the entire ritual sequence, do note the negative consequences of ritual failure for certain parts. For example,

the festival calendar for the Babylonian New Year's Festival (*ANET* 331–34, lines 364–65) mandates that the chief priest must be absent while the temple is purified, or else become defiled himself. Another infrequent rhetorical strategy for motivating compliance is to cite the authority of those promulgating the instructions. In some cases, the implications of that authority claim remain unstated, as in the case of a third-millennium Egyptian offering list that emphasizes the royal authority behind it (Strudwick 2005, 87–91). In other cases, an authority claim invokes explicit enforcement mechanisms, as in the case of the first-millennium Punic Marseilles and Carthage tariffs that emphasize their authorization and enforcement by "the thirty men who are in charge of the revenues" (tr. Dennis Pardee, in *COS* 1:98; also *ANET* 656–67).

Nevertheless, rarely do such explicit exhortations or motivations appear in ritual texts, in marked contrast to the royal inscriptions analyzed above. For the most part, ritual texts simply state the order and amounts of offerings, the sequence of ritual actions and liturgies, and calendars of festivals and events. Thus, a common element in Egyptian tombs from the third millennium on is a list of offerings (Strudwick 2005, 87–91). The huge amounts listed in later private tombs ("May they give a thousand of bread, beer, beef and fowl" in the prayers of Paheri, Lichtheim 1976, 2:16) suggest exaggeration, at the very least. The phrasing of the deceased's request for recitations ("Say 'An offering, given by the king'") may indicate that the offering list's effectiveness was believed to lie not in describing actual food gifts, but rather in its oral recitation. (See further below.) Other ritual texts, however, associate actual offerings with verbal recitations: several early and late Egyptian rituals juxtapose ritual actions with spells and longer recitations, e.g. from the third millennium Pyramid Texts: "Osiris Unis, accept the one of the shank, Horus's eye. 1 BOWL WITH A SHANK OF MEAT" (tr. Allen 2005, 23; for his discussion, see page 6); similarly, from almost two thousand years later, the daily ritual of Amun-Re (*COS* 1.34).

Judging from the amount of space given over to it, a preponderant concern for ancient writers of ritual texts was the issue of who gets what. Recipients include deities, their temples, priests, prophets and other temple functionaries. Ritual texts list sizable expenses in a matter-of-fact tone that rarely expresses any overt concern for the financial consequences of their mandates for those who have to pay.

For example, the Emar ritual for the installation of a high priestess describes seven days of offerings, feasts and purifications. The following lines are typical:

> They give the diviner (one?) shekel of silver, and they sacrifice the one ox and the six sheep before the storm god. They set before the gods the ritual portion of beef and the ritual portion of mutton. . . . The officials who give the consecration-gift, the heralds, and seven eat and drink at the storm god's temple. The men of the consecration gift receive one standard loaf and one standard vessel of barley-beer each (tr. Daniel Fleming, in *COS* 1.122; similarly *COS* 1.126).

Different kinds of texts devote different amounts of attention to the various parties to the ritual exchange. Festival calendars tend to focus on which deities get what and/or when (e.g. Emar texts [*COS* 1.123–125]; Egyptian Old Kingdom festival calendars [Strudwick 2005, 87–91]; an Ugaritic calendar for the month of vintage [Pardee 2002, 56–65 = *COS* 1.95]; Numbers 28–29 in the Hebrew Bible). Simple lists of deities may have served a similar ritual purpose: several such lists from Ugarit contain the cuneiform equivalent of check marks in the margins of the tablets, presumably documenting that the rites were performed and in the proper order (Pardee 2002, 12–13, 200). The aptly named "tariffs," on the other hand, seem more concerned with priestly incomes. The Punic "Marseilles" tariff specifies which portions of each kind of animal belong to the priest (*COS* 1.98), as do the ritual instructions of Leviticus 1–7 in the Hebrew Bible. The Punic and Israelite tariffs make clear that various kinds of animals, ranging from the expensive ox to the inexpensive turtledove, may count as the same kind of offering. They thereby provide a scale of graduated payments that implicitly depends on the worshiper's financial resources or willingness to pay.

One stylistic feature of ritual texts that lends them a didactic feeling rather than a persuasive one, at least to modern eyes, is how they introduce their provisions. Calendrical texts begin, of course, with some kind of date formula, such as the first line of the Ugaritic calendar mentioned above, "In the month of *Ra'šu-Yēni,* on the day of the new moon, cut a bunch of grapes for *'Ilu* as a peace-offering" (Pardee 2002, 63). Non-calendrical texts often introduce their provisions by

specifying the occasion of their performance with a conditional clause: "If people are dying in the country and if some enemy god has caused that, I act as follows . . ." (Hittite, tr. Albrecht Goetze, in *ANET* 347), "When the wall of the temple of god Anu falls into ruin, you shall prepare . . ." (Akkadian, tr. A. Sachs, in *ANET* 339), "When *'Attartu-Hurri* enters the 'mound'(-room) of the palace: put on a feast . . ." (Ugaritic, tr. Pardee 2002, 71), "When one of you offers an offering to YHWH, you may offer your offering of domestic animals, that is from the herd or the flock. If their offering is a burnt offering from the herd . . ." (Hebrew, Leviticus 1:2–3, NRSV). Such conditional formulas leave modern readers with the impression that compliance is optional. The texts seem to give instructions to those already inclined to follow them, rather than mandating performance in overt imperatives like the inscriptions tend to do. Modern interpreters, therefore, tend to classify rituals as didactic or archival, rather than hortatory. They even debate whether particular texts prescribe the rituals or simply describe them (Levine 1965 and 1983).

Such conditional or "casuistic" formulas, however, are also the most characteristic stylistic feature of ancient Near Eastern law collections. Their use in law indicates their appropriateness for detailing obligatory practices. This conditional or casuistic form reflects the influence of scribal, "academic" reflection on the formation of a text, as Raymond Westbrook (1994, 30) observed:

> The casuistic form was the quintessential 'scientific' type of Mesopotamian literature, as attested in the omen and medical texts. It was the means whereby raw data could be cast into a generalized, objective form, stripped of any connections with circumstances irrelevant to their universal application. It was the nearest Mesopotamian science could come to expressing principles. . . . The choice of form for the individual paragraphs of what was essentially a literary document, belonging . . . to the genre 'academic treatise,' was not a legal one but depended on other factors, perhaps pedagogical or rhetorical.

Those rhetorical factors have been clarified by Carol Lipson's study of an Egyptian medical text in the sixteenth-century, the Smith Papyrus. She argued that its repetitive conditional formulas established not only

the anonymous writer's authority but also intended to "direct surgeons, in communicating with their patients, to continue a tradition of treating medical discourse as formalized, ritual oration" modeled after a ritual chant (1990, 399). Thus, ancient experts, like their modern counterparts, often couched their pronouncements in categorical and objective rhetorical forms to reinforce their authority. The frequency of conditional or casuistic phrasing in ritual texts reflects their production and use in the same scribal circles that produced catalogs of omens, medical texts, and collections of laws. Ritual texts in conditional form represent collections of knowledge, and recommended or even mandated practices just as these other genres do.

Such academic origins naturally lead interpreters to assign a primarily didactic function to ritual texts. Why should we look further for a persuasive function? It is the frequent appearance of ritual rhetoric in the contexts of royal inscriptions and decrees that points out the persuasive force of ritual texts in their original social contexts. Inscriptions and decrees illustrate the very high stakes that ancient peoples placed on ritual accuracy and fidelity. The texts that established such ritual standards probably played a very normative role in regulating ritual behavior. Though the texts themselves may not give many indications of this persuasive role, the regulative function of such ritual texts was enforced by the social contexts in which they were used. That is typical of the rhetorical force of lists in general: they gain their power from the social contexts of their use. This observation, however, should not be taken as diminishing their rhetorical effectiveness. As collections of laws, instructions, and procedures, normative lists regulate the lives of those within their social context more extensively than almost any other textual genre (O'Banion 1992, 12; Watts 2004, 202).

Ritual Functions of Texts

We do not, however, have to rely only on such inductive reasoning to ascertain the rhetorical function of ancient ritual texts. There is more direct evidence for their persuasive power, namely, references to using ritual texts themselves as ritual objects.

One might well wonder why ancient temple priests needed ritual texts at all. Functioning as professional and often hereditary guilds of specialists, priesthoods throughout the ancient Near East must have used oral tradition as the primary means for educating young priests.

Since few people outside the scribal and priestly classes could read, ritual texts would have been used almost exclusively by people who were already enculturated in the oral tradition. What use did priests have for ritual texts?

One function of ritual, as well as other texts, was to advance the oral education process itself. Recent research has emphasized the complex interactions between oral traditions and writing, in marked contrast to older scholarship that conceived of orality and literacy in historical sequence so that literacy was thought to have gradually displaced oral ways of learning and thinking. Comparative analysis of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures suggests that they all, in one way or another, used texts to buttress and reinforce oral modes of education rather than displacing one with the other (Carr, 2005). Traditions were memorized by being written and copied, and memories were corrected on the basis of written texts. Furthermore, the reading of ancient texts depended heavily on prior memorization because their graphic forms were difficult for even expert scribes to scan immediately. Thus, one function of ritual texts was to ground oral performances, both reading and memorization.

Ritual texts in particular, however, did not just ground oral performances. They were also used to guarantee the accuracy of ritual performances. Just as Nabonidus searched for texts and drawings to reestablish the original designs of temples and statues, so many references indicate that kings and priests used old texts to (re)establish correct ritual practices. Thus, a prayer of the Hittite king Muwatalli II in the thirteenth century claims that when the gods are offended, he not only consults with knowledgeable elders but also that "whatever I, My Majesty, discover now in the written records, I will carry out" (Singer 2002, 83). During one of his predecessors' reigns, a long-drawn out plague motivated a search of archives to find old ritual and treaty texts whose provisions had fallen into abeyance, with the result that the rituals were reinstated and offerings were made to compensate for the treaty violations (Singer 2002, 58–59). The revival of rituals on the basis of old texts receives prominent depiction in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 22–23; Nehemiah 8), and also appears in Greek and Roman sources (Watts 2005, 2007).

The use of ritual texts to revive old rituals shows the persuasive value of texts in situations of ritual conflict and change. When external crisis or internal criticism requires ritual change, old texts can be

used to buttress the authority for such changes because they appear to be independent of the kings and priests who wield them. Unlike oral traditions, which can only be presented through the embodied voices of those who have learned them and who may therefore be suspected of bias, texts seem to preserve voices out of the past. By appealing to a ritual text, priests and kings could invoke an apparently independent authority for their traditional practices or ritual changes. Never mind the fact that those who control texts, especially in predominantly oral cultures, control their contents almost as completely as oral tradents manage their traditions. The rhetorical force of ritual texts derives from their *appearance* as independent authorities, and ancient kings and priests invoked them precisely to gain that authority for themselves.

This emphasis on the independent appearance of ritual texts was not just figurative. Their role in legitimizing ritual practices sometimes led priests to display texts prominently within the rituals themselves. In Egypt, such practices led to one important functionary being designated as the "lector-priest," that is, the person who is responsible for reading and holding the ritual scrolls. Illustrations of the "opening of the mouth" ceremony often feature the lector-priest displaying an open papyrus scroll in front of the sarcophagus of the deceased (Lorton 1999, 149). Such displays were not limited to this ritual alone, however, as a seventh century papyrus in the Brooklyn Museum of Art shows: it records and illustrates a divine oracle received during the procession of the image of Amun-Re which includes a lector-priest holding up an open scroll. The public reading of books of the law, in which the scroll was displayed as well as heard, played a crucial role in religious reforms in Jerusalem as well (2 Kings 22–23; Nehemiah 8). By the late first millennium, Torah scrolls had become such recognizable symbols of Judaism that some were intentionally destroyed in attempts to suppress Jewish ritual practices (1 Maccabees 1:56–57). In Hellenistic and Roman culture more broadly, book burning became a common method for suppressing religious movements (Sarefield 2007).

The association of ritual texts with ritual performance became so strong that the texts could themselves become stand-ins for the rituals. Instead of doing what the text says, it was enough to recite the text itself in order to receive the same ritual benefit. Though it is tempting to places such ideas at the end of a long historical development, they in fact appear quite early among Egyptian funerary texts. The Pyramid Texts consist of ritual instructions, recitations and spells that were inscribed on the walls of royal tombs in the mid-third millennium. James Allen described the function of these texts: "Originally recited by a lector priest in the role of the deceased's son during rites that probably took place at the funeral, they were carved on the walls of the pyramid's chambers to ensure their ongoing effectiveness" (2005, 5). I have already mentioned wall inscriptions in publicly accessible parts of some Egyptian private tombs that invite visitors to recite "an offering given by the king," apparently in lieu of actually giving offerings. Thus, the Babylonian Talmud (*Menahot* 110a-b) expresses very ancient sentiments when it claims that studying the Torah's rules for the burnt offering earns the same merit as actually performing a burnt offering.

Sometimes, the rituals mandated by a text consisted entirely of preserving and performing the text itself. The Akkadian Erra Epic (eighth century) concludes with the god Erra proclaiming,

> In the sanctuary of the god who honors this poem, may abundance accumulate, but let the one who neglects it never smell incense. . . . Let the singer who chants (it) not die from pestilence, but his performance be pleasing to king and prince. The scribe who masters it shall be spared in the enemy country and honored in his own land. . . . The house in which this tablet is placed, though Erra be angry and the Seven be murderous, the sword of pestilence shall not approach it, safety abides upon it (tr. Foster 2005, 911).

Promises of supernatural blessings on those who honor and preserve the text containing the blessings, as well as curses upon those who do not, appear widely in ancient inscriptions. The negative sanctions in particular echo in later Jewish and Christian literature (e.g. the Letter of Aristeas [Charlesworth 1983, 2:33]; 1 Enoch 104:10–13; Revelation 22:18–19). The Torah, however, presents a more expansive rhetoric containing both promise and threat, within which textual rituals play an important role:

> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind

> them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6–9, NRSV).
>
> Read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 31:11–12, NRSV).

Thus, various ancient cultures employed ritual texts as talismans to curry divine favor. Such practices, which are so well attested in later Western religious traditions (Parmenter 2007), have their roots in ancient Near Eastern ritual rhetoric.

Conclusion

All these examples show that a quid pro quo predicating divine favor toward humans on their assiduous support for the gods' sustenance and residences is a major theme in ancient propaganda and literature, as well as in ritual texts more narrowly defined. This ritual rhetoric, as I have termed it, provided an ideological basis for political criticism. It also encouraged the manipulation of ritual texts as symbols of fidelity to the instructions they contain. Thus ritual rhetoric served as a powerful means of persuasion.

One would not know that, however, from classical rhetorical theory. Greco-Roman theorists of rhetoric provide no analysis of religious rhetorical genres such as oracles, sermons, ritual instructions and prayers. Religious holy sites and temples find no place in their three-fold division of public civic space between law court, political assembly, and funeral. Religion, therefore, has no role in the three rhetorical genres of persuasion. Though these theorists include among their examples of arguments some that mention the gods (e.g. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II, 23.4 [1397b], 23.7 [1398a], III.18 [1419a]), they avoid any participation in the institutional rhetoric of temples and sects. Plato's dismissive attitude towards religious rhetoric seems to typify much of the subsequent theoretical tradition:

> They produce a bushel of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and of the Muses, as they affirm, and these book they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, and that there are also special rites for the defunct, which they call functions, that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice (*Republic* II 364e-365a, tr. Paul Shorey in Hamilton and Cairns 1961, 611–12).

This lacuna in ancient rhetorical theory becomes glaring when one surveys the rhetoric of ancient Near Eastern cultures. That is not because of the prevalence there of stories about deities and their activities, which were just as pervasive in Greco-Roman culture. It is, rather, the prominent mention of rituals in ancient Near Eastern texts that points out the theorists' omission. Greek theorists reflect in passing the existence of this rhetoric in their own society (see, e.g., Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.15 [1377a] on oaths and II.5 [1383b] on the causes of confidence, which may be due to the fact that "we have wronged no one, or not many, or not those of whom we are afraid; and generally, if our relations with the gods are satisfactory, as will be shown especially by signs and oracles" [tr. W. Rhys Roberts, in McKeon 1941, 1392]), but they give it no distinctive function. Such passing references suggest that it would be profitable to investigate Greek inscriptions for traces of ritual rhetoric that could contextualize the distinctive social and ideological position of the classical theorists over against not just the Sophists, whom they often explicitly attack, but also vis-à-vis the rhetoric of temple priests and oracles, whom they ignore.

Laurent Pernot has recently called for expanding classical categories to include the range of genres in ancient religious rhetoric. He starts by giving particular attention to the rhetoric of prayers and hymns (Pernot 2006). Another avenue for exploring the nature and power of religious rhetoric can be found in the pervasive influence of ritual rhetoric in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. Though clearly grounded in the practices of temples and shrines, ritual rhetoric reached beyond those settings to shape the ideological grounds for political power and resistance, and also the less documented struggles

of non-elite people in their everyday lives (e.g. Meskell 2002). Study of ancient ritual rhetoric therefore provides insight into ancient peoples' political and social struggles, as well as their religious practices and beliefs.

Abbreviations

ANET Pritchard, James B. 1969. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* 3rd edition with supplement. Princeton: Princeton UP.

COS Hallo, W. W. and K. L. Younger, Jr., eds. 1997, 2000, 2002. *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World,* 3 vols. Leiden: Brill.

tr. translated by

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