

A Tribute to Joan Westenholz

Wayne Horowitz and Filip Vukasavović

Below is a tribute to our friend and colleague Joan Goodnick Westenholz consisting of two parts. First, is the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem obituary for Joan, which was prepared by Filip Vukasavović and posted on the BLMJ website. Second, is a written version of a short lecture that was presented in Joan's memory at the evening in her honor at the BLMJ on June 26th, 2013. We share both, in this academic setting, in reminder of her many contributions to the BLMJ in particular, but more broadly to honor her many contributions to the field of Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern studies. May her memory be blessed. She is and will be missed!

Obituary for Joan Goodnick Westenholz

I first met Joan in August 2004. At the time, she was the Chief Curator at the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, and was looking to employ an assistant curator. Professor Wayne Horowitz suggested that I apply for the job, and so I found myself in an interview that will forever be etched in my memory. I had been in Joan's office for no more than five minutes, and she had already succeeded in confusing me not once but several times as she leapt from subject to subject without signaling or changing gears. She was simultaneously discussing my varied responsibilities as her assistant while also trying to work on the script of her then forthcoming book *Cuneiform Inscriptions in the Collection of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem: The Old Babylonian Inscriptions*, (Brill, 2006). Almost every time she made a mistake she would make her famous "error sound" which, to this very day reverberates in the curatorial office. (Feel free to give me a call for a live demonstration).

A month later I started the job and found myself working with Joan on an

almost daily basis until her retirement at the end of December 2008. Needless to say, it was an 'interesting' adventure, 'interesting' being quite an understatement. Calling it 'hectic and wild' is a more exact description, as those of you who knew Joan personally and/or worked with her would also testify. However more importantly, it was an educational ride for me, and a maturing process. Her tremendous knowledge was a deep well of intelligence, information and experience that I was able to drink from. For someone like me, who at the time was still a rookie in the field, this was an incredible privilege and honor. I can honestly say that I would not be half the scholar that I am today without Joan's guidance, care, love and encouragement. For that, and much more, I will be forever grateful to her.

In March 2012, while having one of our occasional Skype conversations, she informed me that she had been diagnosed with cancer. Surgery and treatment followed, with a less than optimistic prognosis of survival past a year. She passed away in the UK, surrounded by her family, on 18 February 2013 (8 Adar 5773) and was buried two days later at Eretz HaChayim cemetery near Bet Shemesh, Israel, next to her mother and father.

Joan was born in Philadelphia on July 1, 1943 where she grew up with her parents and her brother Paul. In 1964, she received her BA from the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in Anthropology, with a specialty in Archaeology. She completed her PhD with honors in 1971 at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. There she studied with some of the "giants" of Assyriology: Erica Reiner, A. Leo Oppenheim, I. J. Gelb and Miguel Civil. She often recalled with pride the opportunities she had to study and work at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute. Following her marriage to Aage Westenholz in 1969, she moved to Denmark where both her daughters, Aliza and Dina were born. In 1988 she was appointed the Chief Curator of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem. While at the BLMJ, she was instrumental in creating the Museum's permanent galleries and she also curated a number of

exceptional exhibitions. In 2006, she was awarded the Curator of the Year prize by the State of Israel's then Ministry of Science, Culture and Sport.

Joan's contribution to the world of Assyriology cannot be overstated. She was one of the leading scholars in the fields of Mesopotamian religion, gender studies, and Sargonic literature. She was a prolific author, as is clearly evidenced by the dozens of articles and volumes authored, co-authored and edited by her. Her passion and love for Assyriology was matched only by her love for her family. She left behind, two daughters, three grandchildren and a brother.

She will be greatly missed. May her memory be for a blessing.

Joan Goodnick Westenholz and The Great Wall

(Wayne Horowitz, The Hebrew University and Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem)

It is my honor tonight to speak in memory of Joan Goodnick Westenholz, who for so long served this institution, the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, with such distinction. In fact, my duty is doubly sad. When I first prepared this paper in January 2013, for what was supposed to be an evening in honor of Joan for her and her family, I was hoping to wish her a speedy and full recovery so that we could have had many more evenings like this in her presence for years to come. Also, at that time, I was speaking in place of Professor Avigdor Hurowitz of the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva, a lifelong friend of Joan, who was scheduled to give a short paper in Joan's honor that evening, but who would not be speaking due to illness. In the end, both Joan and her very close friend Avigdor, as one says in Akkadian, "went to their fate, entered their mountain," and so we are left with their memories, and their writings, which have enriched us all in so many ways, and will continue to enrich us in the years to come, for example, by way of Joan's last book, *Goddesses in Context, On Divine Powers, Roles, Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources* (co-authored by Julia M. Asher-Greve),¹ which is just now becoming available. Thus, it has fallen upon me to give a short talk illustrating some of Joan's research and her contributions to the academic community. Well where does one start.

I thought I might start by reading a short description of Joan's interests and writings that I found on the website of The Institute for The Study of The Ancient World of New York University (NYU), where Joan served most recently as a Visiting Research Scholar:

1. Asher-Greve J.M. and J.G. Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context, On Divine Powers, Roles, Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources* (= *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 259), Academic Press Fribourg, 2013

Her (Joan's) research has concentrated on ancient Mesopotamian studies, especially on the subjects of religion and literature. She has investigated Mesopotamian theological conceptions, in particular examining the responsibilities of religious officiants in ancient Mesopotamian temples. The understanding of heroic epics of the Sargonic kings of the first empire-building Dynasty of Akkad has been the focus of her literary interests. She has studied the historical events and the process of their transformation in Akkadian heroic traditions. Her present lexicographical research, together with Dr. Marcel Sigrist, is focussed on the earliest anatomical lexicon in order to determine the Mesopotamian perception of human biology. She is the author of numerous articles concentrating on issues of gender, women and goddesses, scrutinizing the conceptualization of the female role in Mesopotamian society as well as the construction of masculine and feminine ritual roles in Mesopotamia.

So a dry and rather formalistic summary of Joan's career of study of Ancient Near Eastern civilization, its cuneiform corpus of texts, and its art and artefacts, consisting of over a hundred publications of various shapes and sizes that have made, are making, and will continue to make major contributions to the study of Assyriology in this generation and for generations to come.

To this history of publication one also has to add the often unseen work of Joan as Chief Curator of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, publishing texts in the Museum's collections, her role in the very opening of the museum, organizing exhibitions and conferences, and being an important part of our community of visitors, volunteers, workers, collectors, scholars, and administrators who people this most beautiful building housing the collections of the BLMJ.

Thus, when asked to fill in for Avigdor, I thought how can I do justice to Joan and her accomplishments? Well, I can't — no one can in a short talk such as this. So what I decided to do was to show, by means of one very small personal example, how Joan's research has allowed others to follow in her footsteps also making small but important advances in their own research in our common quest to better understand the civilizations of the Ancient Near East and their cuneiform text tradition. So first my text, then Joan's text, and then what I learned from her.

My text is BM 92687, more commonly known as *The Babylonian Map of the World*. This is a British Museum tablet from the vicinity of Babylon dating to the middle of the first millennium BCE that I myself have now published three times in *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (the Ph.D. thesis, the first printing in 1998, and second printing in 2011).²

Fig. 1: The World Map: Photograph³

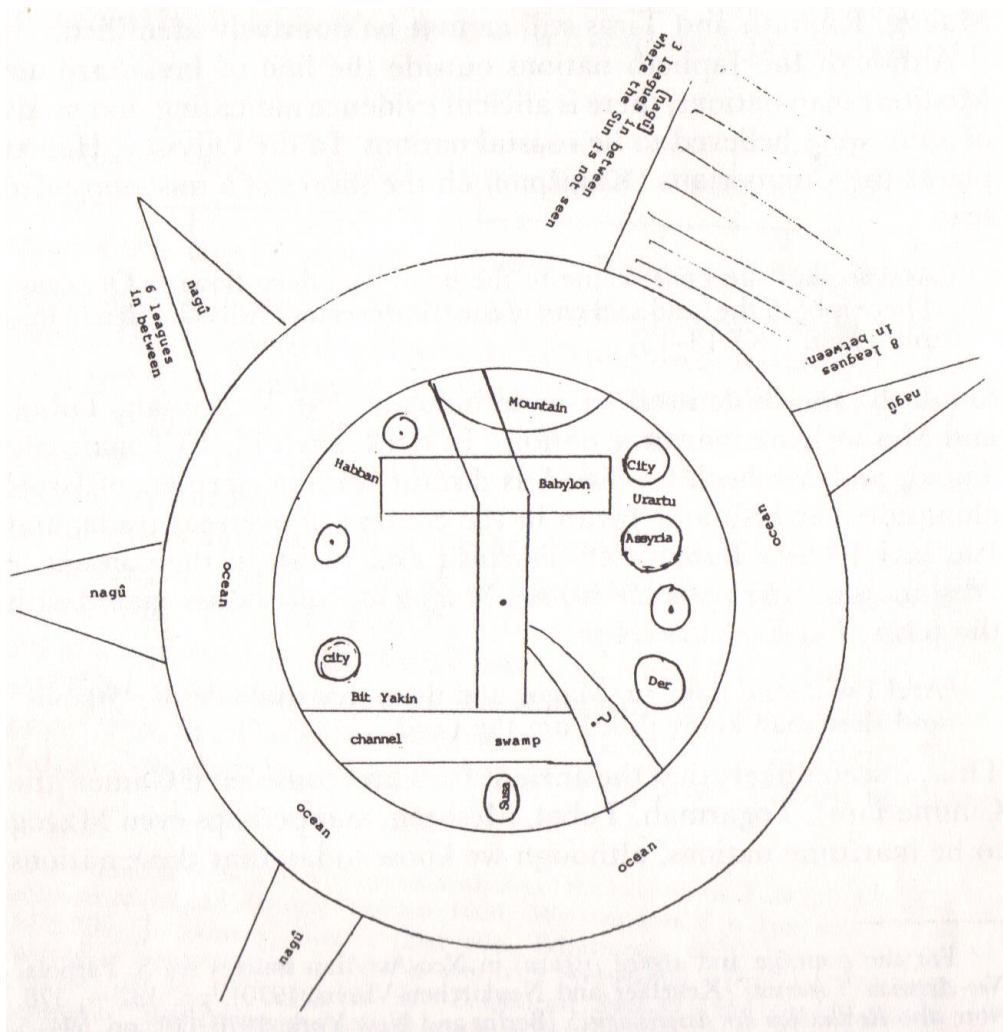


2. Horowitz W. 1998 and *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Addenda), Eisenbrauns, Mishawaka Lake Indiana, 2011.

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3. From *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* pl. 6. We thank the Trustees of The British Museum and Eisenbrauns for permission to reproduce the photo.

fig. 2: The World Map: Drawing⁴



4. A much better sketch of the Map, superimposed over the original tablet, is available in Finkel I.L. and M.J. Seymour, *Babylon, Myth and Reality*, The British Museum Press, London, 2008, p. 17. This could not be reproduced here for reasons of copyright.

The map itself occupies the lower half of the obverse of BM 92687 with related text to be found above the map on the obverse, and on the reverse of the tablet. On the map we see that the Babylonian world is drawn as a set of geometric shapes and labels. From inside to out:

- * A set of parallel lines, what Babylonian geometry knew as ‘a geometric river,’ here representing the Euphrates River which correctly passes through the rectangle labelled Babylon
- * The rectangle marked Babylon itself reflecting the rectangular shape of the walled city of Babylon in the first millennium
- * An oval and label to the right of the Euphrates marked Assyria and Urartu, with Assyria below Urartu
- * An “eye of the bull” shape marked Mountain
- * A ring formed by two concentric circles marked Ocean.
- * Triangular projections extending outwards from the outer circle of Ocean labelled ‘region,’ for Akkadian *nagû*, which has the more specific meaning in Babylonian tradition of a region associated with the sea such as islands, peninsulas, or other land areas reached by crossing the sea as is the case with the *nagû* on our map.

This mix of geography and geometry finds further expression even in the basic shape of the world on the map, a circle in a circle, Akkadian *kippatum ina*

kippatim. In terms of Babylonian geometry, the *kippatum ina kippatim* is one of a number of standard drawings, many of which require drawing one shape inside another shape, in Babylonian terms, a *dikšu*, what we may translate as an ‘indentation.’

As for geography, we are able to identify most of the places labelled on the map. Babylon is Babylon, Assyria is Assyria, Urartu is the kingdom of that name in eastern Anatolia (Armenia) that rivalled Assyria in the first half of the first millennium BCE, and Susa is Biblical Shushan in what for the Babylonians of the time of the map was Elam, but later Persia and today Iran. Likewise, the area marked mountain at the top of the Euphrates represents the mountains in what is today modern Turkey where the Euphrates has its source. Further down on the map, the Euphrates empties into the circular cosmic Ocean by way of the ‘channel’ which leads away from ‘swamp.’ This channel (*bitqu*) is the ancient equivalent of the modern Shatt-il-Arab, which leads the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates through their delta into the Persian Gulf. The Tigris itself finds no expression on the map, most likely as a Babylonian snub against Assyria which was situated on the Tigris. So too note mighty Assyria as a little oval, almost an afterthought next to the large rectangle labelled Babylon.

The text above the map on the obverse of BM 92687 and that on reverse can be related to the World Map as well. On the obverse we find 11 lines of text that preserve references to distant places and early times. For example, exotic animals from outside the Mesopotamian homeland including the monkey; mythological beasts of the sea-goddess Tiamat who battles against Marduk in *Enuma Elish*; and the ancient heroes Utnapištim, the hero of the Babylonian flood story, who Gilgamesh visits at the ends of the earth in *The Gilgamesh Epic*, and Sargon (of Akkade), whose empire, tradition taught, reached from his capital city Akkade to the ends of the world. Likewise, on the reverse we find descriptions of 8 regions, *nagû*, the same term used for the triangular projections beyond the Ocean on the map on

the obverse. These are described as regions of wonder, filled with great trees measuring hundreds of cubits, a place of fast running horned animals, and a region of sunrise where, ‘. . . dawns at its entrance.’ However this evening we are specifically interested only in one of the *nagû*, the *nagû* at the top of the World Map, beyond the region marked mountain where the Euphrates rises, and across the cosmic ocean. Here we find a label ‘Great Wall (BÀD GU.LA), 6 leagues in between where the Sun is not seen.’ Our question then is what is this Great Wall, where is it, and how does it relate to our friend and colleague Joan?

Back in the middle 1990's, when I was working on completing the first printing of *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, the first two questions were of primary concern. The reference to the Great Wall on the map was then relatively new, having been found on a fragment of a tablet which joined BM 92687 that was reported in *British Museum Magazine* 23 (1995) by Irving Finkel of the British Museum. Of course, any mention of a Great Wall in our time and place immediately brings to mind the one in China, but was the cuneiform Great Wall similarly a defensive wall protecting Ancient Mesopotamia, and if so, what was it doing so far away, across the Ocean where the Sun is not seen.

The solution to this problem turned out to be in Joan's research. At about the same time that I was finishing up *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, the 1998 book, for publication in the *Mesopotamian Civilizations* series at Eisenbrauns, it turned out that Joan was completing her book for the same series, *The Legends of the Kings of Akkade*.⁵ This wonderful book presents under one cover all the legends concerning the great kings of the Old Akkadian Dynasty who ruled Mesopotamia ca. 2334-2154 BCE. For centuries and even millennia after, the founder of the dynasty Sargon of Akkade, and his grandson Naram-Sin, were remembered as two of the greatest heroes of Ancient Mesopotamia. As I read through Joan's book, I found the answer

5. Westenholz J.G., *Legends of the Kings of Akkade, The Texts*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake., 1997.

to my questions about the Great Wall.

In *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* pp. 36-49, Joan edits a literary work in Akkadian now known by the modern name *The Sargon Birth Legend*. This text is a purported autobiography of Sargon of Akkade written in first person that Joan reconstructs from four first millennium manuscripts: three Neo-Assyrian exemplars from the library of Assurbanipal, King of Assyria 668-627 BCE, and a roughly contemporary tablet in Neo-Babylonian script from the city of Dilbat in Babylonia.

Now many of you are already familiar with the hero of *The Sargon Birth Legend*, who is none other than, Sargon of Akkade, the first Semitic emperor of Mesopotamia, who ruled from 2334 to 2279 BCE according to a standard chronology (that of A.L. Oppenheim's *Ancient Mesopotamia*). This third millennium Sargon was the inspiration for the much later Assyrian King, Sargon II of Assyria (721-705 BCE), who is infamous in our world as the Assyrian King who completed the conquest of the northern Kingdom of Israel and exiled what have come to be known as the ten lost tribes. This later Sargon, Sargon II of Assyria, was the great grandfather of Assurbanipal, in whose library three of the sources for our text were found. Let's leave this piece of information aside for the moment, and read together from Joan's translation of the text, bearing in mind that we are looking for an explanation of the Great Wall that is to be found in the north (upstream) on the World Map, by the uppermost *nagû*:⁶

1. Sargon, the mighty king, the king of Akkade, am I.
2. My mother was an en-priestess(?), my father I never knew.
3. My father's brother inhabits the highlands.
4. My city is Azupirānu, which lies on the bank of the Euphrates

6. The quotation from *The Sargon Birth Legend* immediately below and those following are taken directly from *Legends of the Kings of Akkade*.

Here, in the first section of the work, Sargon of Akkade introduces himself as King of Akkade, and relates to us his humble origins, certainly not what one would expect of one of the greatest kings in Mesopotamian history.

In the next lines, Sargon of Akkade relates the circumstances of his birth and explains how he came to kingship:

5. She conceived me, my en-priestess mother, in concealment she gave me birth,
6. She set me in a wicker basket, with bitumen she made my opening water-tight
7. She cast me down into the river from which I could not ascend.
8. The river bore me, to Aqqi the water-drawer it brought me.
9. Aqqi the water-drawer, when lowering his bucket, did lift me up,
10. Aqqi the water-drawer did raise me as his adopted son,
11. Aqqi the water-drawer did set me to his gardening,
12. While I was (still) a gardener, Ištar did grow fond of me,
13. And so for [. .] years did I reign as king,
14. The black-headed people, I did rule and govern.

Sargon's mother conceives him and gives birth to him in secret, and then casts him into the river in a basket -- the same motif as that of Moses in the ark in Exodus, but this is a story for another day. Back in our legend, Aqqi, the water-drawer lifts the baby, Sargon of Akkade to be, from the river in his bucket, raises him as his son, and sets him to gardening. Then, while gardening, the goddess Ištar falls in love with the young Sargon of Akkade and raises him to kingship over the black-headed

people, that is to say, the people of Ancient Mesopotamia.

Sargon then goes on to conquer the entire world, as far as the ends of the Earth at 'The Great Wall of Heaven and Earth,' where the historical narrative ends with Sargon apparently removing stones from the wall, presumably to bring them home with him to Akkade:

15. With copper pickaxes, I did cut my way through the (most) difficult mountains
16. I did ascend all the high mountains
17. I did traverse all the foothills
18. The sealands, I did sail around three times
19. Dilmun did submit to me (?) . . .
20. The Great Wall of Heaven and Earth(?), I did ascend.
21. [(Its very s]tones(?), I did remove [. . .]

It is here at the ends of the world, where Sargon ascends the Great Wall of Heaven and Earth, removing its stones, that *The Sargon Birth Legend* meets *The Babylonian Map of the World*. I would suggest that the Great Wall in the north on *The Babylonian Map of the World*, beyond the mountain where the Euphrates rises, and across the cosmic sea, is the same Great Wall as that in Joan's *Sargon Birth Legend*, 'The Great Wall of Heaven and Earth.' If so, Mesopotamian tradition in the first millennium must have held that a Great Wall was located in the northern extremes of the World - far far away - where only one king had gone, where no man had gone before or since, this king being Sargon of Akkade.⁷ Yet, when Joan and I began our respective separate lines of research this was unknown to us.

7. A study of why this region is said to be a place where the Sun is not seen on the World Map is beyond the scope of this paper, but can be found in my *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, pp. 32-33. The then unpublished article referred to there in fn. 15 is "The Great Wall of Sargon of Akkad," *N.A.B.U.* (1997) 98, no. 104.

Joan, in her commentary to line 20, notes that 'Great Wall of Heaven and Earth' was not the accepted interpretation for the line. Yet she bravely gave this new interpretation, not knowing that a small fragment at the British Museum, soon to be joined to *The Babylonian Map of the World*, would prove her right. On my part, I remained uncertain as to how to understand 'Great Wall' in *The Babylonian Map of the World* until I read Joan's text. In essence, each of our texts solved the other's textual difficulty. Joan's research had made a substantial contribution to my own.

In honor of Joan, I would now like to close this paper with the next section of *The Sargon Birth Legend* where Sargon of Akkade challenges any future king, who thinks himself to be a king, to repeat his great deeds:

22. Whatever king will arise after me,
23. [Let him exercise kingship for x years]!
24. Let him rule the black-headed people!
25. Let him cut his way through the (most) difficult mountains with copper pickaxes!
26. Let him ascend all the high mountains!
27. [Let him traverse all the foothills]!
28. Let him circumnavigate the sealands three times!
29. [Let Dilmun submit to him (?)]!
30. [Let him ascend to the Great Wall of Heaven and Earth (?)]!
31. [Let him remove (its) stones . . .]!

Of course, no Mesopotamian king could repeat all these wondrous and legendary deeds, but among those who came closest to duplicating the world wide travels and conquests of Sargon of Akkade was Sargon's first millennium namesake, Sargon II of Assyria and his successors, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal. These

were the last great kings of the Assyrian Empire, those who confronted the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in what was for Mesopotamia, the Neo-Assyrian Period, but here in the Land of Israel, the First Temple Period. It is this meeting of civilizations, those of the Bible and the cuneiform Ancient Near East, that is so well documented by the collections of this museum, where Joan served for so many years as curator with such great distinction. So, although Joan, unlike the ancient Sargon, did not actually ascend the Great Wall at the ends of the Earth and remove its stones, she did the next best thing. Joan was the one who brought this tradition to light, with the challenge, made by the Sargon of Akkade to all those who would come after him. May we all, Joan's friends and colleagues, similarly strive to live up to the high standards which characterized Joan's life and her work here in the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem.