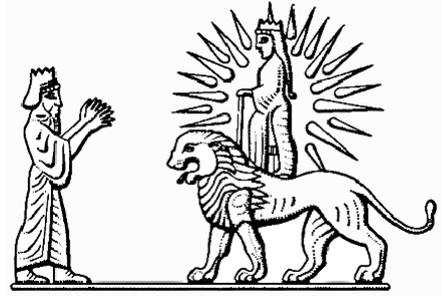


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JACK N. LAWSON Kent

Mesopotamian Precursors to the Stoic Concept of Logos*

Logos and the Near East

In 1918 an article appeared by the Assyriologist Stephen Langdon tantalisingly entitled, “The Babylonian Conception of the Logos.”¹ Although Langdon was not the first Assyriologist to posit such a connection between Mesopotamian thought and Greek philosophy on precisely the term ‘Logos,’² he was the first to widen the discussion from philological to conceptual grounds. The principal focus of his article was the meaning and usage of the Akkadian term *mummu*, which Langdon took to stand for “creative cosmic reason”: “Deny it to be metaphysical, refuse to define it as Logos or cosmic reason, nevertheless the Babylonians certainly did have a fairly clear teaching along the lines which we Europeans designate as metaphysical.”³ In 1920, W. F. Albright attacked Langdon’s thesis on the basis of philology, maintaining that *mummu* is actually two distinct homonyms derived from Sumerian *umún*, one meaning ‘mill,’ ‘millstone,’ and the other meaning ‘lord,’ or ‘lady.’⁴ In 1948 Alexander Heidel published an article in which he

deftly summarized all the literature to date concerning the meaning of *mummu* in Akkadian texts.⁵ Since that time there has been relative silence regarding a Mesopotamian origin for the concept of Logos.⁶

The problem with all the articles cited above is that the scholars attached too much importance to the single term *mummu* – especially as used in *Enuma Elish* – to the exclusion of other terms and other texts. Thus this paper seeks to open the discussion again, for certainly, although not attached to one specific Akkadian term, the idea of a creative principle existed in Mesopotamian thought well before its formulation as Logos in Greek Stoic philosophy. Rather there was a complex of Akkadian terms which carried this sense of creative cosmic reason, and for the most part, these terms had to do with ‘speech/spoken utterance’ of the gods, which I shall discuss momentarily.

At its earliest, Logos doctrine (“creative, cosmic reason”) can be traced to Heraclitus of Ephesus (late sixth/early fifth centuries

* This article is dedicated to the memory of a wonderful teacher and irreplaceable friend, Dr. W. D. White. The author wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance provided by Professors Shlomo Izre’el, Andrew George, and Graham Anderson, and to thank the British Academy for their generosity in providing a grant to support my research. Abbreviations in this article follow those found in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*.

¹ S. Langdon, “The Babylonian Conception of the Logos,” *JRAS* (1918), 433-49.

² The earliest attempts to posit a Mesopotamian origin for the concept of ‘creative cosmic reason’ or Logos were undertaken by: J. Hehn, “Hymnen und Gebete an Mar-duk” *BA*, V, (1906), 279-400; P. Jensen, *Assyrisch-baby-*

lonische Mythen und Epen (Berlin, 1908); Böhl, “*Mummu* = Logos?” *OLZ* 19 (1916), 265-68.

³ Langdon, 438.

⁴ W. F. Albright, “The Supposed Babylonian Derivation of the Logos” *JBL* 39 (1920), 143-51.

⁵ Alexander Heidel, “The Meaning of *MUMMU* in Akkadian Literature,” *JNES* VII (1948), 98-105.

⁶ Since the time of Heidel’s article the *CAD* has at least partially vindicated Langdon’s assertions concerning *mummu* inasmuch as it is cited as a divine epithet carrying the meanings of ‘craftsman’ and ‘creator’ (*M/2* s.v. *mummu* A, 197. H. W. F. Saggs, in his *The Greatness that Was Babylon*, understands *mummu* to connote something akin to “Creative Life-Force” (362).

BCE). Ephesus is also the traditional site of John's Gospel. It is in the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-3) that we see the exemplary confluence of Eastern Semitic thought with Western Greek philosophy. Here the Hebraic tradition embodied in the person of Jesus is given systematic treatment as Logos. These three verses are as descriptive of Logos as any we could cite.⁷ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

Heraclitus, like his older contemporary, Thales of Miletus, is reckoned to have had contact with the Orient (Mesopotamia).⁸ Regarding the latter, there are accounts by Diogenes Laertius and Herodotus that Thales was of Phoenician descent.⁹ Aetius and Proclus, in their writings concerning the pre-Socratic philosophers, state that Thales practised philosophy in Egypt before settling in Ionia. In fact, much of Ionia was under Persian control and influence during Heraclitus' lifetime. As to contact between the ancient Near Eastern and Grecian cultures, over a half-century ago W. Jaeger, in his impressive three-volume *Paideia* wrote: "Since...the Near Eastern countries were neighbours of Ionia, it is highly

probable (and the probability is supported by sound tradition) that these older civilizations, through constant intellectual intercourse with the Ionians, influenced them not only to adopt their technical discoveries and skills in surveying, navigation, and astronomy, but also to penetrate the deeper problems to which the... Oriental myths of creation and divinity gave answers far different from those of the Greeks."¹⁰

It is not, however, the purpose of this work to establish the cross-cultural transmission of ideas from the ancient Near East to Greece and its Mediterranean colonies. Happily, this has been done in fine detail in two major publications which have taken a serious inventory of Near Eastern influence on Greek culture. The first to appear was Walter Burkert's *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (1992) and more recently has appeared M. L. West's *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (1997). In the conclusion to this book, Burkert writes:

Culture is not a plant sprouting from its seeds in isolation; it is a continuous process of learning guided by curiosity along with practical needs and interests. It grows especially through a willingness to learn from

⁷ Regarding just such cross-cultural transmission Walter Burkert writes: "The historian... finds the clearest evidence of cultural diffusion precisely in correspondences of details that seem most absurd and unnatural, and hence likely to be arrived at independently" (*The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 51.

⁸ "The archaeological record suggests that intercourse between Greece and the East was most intense between 1450 and 1200, not reaching a similar level again until the eighth and seventh centuries. We may reasonably suppose that those were also the two most significant periods of 'literary' convergence." M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, (Oxford, 1997), 586.

⁹ So also M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon*, 620. See also Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philos-*

ophers (Cambridge, 1995), 79. More important to our area of research is Thales' prediction of an eclipse in 585 BCE. Astronomical records in Mesopotamia date back to the seventeenth century BCE although they are only available in first millennium copies. From the early 7th century BCE onwards Babylonian priests were able to make accurate predictions of lunar eclipses. Although never able to predict solar eclipses, the Babylonian astronomers were able to tell when solar eclipses were possible. Regarding this, Kirk et al. state: "It is overwhelmingly probable that Thales' feat depended on his access to these Babylonian records" (82). Further, as regards Thales' cosmology – the fact that he conceived the earth to float upon water – they posit an indebtedness to the ancient Near East as well (93).

¹⁰ W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, I (New York, 1945), 155-56.

what is “other,” what is strange and foreign ... The “miracle of Greece” is not merely the result of a unique talent. It also owes its existence to the simple phenomenon that the Greeks are the most Easterly of Westerners.¹¹

In any case, then – as today – Anatolia was a place where Eastern and Western cultures met; thus it should not be surprising that a concept as seminal as λόγος should find its way into systematized Western

thought. This is not to suggest that the cultures of the ancient Near East had any single term which carried in itself the multivalence of Greek Logos, but rather, they had a two millennia old literary tradition which expressed the sense of creative cosmic reason through a complex of terms, which for the most part had to do with ‘speech/spoken utterance’ of the gods, as we shall see below.

ὁ Λόγος

As for the term itself, Logos is derived from λέγω (‘say,’ ‘speak’) and has the basic meanings of ‘word’ (spoken or written) or ‘utterance.’ It was a common term in the Greek language of the late sixth century BCE and it is only with the philosophy of Heraclitus that λόγος/Logos first finds an extended, specialized meaning.¹² For Heraclitus, Logos was a universal governing principle – that which provided continuity amid flux.¹³ It is λόγος which makes the world an orderly structure, a κόσμος. According to Aristotle, Heraclitus might have conceived λόγος as a material force either akin to or identical with fire, the reasoning being that heat is something vital and active.

What fascinates this author is why Heraclitus – and the Stoics after him – should have used a term so fundamentally related to speech, when this specialized usage of λόγος was strictly metaphorical; why not use a term more commensurate with physical

force/power/creative energy, e.g. δύναμις? As Langdon wrote in 1918,

It is wholly inconceivable that the Greek language permitted a sudden transformation of one of its most ancient and perfectly understood words without adequate cause. The etymology and ordinary meaning of λόγος afford no remote suggestion of a divine agent, a first principle... Many words for reason, mind, wisdom already existed... We must suppose, if the Ionian philosophers identified Word with cosmic reason and first principle, that they were induced and influenced by some well-known semi-philosophical use of the term “Word of the gods” as the personification of divine agency.¹⁴

Although exact points of contact cannot be conclusively proven, this author believes that it was precisely the Mesopotamian literary expressions of the creative power inherent in the spoken divine word which lie behind the λόγος of Heraclitus.

The doctrine of Logos to which I shall be referring is that which was developed by the

¹¹ Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 129.

¹² For a basic survey of the term λόγος, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, I (Cambridge, 1962), 419ff.

¹³ In his *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York, 1960), Thorlief Boman sees distinct Oriental/Semitic strains running through the ideas of Heraclitus. Heraclitus saw change and flux as central to the cosmos: “A man cannot step into the same stream twice.” Accord-

ing to Boman,

This high estimate of change and motion is un-Greek; Heraclitus stands alone among Greek philosophers with his doctrine. Quite un-Greek as well is the obscurity of his diction [in the expression of his ideas]... Perhaps this peculiarity in the philosophy of Heraclitus can be traced to an indirect or unconscious oriental influence (51-52).

¹⁴ Langdon, 433.

Stoic school nearly three centuries after Heraclitus. In particular I refer to Zeno of Citium, Cyprus (333-261 BCE), himself of Phoenician (thus Semitic) stock. Zeno reacted strongly against the Epicurean idea that the universe was a product of chance:

He found the germ of truth in the mind-matter complex of Heraclitus, and put at the centre of his system the *logos* which has its material embodiment in fire. This union of mind and matter, for Heraclitus a naïve assumption, was for Zeno a conscious achievement, following on study and explicit rejection of the Platonic and Aristotelian forms of dualism. Nothing can exist without embodiment.¹⁵

For Zeno and the later Stoics, Logos was the principle of all rationality in the universe. As such it was identified with God as the source of all creative activity. As an active principle λόγος worked on passive matter to generate the world and everything contained within it (Diogenes Laertius, vii, 134).¹⁶ Stoic philosophers referred to God as λόγος σπερματικός or ‘seminal logos,’ which contains the essence or idea of all that is created (Diogenes Laertius vii, 136). Sometimes used in the plural (λογοὶ σπερματικοί), these are the ‘ideas,’ ‘creative principles,’ or ‘models’ of the physical world. The prologue to John’s Gospel reflects this later, more highly developed, usage of Logos more so than that of Heraclitus. In particular, John’s usage of Logos

would bear more in common with the writings of the middle-Platonist philosopher and near-contemporary, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, who borrowed heavily from the Stoics as regards Logos. It is in Philo’s work that the Western Greek and Eastern Semitic worlds of thought are brought together around the idea of λόγος. It would seem that Philo brings the idea back “full circle” to the Orient. His understanding of λόγος σπερματικός is clearly expressed in the following:

As then, the city which was fashioned beforehand within the mind of the architect held no place in the outer world, but had been imprinted on the soul of the craftsman as by a seal, even so the world (κόσμος) that consists of the Ideas would have no other location than the divine Reason (λόγος Θεῆος), which was the author of this physical world (*Opif.20*).¹⁷

Thus the Logos provides the *logic*, the rational consistency and order of the cosmos. Samuel Sandmel writes, “That there exists a Logos is part of Philo’s Jewish heritage; the various explanations of how Logos operates in the intelligible world is essentially his Grecian culture.”¹⁸ In making my argument, I am in agreement with Langdon, that although the Babylonians, and the Sumerians who preceded them, never constructed such a metaphysical *theory* of Logos, they nevertheless had a lively sense of metaphysics expressed within their literature.

The Akkadian Terms

As mentioned above, the Akkadian language has a complex of terms which serve a similar function to the Greek term λόγος.

In the texts to be examined it will become clear that these terms are interchangeable. The commonality of the Akkadian terms is

¹⁵ Guthrie, 19-20.

¹⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, The Loeb Classical Library, trans. R. D. Hicks (London, 1958).

¹⁷ J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 157-58.

¹⁸ S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria* (New York, 1979), 99.

found by their context, and specifically the way in which they are mirrored by the later Greek usage of λόγος. It is also the case that Akkadian literature is characterized by an intermingling of ideas and thus is not susceptible to the separation and classification of ideas as found in the Stoic philosophy – such taxonomy is, after all, a product of Greek thought. With the foregoing caveat, the main terms for our consideration are:

amatu CAD A/2, 29, 1. ‘spoken word, utterance, formula,’ 4. ‘command, order, decision.’

qibītu (verb *qabû* – ‘to say, tell, speak, pronounce, utter, declare, decree, name’) CAD Q, 244a 1. ‘speech, word, report,’ 2. ‘order, command,’ 5. ‘divine pronouncement creating and maintaining the proper functioning of the world.’

ipšû (from *epēšû* which can mean ‘to act, to be active, to build, construct, manufacture’) CAD I-J, 168 1. ‘act, deed,’ 3. ‘work, achievement, equipment,’ 5. *ipiš pî* ‘speech, command,’ from OA and OB on. Quite literally, *ipiš pî* is an act or deed of the mouth.

šītu CAD, 215d, (with meanings ‘birth, emergence, produce, product, offspring’). In combination with ‘mouth’ (*pî*) *šīt pî* = ‘utterance, command.’ As with *ipiš pî* above, *šīt pî* is literally a product of the mouth. The literal quality of these terms is of great importance as we explore the creative properties of the divine utterance.

zikru CAD Z, 112, 1. ‘discourse, utterance, pronouncement, words,’ 3. ‘(divine or royal) command, order.’

Throughout my translations I will render these terms in their most basic sense, as ‘speech’ or ‘utterance’ as I believe this will help make clear the link between these terms and Greek λόγος.¹⁹ Interestingly, the Stoic Cleanthes of Assos, in his ‘Hymn to Zeus’ (see below) writes: “For we Thine offspring are, and sole of all created things that live and move on earth receive from Thee the image of the Word” (“Hymn to Zeus,” 6-8). In other words, humanity is the only species which receives the imitation of the divine voice (= speech).

Cleanthes’ “Hymn to Zeus”

Before turning to the Akkadian texts, it will be useful to adduce the work mentioned above, the “Hymn to Zeus” by one of the early Stoics, Cleanthes of Assos (331-233 BCE), both disciple and successor to Zeno as head of the Stoic school. It is worth noting that his home, Assos, is located in Asia Minor, about 30 miles south of Troy. Cleanthes’ “Hymn to Zeus” encapsulates

the Stoic understanding of Logos and makes a pertinent backdrop against which to read the Akkadian texts.

- 1) Most Glorious of Immortals, mighty God,
- 2) Invoked by many a name, O Sovran King
- 3) Of Universal nature, piloting
- 4) This world in harmony with law, – all hail!
- 5) Thee it is meet that mortals should invoke,
- 6) For we Thine offspring are, and sole of all

¹⁹ Indeed, there are Assyriologists who would dispute whether we can translate terms such as *amatu* as ‘word.’ Writing in an as yet unpublished manuscript, *Language Has the Power of Life and Death: The Myth of Adapa and the South Wind*, Prof. Shlomo Izre’el states that

Language means ... the apparatus which enables us to think. It is language which reflects human intelligence, and it is language that distinguishes the human species

from all other species. Thus, it is language, or, in the terminology of the Babylonians, “speech” which serves “as a symbolization of the human mind.”

In a footnote, Izre’el goes on to say that The Akkadian language (and Sumerian likewise) did not have a special term for the notion of “word.” Hence the word *amatu* should always be interpreted as ‘speech,’ ‘utterance’ or the like (421, n. 36).

- | | |
|---|---|
| 7) Created things that live and move on earth | Spirit, |
| 8) Receive from Thee the image of the Word. | 29) The foul itself grows fair; all things are |
| 9) Therefore I praise Thee, and shall hymn
Thy praise | blent |
| 10) Unceasingly. Thee the wide world obeys, | 30) Together, good with evil; things that strive |
| 11) As onward ever in its course it rolls | 31) Will find in Thee a friend; that so may |
| 12) Where'er Thou guidest, and rejoices still | reign |
| 13) Beneath Thy sway: so strong an instru-
ment | 32) One Law, one Reason (λόγον), everlast-
ingly |
| 14) Is held by Thine unconquerable hands – | ... |
| 15) That two-edged thunderbolt of living fire | 44) O Thou most bounteous God who sittest
throned |
| 16) Which never fails. Beneath its dreadful
blow | 45) In clouds, the Lord of Lightning, save
mankind |
| 17) All Nature reels; therewith Thou dost di-
rect | 46) From baleful ignorance; yea scatter it, |
| 18) The Universal Reason (κοινὸν λόγον)
which, commixt | 47) O Father, from the soul, and make men
wise |
| 19) With all the greater and lesser lights, | 48) With Thine own wisdom, for by wisdom
Thou |
| 20) Moves thro' the Universe. | 49) Dost govern the whole world in righ-
teousness; |
| 21) How great Thou art, | 50) That so, being honoured, we may Thee
requite |
| 22) The King supreme for ever and for aye! | 51) With honour, chanting without pause Thy
deeds, |
| 23) No work is done apart from Thee, O God, | 52) As is most meet; for greater guerdon ne'er |
| 24) Or in the world or in the heavens above | 53) Befalls or man or god than evermore |
| 25) Or in the deep, save only what is wrought | 54) Duly to praise the Universal Law (κοινὸν
νόμον). ²⁰ |
| 26) By sinners in their folly. Nay, 'tis Thine | |
| 27) To make the uneven smooth and bring to
birth | |
| 28) Order from chaos. By Thy power, great | |

The Akkadian Texts

The texts adduced below are by no means meant to be exhaustive in relation to this topic of Logos; rather they are exemplars from three genres: prayers, hymns, and incantations. Each text is illustrative of many others which one can find cited in Akkadian dictionaries under the respective terms cited above. Commentary as regards their relationship with Logos philosophy will follow.

Text I: a prayer to Enlil which was intended to be used after an eclipse of the moon – presumably if it portended evil.

BMS 19, Obverse

- 4) O Lord of lords!

- 5) Father of the great [gods]!
6) The lord of fates [and] of cosmic-plans!
7) Ruler of heaven and earth, the lord of
lands!
8) [The one who renders the fi]nal verdict,
whose utterance cannot bechanged!
9) Determiner of ... [all] the fates!
10) In the ill portent of the eclipse of the
moon which in the month^(space) on the day^(space)
has taken place,
11) in the bad fortune of ominous happenings
and signs,
12) which are in my palace and in my land.
13) By your utterance (*qi*)*bikama*) was hu-
manity given birth!
14) You elevate in rank both king and governor
15) since to create both god and king
16) rests with you.

²⁰ E. H. Blakeney, trans., *The Hymn of Cleanthes the Stoic*, (n.p. 1947).

BMS 19, Reverse

- 21) Determine the fate of my life!
- 22) Command the making of my name!
- 23) Take away my ill fate, (and) grant me good fortune.
- 24) Place over me your great guarding presence.
- 25) Let god and king hold me in esteem,
- 26) [noble?] and prince do what is in my favour!
- 27) Let [...] be before me!
- 28) In the assembly may my word be heard!
- 29) May the protective deity command favour upon favour,
- 30) daily may he walk with me,
- 31) by your exalted utterance (*qibītka*) which cannot be altered,
- 32) and your constant approval which does not change.²¹

Text II: an excerpt from a prayer written for a building dedication:

Schollmeyer, 13

- 1) Šamaš, lord of heaven and earth, builder of city and house, are you!
- 2) To determine fates, to establish cosmic-plans is in your hands.
- 3) You determine the fate of life,
- 4) you draw up the plan of life,
- 5) your utterance (*šit pīka*) is not [altered],
- 6) your pronouncement (*ipiš pīka*) is not [changed].²²

Text III: also from a building dedication.

Schollmeyer, 13a (Sippar 36)

- 8) Incantation: Ea, Šamaš, Marduk, lords of heaven and earth
- 9) You are builder(s) of city and house
- 10) who judge the land, giving guidance for humankind.
- 11) (You) design the cosmic-plans
- 12) (You) restore sanctuaries (and) establish temples
- 13) To determine fates, to design cosmic-plans is in your hands.
- 14) It is you who determine life's fates.
- 15) It is you who fashion life's plans.

- 16) Your speech (*šit pīkunu*) is life,
- 17) your utterance (*epeš pīkunu*) is well-being,
- 18) the doing of every deed is in your hands.²³

Text IV: an Old Babylonian bilingual hymn to the Moon-god Nannar/Sin:

IV R. 9, Obverse

- 1) O master, lord of the gods, who in heaven and earth is singly august!
- 2) Father Nannar, lord Anšar, lord of the gods!
- 3) Father Nannar, great lord Anu, lord of the gods!
- 4) Father Nannar, lord Sin, lord of the gods!
- 11) 'Fruit' which is self-created, tall of stature, lovely to look at, one cannot be sated with its pleasant appearance!
- 12) Maternal womb, begetter of all living beings, who along with all creatures occupies a pure abode
- 15) C[reat]or of the land, who founds the sacred places (and) gives them their names.
- 16) Father, begetter of gods and mortals, who has (them) occupy seats, who establishes the offerings,
- 17) Who appoints kingship (and) gives the sceptre; who determines destiny unto distant days,
- 18) The powerful leader, whose unfathomable mind no god has revealed
- 22) O lord, who decides the decrees of heaven and earth, whose word (*qibītsu*) [is inalterable]
- 23) who controls fire and water (and) guides living creatures. Which god is as important as you?
- 24) In heaven who is (as) eminent? You alone are superior!
- 25) In earth who is (as) eminent? You alone are [superior!]
- 26) As for you, your utterance (*amatka*) is proclaimed in heaven and the Igigi assume an attitude of humility.
- 27) As for you, your utterance (*amatka*) is proclaimed in earth and the Anunnaki kiss the ground.
- 28) As for you, when your utterance (*amatka*)

²¹ L. W. King, *Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* (London, 1896), plate 47; E. Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung"* (Berlin, 1953), 20. This and subsequent translations from the Akkadian (unless otherwise noted) are the present author's.

²² P. A. Schollmeyer, *Sumerisch-babylonisch Hymnen und Gebete an Šamaš* (Paderborn, 1912), 71-72.

²³ Schollmeyer, 73-74. This notion of every deed being within the gods' control is echoed in the "Hymn to Zeus" by the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes of Assos, line 23.

passes by on high like the wind, it creates abundance in pasturage and water supply.

IV R. 9, Reverse

- 1) As for you, when your utterance (*amatka*) is issued on earth, green plants are produced.
- 2) As for you, your utterance (*amatka*) provides fodder for the cattlefold and sheepfold, it makes living beings numerous.
- 3) As for you, your utterance (*amatka*) creates truth and justice, (thus) people speak the truth.
- 4) As for you, your speech (*amatka*) is the distant heaven, the hidden nether world, which no one can reveal.
- 5) As for you, who can comprehend or equal your speech (*amatka*)?
- 6) O lord, you have no equal among the gods your brothers, in dominion in heaven, in sovereignty on earth.
- 7) O king of kings, lofty one, whose decrees no one (has the right) to request, whose divine power no god can equal.²⁴

Text V: a hymn of Ashurbanipal dedicated to Aššur.

K. 3258, Obverse

- 1) Magnificent lord of the gods, who knows all,
- 2) Honoured, surpassing the highest rank of the gods, who determines destinies,
- 3) Aššur, magnificent lord, who knows all,
- 4) honoured, surpassing the highest rank of the gods, who determines destinies,
- 5) [I shall exalt] Aššur, omnipotent, foremost of the gods, lord of the lands.
- 6) [I shall proclaim] his greatness; I will vaunt his glory.
- 7) The fame of Aššur I shall proclaim, I will exalt his name.
- 8) I will vaunt the glory of [the one] who dwells in Ehursaggalkurkurra.
- 9) [Continuously] will I declare, will I praise his valour,
- 10) [the one who] dwells in Ešarra, Aššur,

who determines destinies.

- 11) [In order to] reveal to the world, I will disclose for the future,
- 12) [I? will leave] a remembrance so that future generations may hear.
- 13) I will exalt the lordship [of Aššur] for eternity.
- 14) [Most able], broad of understanding, the noble sage of the gods,
- 15) [Father], creator of the celestial beings, who moulded mountains,
- 16) [...] creator of the gods, sire of the goddesses,
- 17) unfathomable [heart], cunning mind,
- 18) exalted [warrior?], whose pronouncement is feared,
- 19) [who deliberates only with him]self, Aššur, whose speech is profound.
- 20) [His utterance] is like a mountain – its base cannot be shaken.
- 21) [His utterance is like] the constellations, it does not miss its determined period.
- 22) His pronouncement [is inalterable], his utterance is fixed.
- 23) [His speech] is like a mountain – its base cannot be shaken.
- 24) [His speech is like the con]stellations, it does not miss its determined time.
- 25) Your [speech] is declared since the beginning.
- 26) [...] your [great]ness, Aššur, no god can understand.
- 27) the meaning [of your majestic designs] is not understood.
- 28) [...] your [great]ness, no god can understand.
... remainder fragmentary ...²⁵

Text VI: an Incantation from the *Mis pî* Rituals

Hama, 6A 343, Obverse

- 1) Incantation: Ea, Šamaš, Marduk, (the) great gods
- 2) who render judgements for heaven and earth, who determine fates
- 3) who make decisions, who make the temple-

²⁴ Cuneiform text from H. C. Rawlinson, *A Selection from the Miscellaneous Inscriptions of Assyria*, (London, 1891), pl. 9. Transcription and translation: Åke Sjöberg, *Der Mondgott Nanna-Suen in der sumerischen Überlieferung, I Teil: Texte* (Stockholm, 1960), 166-69.

²⁵ Restorations in the text come from A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki,

1989), 4-5; K. D. Macmillan, "Some Cuneiform Tablets Bearing on the Religion of Babylonia and Assyria," *BA 5/5* (Leipzig, 1906), 652-54, *CAD* and Joseph Shao, "A Study of Akkadian Royal Hymns and Prayers," unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Hebrew Union College 1989), 339-44.

- cities great,
- 4) who firmly found the throne daises, who establish designs,
 - 5) who fashion the cosmic-plans, who apportion the lots,
 - 6) who control the sanctuaries, and make pristine the purification rituals,
 - 7) who know the purification (ritual), to determine fates,
 - 8) to fashion designs (is) in your hands. It is you who determine
 - 9) the destinies of life, it is you who fashion
 - 10) the designs of life, it is you who resolve
 - 11) the decision(s) of life. You survey the throne dais of god and goddess.
- 12) You are the great gods who provide correct
 - 13) decisions for heaven and earth, for springs and seas.
 - 14) Your speech (INIM = *amatu*) is life, your utterance ([*y*]it *pīkunu*) is well-being,
 - 15) your pronouncement (*epiš pīk[unu]*) is life itself. It is you who tread in the midst of the
 - 16) distant heavens. You dispel evil,
 - 17) you establish good fortune; you nullify ominous happenings and signs
 - 18) of frightening and bad dreams; you cut the thread of evil.²⁶

Aspects of Logos

In Stoic thought Logos has the basic meaning of ‘creative, cosmic reason’; it is that which both establishes and maintains the cosmos. Within this overarching idea, the Greek philosophers identified various conceptual aspects of the Logos. Using their classifications, we shall examine the Akkadian texts to show that these same aspects of a universal governing principle existed in Mesopotamia for centuries prior to Stoic philosophy:

I. Universal governing principle: For Zeno, Cleantes and the later Stoics, Logos was identified with God as the universal governing principle and source of all creative activity.

II. Seminal Logos: As the Logos, God was not only responsible for creating, but also for the principles and plans which lay behind the creation. This aspect of the Logos is what the Stoics termed λόγος σπερματικός or ‘seminal logos.’

III. Universal Logos: The instrumental aspect of Logos which acts upon passive mat-

ter to generate life and all physical phenomena.

IV. Immanent Logos: As the plan behind created phenomena, Logos cannot be separated from creation; rather it is the thread of continuity which runs throughout the cosmos and keeps it coherent.

I Logos: the Universal Governing Principle

Taking the Akkadian texts in order, we see that the petitioner in Text I addresses his words to the “father of the great gods” who is also the “lord of fates [and] of cosmic-plans” as well as “ruler of heaven and earth, the lord of the lands” (Obv. 5-7). There would seemingly be no “higher court” in the divine pantheon to which one could address one’s petition.

In the six short verses of Text II we have several trenchant ideas concerning the cosmic, creative power of Šamaš. First, Šamaš is praised as the lord of heaven and earth.

²⁶ See J. Læssøe, “A Prayer to Ea, Shamash, and Marduk, from Hama,” *Iraq* 18 (1956), 60-67; Stefan Maul, “Universalnamburbi” in *Zukunftsbewältigung*, (Mainz,

1994), 467-83; F. N. H. Al-Rawi and A. R. George, “Tablets from the Sippar Library V. An Incantation from *Mis pi*,” *Iraq* 57 (1995), 225-28.

Then, as in Text I, obv. 6 the suppliant states that Šamaš is the one who determines fates and draws up the plans of the cosmos (Akkadian: *uṣurāti*; Sumerian: GIŠ.HUR.MEŠ). Verses 5 and 6 also echo the preceding text (rev. 31) in stating that the divine word is inalterable. Both of these ideas will be discussed in greater detail below under concepts III and IV respectively.

In Text III three deities are proclaimed as lords of heaven and earth. Once more, as in the texts which precede it, we encounter the understanding that cosmic-plans are held in divine hands. This will be discussed in depth after all the texts have been examined. What stands out clearly is that in the determination of life's fate and the establishing of cosmic designs the gods provide order both for the universe and for humanity. This prayer goes so far as to state that "the doing of every deed" (lit. "all doings") is in the gods' hands (line 18), that is, in the controlling power of the gods. Here again is an antecedent of the Stoic notion that Logos is both the cause and directing agent of all things.²⁷ In addition, line 18 has resonance in Cleanthes' "Hymn to Zeus," line 23 (11 in Greek), in which we read: "No work is done apart from Thee, O God." In other words, the god's sovereignty is all-pervasive.

Text IV, a prayer dedicated to the moon god Nannar/Sin, is one of the most wide-ranging in its epithets of praise – gathering up names and qualities of other, more 'senior' gods (Anšar, Anu), and attributing them to Sin. In obv. 11 and 12, Sin is referred to as "self-created" and the "maternal womb, begetter of all living beings" – thus establishing Sin as the source of creative activity. As we would expect, in obv. 17 Sin is credited with the determination of fates/destinies. Following verses which

extol Sin's position and power among the gods, there appears a somewhat lengthy description of Sin's *amatu* (Obv. 26, 27, 28; Rev. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Lines 26 and 27 (Obv.) stand in parallelism with the two preceding lines:

- a 24) In heaven who is (as) eminent? You alone are superior!
- b 25) In earth who is (as) eminent? You alone are superior!
- a' 26) As for you, your utterance(*amatka*) is proclaimed in heaven and the Igigi assume an attitude of humility.
- b' 27) As for you, your utterance(*amatka*) is proclaimed in earth and the Anunnaki kiss the ground.

The Igigi are, of course, the gods of the upper region (heaven) and the Anunnaki the gods of the lower region (earth and the netherworld). Together they constitute a hendiadys symbolizing the totality of universes which is subject to Sin.

Text V, a hymn of Ashurbanipal, begins by extolling the unsurpassed nature of his patron deity, Aššur, and in so doing makes use of formulaic phrases which we have encountered above in relation to other gods. Nevertheless, the fact that they are formulaic in no way lessens either their importance or the sincerity of the author. Rather, it is precisely the formulaic, common quality of such divine epithets such as "all-knowing," "determiner of destinies," "all-powerful," etc. which establishes the power of the divine word and the case for "creative cosmic reason" in Mesopotamian thought.

Text VI, while formerly thought to be an incantation against the poison of a snakebite (line 33: *ana lumun šīri*), has come to be recognised as an incantation of the *Mīs pī* ('washing of the mouth') series of rituals which accompanied the restoration and re-animation of divine statues.²⁸ In any event

²⁷ A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London, 1974), 144, 154.

²⁸ Al-Rawi and George, 225-28.

it testifies to the petitioner's belief that the gods' speech is effective precisely because within it inheres the (divine) power to establish life, fate, well-being, to fashion cosmic-plans, etc. – i.e. the universal governing principle.

While it is true that these Akkadian texts present us with various deities who are lord(s) of heaven and earth – rather than one unifying principle such as Logos – the Greeks were not without their pantheon, and Logos was identified with the chief of the pantheon. In line 2 of his hymn, Cleanthes gives Zeus the epithet “Invoked by many a name.” According to W. F. Otto in his *The Homeric Gods*, Zeus can be understood as a “great and infinitely enhanced being” who is at one and the same time both an independent deity, who is the chief god of the pantheon, and also synonymous for all “the gods,” *pars pro toto*.²⁹ In *Enuma Elish* (c. thirteenth century BCE), after Marduk attains supremacy and organizes the earth and heavens, the gods assemble and recite the fifty names of Marduk, all of which are attributes and abilities of various gods in the pantheon (Tablet VI, 121 to VII, 142). From the Late Babylonian period comes a text in which various gods of the Babylonian pantheon are seen to be aspects of Marduk. Thus, for example, we see “Uraš (is) Marduk of planting, Lugalidda (is) Marduk of the abyss, Ninurta (is) Marduk of the pickaxe,” etc. (CT 24 50, BM 47406, obverse).³⁰ The point is that until the development and refinement of Logos doctrine by the Stoics, the “universal governing principle” was found either in a god or the gods. And of course, even as Logos doctrine

(as a unifying principle invested with cosmic creative power and governance) was developed, this one term alone did not suffice to explain all aspects of the power and functions implied within it. There subsequently came as well the various conceptual aspects of Logos which we are now exploring. Thus the problems of pantheon were replaced by philosophical classifications. However, that there existed in both Mesopotamian and Greek thought a universal helmsman is clear. As Cleanthes so aptly puts it: “Most Glorious of Immortals, mighty God, invoked by many a name, O Sovran King of Universal nature, piloting this world in harmony with law.”³¹

II God as Seminal Logos

In all of the Akkadian textual examples except number IV, we have encountered the term *uṣurtu* (Sumerian GIŠ.HUR; Akkadian plural: *uṣurāti*) which I have translated “cosmic-plan.” It is often as the object of the verb *eṣēru* (as in line 5 above) which means “1. to draw, to make a drawing. 2. *uṣuru* to make a drawing, to establish (regulations)” (CAD E 346b). When used with the cognate accusative *uṣurtu*, one can get the sense of ‘plan,’ as in a town plan, a ‘map’; there is also the sense of a building plan or ‘blueprint’ (CADE 347). Our translation of *uṣurtu* as “cosmic-plan” or “cosmic-design” throughout the Akkadian texts is given further support by texts such as LKA 76, the myth of the “Seven Sages” wherein there is a fundamentally cosmic sense to the word *uṣurtu*.

²⁹ W. F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods* (London, 1954), 282.

³⁰ For an extended discussion see: W. G. Lambert, ‘The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism’ in Hans Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (eds) *Unity and Diversity* (Baltimore, 1975), 191-200.

³¹ In Cleanthes’ “Hymn to Zeus,” “Universal Law”

(κοινὸν νόμον, lines 32 and 54) stands in synonymous relationship with κοινὸν λόγον “Universal Reason/Logos”; cf. Liddell, H. G. and Scott, R., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968): s.v. λόγος, III,2.d. ‘rule, principle or law as embodying the result of λογισμός’; cf. Plato, *Crito* 466, *Laws* 696c.

LKA 76

- 8) [Sev]en *apkallus* “grown” in the river,
- 9) who insure the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth.³²

In *Enuma Elish*, following the creation of humanity and the establishment of Esagila, we read that:

Enuma Elish, VI

- 78) The cosmic-designs were established, all the omens,
- 79) the stations of heaven and earth the gods allotted, all of them.³³

Another ‘myth of origins’ in which *uṣurtu* carries this sense of a plan that is fundamental to the functioning of heaven and earth is a bilingual account of the creation of humanity which was discovered in Assur. Only the Sumerian version has survived in the verses concerned:

KAR 4, Obv.

- 3) When the earth had been set up and the netherworld was made,
- 4) after the designs of the cosmos were fixed...³⁴

Thus, when used in relation to the gods, especially when they are being extolled for their creative powers, *uṣurtu* has the sense of ‘cosmic-design’ or a plan fundamental to the functioning of heaven and earth.³⁵ This would seem to foreshadow Heraclitus’ concept of Harmony. If there is no cosmic ‘plan’ then there can be no harmony within the cosmos; indeed there can be no cosmos. Heraclitus “seems to have viewed the world as a collection of things unified and regu-

lated by the *logos* which is common to them.”³⁶ In this case, *uṣurtu*/Logos as ‘plan’ is more than a mere drawing, but implies the *intentions* of a rational being or creator. A plan for the building of a house or of a battle campaign implies the dynamic execution or working out of the plan.³⁷ In this regard *uṣurtu* and λόγος σπερματικός or ‘seminal Logos’ stand as equivalent concepts, for just as a seed, be it plant or animal, carries within it the genetic pattern for the life which will issue from it (and this is implied in the Greek σπερματικός), neither of these concepts is merely a static idea but a plan to be realized.

III Universal Logos

It is with this aspect of the Logos that we begin to find the more active or ergative quality of Logos. It is this aspect of Logos which realizes that which is contained within seminal Logos. In the Akkadian literature we see it most particularly in the speech of the gods. As mentioned above, the Akkadian terms for speech (human or divine) can be variously rendered according to the languages into which they are being translated. Thus in English translations – especially in the context of divine speech – we find that there is often a preference for translations such as ‘command,’ ‘order’ and ‘decision.’ These, of course, are not “wrong” but they can conjure up the image of an oriental potentate issuing orders from a palace and being somewhat removed from their execution. Yet when we stop to consider the root

³² Erica Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the ‘Seven Sages,’” *Or.* 30 (1961), 2-4.

³³ The translation of portions from *Enuma Elish* are my own. The cuneiform text is that of W.G. Lambert and S. Parker, *Enuma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (Oxford 1966). I have also made use of: Moshe Weinfeld, *עלילות הבריאה הבבלית* (Jerusalem, 1972) and Hecker, Lambert, Müller, von Soden and Ünal, *Weisheitstexte*,

Mythen und Epen, Band 3/2, in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh, 1994), 565-602.

³⁴ Erich Ebeling, *KAR*, I (Leipzig, 1919), 6.

³⁵ J. N. Lawson, *The Concept of Fate in Ancient Mesopotamia of the First Millennium* (Wiesbaden, 1994), 80.

³⁶ Long, 145.

³⁷ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London, 1975), 72.

meanings of some of the Akkadian terms, such as *ipiš pî* or *šit pî*, we find that they basically mean ‘the deed of the mouth’ and ‘the product of the mouth.’ These are quite literally “performative utterances” or “speech acts.”³⁸ Thus, for all the Akkadian terms I have limited my translations to their most basic form to define clearly the active quality of the divine speech; a quality which is certainly found within universal Logos.

In Text I, obv. 13 we note that by the god’s utterance (*qibîtu*) was humanity created. Next, in appealing, to this god, the suppliant states that the god’s utterance cannot be changed: *šá la ênû qî-bit-su* (Obv. line 8). This description of the divine word as “fixed” is common to the language of prayers and hymns (as we shall see below), and calls to mind Heraclitus’ Logos as continuity amid flux – thus we will save fuller discussion until Concept IV, Immanent Logos (so too with Text II, lines 5 & 6).

In our third text, Ea, Šamaš and Marduk are praised as the lords of heaven and earth. Lines 13-15 extol their cosmic, life-directing powers. Then, in line 16, we find the phrase: “Your speech (*šit pîkunu*) is life.” As discussed above, we could translate this line “the birth/product/offspring of your mouth is life.” In other words, “life springs forth from your mouth.” Similarly with line 17, “Your utterance (*epeš pîkunu*) is well-being,” one could easily translate “the work/deed/act of your mouth is well-being.” (See also Text VI, lines 14-15.)

Text IV (Obv. 28; Rev. 1,2,3,4,5) presents us with splendid imagery concerning the creative power, wisdom, and authority of Sin’s speech within creation. Those familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures will be given to consider the similar description of God’s word in the writings of Deutero-

Isaiah from the period of the Babylonian Exile (55:10-11, RSV):

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

We can hear echoes of Text IV (IV R. 9, obv. 28 & rev. 1-2):

As for you, when your utterance (*amatka*) passes by on high like the wind, it creates abundance in pasturage and water supply. As for you, when your utterance (*amatka*) is issued on earth, green plants are produced. As for you, your utterance (*amatka*) provides fodder for the cattlefold and sheepfold, it makes living beings numerous.

And, of course, we can easily see the parallels with the Akkadian texts which extol the irrevocable and inalterable nature of the divine word. With further regard to the Bible, the life-giving power of Sin’s *amatu* as seen in obv. 28 and rev. 1 and 2 brings to mind the creative activity of God’s word in Genesis 1:3-26, which is paralleled in the Prologue to John’s Gospel as we noted at the beginning. In rev. 3 it is stated that Sin’s utterance creates “truth and justice, (thus) people speak the truth.” There is an obvious logic of consequence here. The Stoics held that in both natural events and logic, the consequent follows from the antecedent if and only if the connection between them is “true.”³⁹ The “truth” of all connections is the work of universal Logos, represented in this text by the divine speech.

In Text I, rev. 21, 22, 28, the suppliant prays that the god will utter propitious com-

³⁸ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1975); S. C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge

Textbooks in Linguistics) (Cambridge, 1983).

³⁹ Long, 145.

mands for his life in the divine assembly – the locus of divine decreeing of destinies. Both in this text, as well as in others we have cited, there would seem to be an integral connection between the power of a god’s word and the power to determine destinies. The latter is an entire topic in itself,⁴⁰ but for our purposes in this article suffice it to say that the gods determine the fates for humanity and for natural phenomena. For humanity this would include what we might call the “life plan” and it also includes the “nature” and “function” (Greek *physis*) of all life and natural phenomena. It is also the case that the gods themselves are subject to the workings of fate. In short, the Mesopotamian universe could be described as a closed-system universe in which everything comes under the sway of fate/destiny.⁴¹ All this is symbolized by the *tuppi šīmāti* or ‘Tablet of Destinies’ (see discussion below). In Mesopotamian mythology the Tablet of Destinies is a *written* tablet, containing the destinies of heaven and earth; it is not a sceptre or crown which only *symbolizes* power, but rather it is the divine word in all its potency.⁴²

To use an example from science, if the deity could be termed “potential energy” then the utterance which issues forth from the god could be conceived as “kinetic energy” – the god’s will put into action. In the Akkadian texts examined above, it is the word of the god, written or spoken, which gives actuality to divine intention both in the creating of life and the determining of destinies. According to the doctrine of universal Logos, this would be the instrument (ὄργανον) through which (δι’ οὗ) the physi-

cal world was framed.

The activity of universal Logos is encapsulated by Cleanthes in the phrase “bring to birth order from chaos” (27b-28a; Greek line 15: καὶ κοσμεῖν τ᾿ἀκόσμη). One can easily think of the biblical parallel in Genesis 1:1-2, in which there was no created order or cosmos, and God’s word (vv. 3ff) brings about orderly creation. This idea of the divine utterance creating cosmos out of chaos has earlier Mesopotamian parallels, as we have noted above in Text I, obv. 6 and Text III, line 11 in which the term *ušurtu* connotes ‘cosmic-plan,’ as has been discussed above.

IV Immanent Logos

Throughout many of our Akkadian texts we have seen phrases relating to the fixed or pre-determined quality of the divine utterance: Text I, rev. 31; Text II, 5-6; Text IV, obv. 22; Text V, 20-4. In a doctoral dissertation by Joseph Shao, “A Study of Akkadian Royal Hymns and Prayers,” an examination was made of the dependent clauses which characterize the deity’s word. In his findings, Dr. Shao states that the deity’s word has five distinctive qualities regarding its vitality: It cannot be changed, it is irrefutable, immutable, irrevocable, and cannot be void.⁴³ These findings would indicate that a god’s speech (be it *amatu*, *qibītu* or other terms) is indeed an independent and fixed entity. The god’s word is like an arrow which, once released from the bow, travels inexorably to its designated target.⁴⁴ (See the discussion on *adannu* below.) We have

⁴⁰ See Lawson, *The Concept of Fate in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Wiesbaden, 1994); F. Rochberg-Halton, “Fate and Divination in Mesopotamia,” *AfO Beiheft* 19 (1982), 363-68.

⁴¹ Lawson, 19-39.

⁴² A. R. George, “Sennacherib and the Tablet of Destinies,” *Iraq* 48 (1986), 133-46; Lawson, 64.

⁴³ Shao, 179.

⁴⁴ The author wishes to thank Prof. Simo Parpola for pointing out that the god Ninurta has among his epithets “arrow” and “weapon” in Tallqvist *Götterepitheta*, p. 424. Also, in SAA 3 37:11-15, it is by Marduk’s “arrows” that Anzū is defeated – cf. Anzū discussion below.

a poignant and even humorous example of this in an account of the destruction of Babylon. The gods had decided that it should remain uninhabited for seventy years. Although Marduk took pity on his people, even he could not rescind the gods' decree. However, by a generous sleight-of-hand he reversed the number seventy on the *tuppi šīmāti* (Tablet of Destinies) so that it appeared as eleven, thereby reducing the period of desolation!⁴⁵

In Text V, line 21, we find a description of Aššur's 'speech/utterance' (*qibītu*) which is both curious and problematic in regard to the deity's power to determine life. It is sandwiched in the midst of nine lines (18-24) which describe the strength and majesty of the word of Aššur. Line 21 reads: "[His utterance] is like the constellations, it does not miss its determined period." The problem is centred round the connection between – *šītir burūmê* which literally means 'the writing of the firmament' (CAD B 345a), and thus by extension means the 'stars' or 'constellations,' – and the term *adannu*. According to the CAD (A/1 97ff) *adannu* has two principal meanings: 1. 'a moment in time at the end of a specified period,' 2. 'a period of time of predetermined length or characterized by a sequence of specific events.' *Adannu* plays an integral part in Mesopotamian omen literature as the time within or after which the prognosticated event is set to occur. The events foretold by divination are written in the heavens by the gods just as they are written in the exta of sheep. By comparing Aššur's utterance to the *šītir burūmê* there is by implication a constancy or predetermined quality to the divine *qibītu* – just as the constellations reach their positions in

the sky with sequential regularity. Does the author of this hymn mean simply to imply that there is a trustworthy constancy to Aššur's word or does he mean that Aššur's word is fixed for eternity? The fact that it is stated to have a 'determined period' suggests that what was spoken in the past finds fulfilment in time – without deviation.⁴⁶ This idea would seem to be a forerunner to the concept of immanent Logos – that thread of continuity amidst flux, the plan which is embodied within the world and all physical phenomena and realized through the activity of universal Logos.

In relation to Logos, F. H. Sandbach writes:

So the *logos* that is God by giving shape to matter makes the world and all the things that are in it; it is rational, that is to say the world is not an arbitrary or haphazard construction; and finally the world must be seen as a dynamic process, *tending to some kind of consummation* [emphasis added], not as a static organization with a permanent form. This last feature is not a necessary implication of the word *logos*, but it is one that is fundamental to the Stoic way of looking at the universe.⁴⁷

It is this dynamic process, cosmic-designs tending toward consummation, which can be found in the above description of Aššur's word in Text V. In this regard, Aššur, as omnipotent overlord and master over both divine and human realms, could be viewed as representative of a rational cosmos, operating within its own predetermined patterns. This notion would seem to be embodied in line 19: "[Who deliberates only with him]self, Aššur, whose word is profound."

⁴⁵ D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria*, II, (Chicago, 1927), § 643.

⁴⁶ Lawson, 68.

⁴⁷ Sandbach, 72-73.

The *Akītu* Festival

By way of concluding this exploration of the various aspects of Logos which can be found in Akkadian thought and literature it is worthwhile to turn our attention to the Babylonian new year (or *akītu*) festival. Many aspects of the creative and organizing power of the divine utterance cited above are brought together in this festival. Its overarching purpose was the determination of fates for the king and the country at large. Throughout the festival, the power of the divine word is extolled. In Thureau-Dangin's edition of the ritual text for the *akītu*-festival of the new year as performed in Babylon, there is a damaged part of a recitation by a priest near the beginning (lines 59-61) which invokes the name of Marduk

(perhaps in relation to his or Babylon's enemies): "Great lord Marduk... has pron[ounced] a curse that cannot be altered... de[creed] a fate that cannot be withdrawn."⁴⁸ Therein the immutability of the divine word is established once again. In line 225 the *šešgallu*-priest exalts Marduk's lordship over (cosmic) designs: "Lord of the (inhabited) regions, king of the gods, Marduk, who establishes the cosmic-design." A few lines later (242-3) we are reminded that it is Marduk who determines the fate of gods as well: "Exalted Marduk, who determines the fates of all the gods." The divine word or utterance is the thought/plan which runs throughout the whole of life just as the Logos is immanent within creation.

Divine Speech in *Enuma Elish*

There is one extended narrative which can give us a dramatic portrayal of the efficacy of the divine word or utterance: *Enuma Elish*, the so-called Babylonian creation epic. The central concern of *Enuma Elish* is not so much the creation of the cosmos, but rather the one who did the creating: Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. *Enuma Elish* serves both as a description of how Marduk became pre-eminent and as a paean to his power and

glory. Throughout this epic, we find a repetition of phrases concerning both the power and the inalterable quality of the divine word. The epic's drama provides us with an opportunity to see 'played out' the ways in which the efficacy of the divine speech was envisaged. Marduk becomes the chief god of the pantheon through combat with the mother-goddess Tiamat, who had spawned a new generation of younger gods and whose champion Marduk had become.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels Accadiens* (Paris, 1921), 149.

⁴⁹ Marduk is the son of Ea. There is a very long tradition – perhaps going back to Archaic Sumerian – of Marduk/Ea incantation rituals. Usually someone suffering from a disease appeals to Marduk (generally identified as Asarluhi). Unable to help the suppliant, the formula consists of Marduk (1) asking Ea for help, whereupon Ea responds: "My son! What do you not know? How can I add to your knowledge? What do you not know? How can I increase it? What I know, you know also. Go, my son!" [cf. *Enuma Elish*, II 116-117] (2) Ea tells Marduk (= the priest) what acts are to be performed. (3) The concluding part states what effect the incantation had upon the suf-

ferer/disease.

In the case of Enki's words at the end of the incantation, powerful illocutionary commands do not so much describe what will happen but make it happen. In other words, word and performance are one – the very essence of magic. (S. N. Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God* [New York, 1989], 101.)

Kramer and Maier also write:

So well established was the form of the Marduk/Ea incantation that the great *Enuma Elish* itself may well have been patterned after it. In a sense, that is appropriate and indicative at the same time of the somewhat reduced – or at least changed – status of Ea by a certain period in Akkadian literature. In the many Marduk/Ea

When Marduk is chosen to be champion in combat with Tiamat, he makes this conditional demand on Anšar, the senior deity among the ‘younger’ gods:

Enuma Elish, II

- 122) Lord of the gods (and) of the destiny of the great gods,
- 123) if I am really to be your avenger,
- 124) (if) I am to defeat Tiamat and save your lives, (then)
- 125) seat the Assembly, proclaim my destiny supreme!
- 126) When you are seated together in *ubšukkinaku*,
- 127) let me, with my utterance, determine the fates instead of you.
- 128) Whatever I create will never be changed;
- 129) neither recalled nor changed shall be the pronouncement of my lips.

Anšar accedes to Marduk’s demand (which is repeated using the same terminology in III, 61-64), but his decision requires confirmation by the divine assembly. This comes in Tablet IV, 1-10:

- 3) You are (most) honoured among the great gods,
- 4) your destiny is without equal, your pronouncement is (in power) Anu,
- 5) Marduk, (most) honoured among the great gods,
- 6) your destiny is without equal, your pronouncement is (in power) Anu.
- 7) From this day forward your utterance (*qibika*) shall not be revoked.

In both of the preceding passages we see a connection between Marduk’s power of speech and his destiny (*šimtu*). As stated above, in Mesopotamian thought, all living beings – mortal and divine – are subject to destiny or fate (*šimtu*). *Enuma Elish* makes it clear that the determination of destinies came into existence with the gods (I, 7-9), and that the gods not only have the power

to decree fate, but that their own fates are decreed as well. Thus, the ultimate in divine power is to have the most propitious fate and the most powerful speech. As though both to confirm *and* test Marduk’s newly exalted status, the gods place a constellation before him and ask him to command it to disappear and then re-appear.

Enuma Elish, IV

- 19) They set up in their midst one constellation.
- 20) They called upon Marduk, their son,
- 21) “Let your destiny, O Lord, be pre-eminent,
- 22) to destroy and to create: Speak! It shall be so.
- 23) At your utterance (*ipšu pika*): may the constellation disappear.
- 24) Speak again, may the constellation be whole again.”
- 25) He spoke: at his utterance the constellation disappeared;
- 26) He spoke again: the constellation was re-created.
- 27) When the gods, his fathers, saw (the power of) his speech (*šit pišu*)
- 28) they rejoiced (and) did homage: “Marduk is king!”

In this passage we have a dramatic example of the creative (and destructive) power of divine speech or ‘word.’ To have control over destinies is to have control over the very essence of things. From the Stoic point of view the control of destinies is the control over the φύσις (*physis*) of things – animate or inanimate. That is to say, the ability to determine destinies is the ability to determine the nature, property or constitution of things. In the Stoic conception, bodies are compounds of matter and Logos. The Logos within matter is not something *other* than matter but a necessary constituent of it; it is the essential, logical

incantations, the power is Ea’s, transferred to his son to enact. Asarluhi is not the “hero” of that strange combination of magic and story; the center is the

powerful word [emphasis added], and that word is the crafty god (142).

connection with the controlling universal Logos, that which makes the universe a cohesive, logical whole. Thus we see once more that the divine word, in and through the determination of destinies is, in Greek Logos-terminology, the ὄργανον through which (δὲ οὐδὲ) things come into being.

Perhaps the greatest display of the creative power of the divine word is to be found in the events following Marduk's defeat of Tiamat. Prior to the combat Tiamat had invested Qingu, her chief underling, with the Tablet of Destinies (*tuppi šimāti*). Following Tiamat's defeat and the 'arrest' of all her supporters, Marduk strips Qingu of the Tablet of Destinies and binds it to his own breast. Once vested with the Tablet of Destinies Marduk sets about creating and organizing the cosmos. Tiamat is despatched – split like a dried fish – one half forming the heavenly space above and the other half making the world below. Then Marduk goes on to construct the various astronomical phenomena, whilst on earth he creates cloud, wind, rain, rivers, mountains and establishes the order for everything. Importantly, all this is done only *after* Marduk's elevation (IV, 1-10) through having both his destiny and his word declared supreme, and after having obtained the Tablet of Destinies. Following the proclamation of Marduk's 50 names, and in the closing lines of

Enuma Elish the reader is reminded:

Enuma Elish, VII

- 151) His utterance (*amatsu*) is fixed, his pronouncement (*qibitsu*) is inalterable
 152) No god can change his utterance (*šit pišu*).

This immutable quality of the deity's word would also appear to be a reflection of its power: once spoken, the word has a life of its own, carrying forward the power and intentionality of the particular deity, very much like the relationship between Logos and *logos spermatikos* of Stoic philosophy. The Logos (God) acts upon the seminal logos ('model,' 'principle,' 'idea') in order to bring it into actuality. The gods themselves emerge from a pre-existent realm of power or 'mana.' Thus they are vehicles through which power is realised in both the divine and human realms. The gods are also known to employ 'mana' or magic to help them: e.g. Marduk arms himself with various types of potent weapons before going out to do battle with Tiamat (*Enuma Elish*, IV).⁵⁰ Given this fact, a god's word, once spoken, carries with it the same will and potency as inhere in the god. This is an exact forerunner of the Stoic notion of the Ideas or λόγοι σπερματικοί – plans, models, principles which are acted upon by the universal Logos to become concrete reality.

Related Akkadian Terms

Determining fates, speaking with the intent of creating life, establishing the designs of the universe – all these are functions of the gods, or of the chief god, of the Mesopotamian pantheon at any particular time, and all are accomplished through the divine

word. At this juncture it will be useful to introduce several other related terms which help to round off the complex of terms which inform the later Greek λόγος. These are: *riksu*, 'bond' or 'binding';⁵¹ *markasu*, which bears the meanings: 'rope, cable (of

⁵⁰ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (New York, 1972), 32.

⁵¹ cf. *AHw*, II, 984: 'Gott als Band der Welt.'

a boat), bond, link, centre (in the cosmic sense)' (*CAD*, M/I, 282);⁵² *šerretu*, 'nose-rope,' 'lead-rope,' 'halter' (*CAD*, Š, 134). Our immediate concern is with the use of the first two terms as epithets for the gods in the cosmological sense. The third term, with a semantic shift, is used in descriptions of gods, with regard to their cosmic rulership. In considering these three terms it is worth citing at length A. R. George:

While *markasu* is literally a mooring rope, in cosmological contexts it is a rope which connects together, or 'binds,' the component parts of the Babylonian universe, by the holding of which the cosmos is controlled...⁵³ To hold someone's "nose-rope" is a metaphorical expression of having complete power over him... Developing from the image of the "nose-rope" by which gods and kings control their subjects is a cosmological connotation...⁵⁴ But most revealing is the equation in cosmological contexts of *šerretu* and *markasu*, the cosmic mooring rope, or "bond"... The identification of the two words is explicit in the Marduk hymn: Marduk fixed up and took in his hand the bridle of the Igigi and Anunnaki, the bond of heaven [and underworld].⁵⁵

It appears that the various parts of the Sumero-Babylonian universe were conceived as

being linked or "bonded" by one or more such cords or ropes (the existence of a cosmic cable is noted by Lambert in Blacker and Loewe, *Ancient Cosmologies*, p. 62). That there was more than one rope is suggested by the existence not only of the "bond of heaven and the underworld," but also the "bond of the heavens," which was perhaps visible as a constellation, and an earthly "bond of the land(s)/peoples"... One such cosmic rope is known by name as *durmāhu* (dur.maḥ, 'exalted bond'), into which Marduk wove Ti'amat's tail when he reorganized the cosmos (*Enūma eliš* V 59), and which is itself interpreted as *markas ilī^{mes}*, "the bond of the gods," in *Enūma eliš* VII 95. By holding these cosmic ropes a deity could control the universe.⁵⁶

These Akkadian terms for the bonds which link the universe together are concrete, even pictorial, in their realism. Nevertheless they lay a foundation for the later, abstract Logos doctrine which embodies the very same concepts. Another concrete manifestation of Mesopotamian thought regarding the governance of the universe is to be found in the "Tablet of Destinies," which – as will have been seen in the texts above – is the embodiment of cosmic power and control.

The Tablet of Destinies

From the British museum's Kuyunjik collection we have K. 6177+8869, which contains a theological exposition of the Tablet of Destinies (Text B), making use of the

terms *riksu*, *markasu* and *šerretu*:

K 6177+8869 (Text B)

1) The Tablet of Destinies, the bond (*riksu*)

⁵² Cf. Langdon, 441. Concerning *riksu*, he writes that when Nabû "is called the "band of all things," we obviously have to do with an abstract use of the word, and in my opinion the scribe here is struggling with a language inadequate to his thought. He really wishes to connect the god of wisdom with the creative cosmic reason" (441). Of *markasu* Langdon states that "When the gods Ea or Nebo [sic], who were identified with "creative form," are called the "rope of heaven and earth," we have most certainly a philosophical term before us. Here again, I believe, the scribes are imputing an

abstract sense to the word. They endeavour to express the idea of the universal creative form" (442).

⁵³ A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leuven, 1992), 244.

⁵⁴ George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 256.

⁵⁵ George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 257. Craig, *ABRT* I, pl. 31, 8 (coll. + Ki 1904-10-9,205, unpub.): *uk-tin-ma it-mu-ma^d marduk rit-tuš-šú še-er-re[t^d] í-gi-gi^d anunnakkī(600) mar-kas šam[ê u eršetī]*

⁵⁶ George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 262.

- of the Enlilship (= supreme power)
- 2) dominion over the gods of heaven and earth,
 - 3) and kingship of the Igigi and Anunnaki,
 - 4) the secret of the heavens and the nether-world,
 - 5) the bond (*markasu*) of the Canopy of Anu and Ganir, the lead-rope (*šerretu*) of [humanity(?)]
 - 6) which Aššur, king of the gods, took in his hand and held [at his breast] –
 - 7) the image of his form, his proper representation [(is depicted)] upon it.
 - 8) He holds in [his] hand the reins of the great heavens, the bond of the [Igigi]
 - 9) and Anunnaki.⁵⁷

As stated above, by holding these cosmic bonds a deity could control the universe.

The Anzû Myth

For an example of what can happen when the Tablet of Destinies is not properly maintained we can turn to the myth of Anzû, *Bin Šar Dadmē* (“The Son of the King of Habitations”).⁵⁹ Anzû, a bird-like god, is the servant of Enlil, king of the gods. Jealous of the power invested in Enlil by virtue of possessing the Tablet of Destinies, Anzû schemes to steal the Tablet when his master is bathing (Tablet I, 68ff).

Bin Šar Dadmē, I

- 81) His hands seized the Tablet of Destinies.
- 82) He took the Enlilship – the [offices] were cast down!
- 83) Anzû flew off and [went] to his mountain.
- 84) Numbness spread about; si[lence] prevailed.
- 85) The father, their counsellor Enlil, was

Thus a deity such as Marduk or Aššur is seen both to create the various phenomena of the universe and also to be the ‘power’ which holds it together, as symbolized by holding the cosmic bonds. Here we come very close to the Stoic idea of Logos as both cause and effect in the cosmos. Logos not only gives existence to phenomena (universal Logos), it cannot be separated from matter or created reality (immanent Logos).⁵⁸ As such, Logos is the thread of continuity in the universe similar to the way the cosmic bonds hold the Mesopotamian universe together in an orderly (logical) fashion. In either case to sever the cosmic bonds or to cut the thread of Logos is to invite chaos.

dumbstruck.

- 86) The sanctuary divested itself of its numinous splendour!
- 87) [In the Up]perworld they (the gods) milled about at the news.

The result of Anzû’s theft of the Tablet of Destinies is the introduction of chaos into cosmos. In line 82, the ‘offices’ ([*parši*]) are the divine offices, that is the gods’ ‘functions’ in the universe.⁶⁰ It is because Anzû controls both the divine destinies and offices that ‘numbness’ spreads (line 84) and the gods mill about aimlessly (line 87); the established order has been totally disrupted. However, the possession of the Tablet in and of itself does not confer absolute *control* of the universe, for in fact, Anzû is finally not capable of handling the

⁵⁷ George, “Sennacherib and the Tablet of Destinies,” 133-34.

⁵⁸ Long, 144.

⁵⁹ Translation from: M. E. Vogelsang, *Bin Šar Dadmē*, (Groningen, 1988).

⁶⁰ Perhaps the best text for understanding *paršu* (Sumerian: ME) is the Sumerian myth “Inanna and Enki,” which concerns the transfer of the arts of civilisation from Enki’s cult city of Eridu to Inanna’s city, Uruk. Although

these concern the necessary arts for human civiliaztion, by extension to the gods, it can be seen that they have to do with the very order and structure of the universe. For the most in-depth study, see G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos “Inanna und Enki” unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste me* (Rome, 1973). A second myth which elucidates ME/*paršu* is “Enki and Inanna: The Organiatzion of the Earth and Its Cultural Processes” in Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki*, 38-56.

Tablet and meets his demise in battle with Ninurta.⁶¹ As A. R. George correctly points out:

the function and nature of the Tablet of Destinies... is *rikis Enlilūti*, that is, the means by which supreme power is exercised: the power invested in the *rightful keeper* [emphasis added] of the Tablet of Destinies is that of the chief of the destiny-decreeing gods (*mušim šīmāti*), which amounts in principle to kingship of the gods.⁶²

As with Qingu and Marduk in *Enuma Elish* the Tablet of Destinies is truly effective in the governance of the cosmos when in the *rightful* and *proper* hands; then and only then is there order in the universe.

The Anzû myth adds another dimension to our study of Logos which is worth mentioning. When Ninurta first goes to do battle with Anzû, in order to restore the Tablet of Destinies to Enlil, Anzû uses the Tablet and spoken command to change the nature (*physis*) of the weapons Ninurta uses against him.

Bin Šar Dadmē, II

- 60) From the breast of the bow he sent out the reed-arrow at him,
- 61) but it did not come near Anzu: the reed-arrow turned back!
- 62) For Anzu called to it:
- 63) "O reed-arrow that has come to me, return to your canebrake!
- 64) Frame of [the bow], to your forests!
- 65) String, to the back of the sheep! Feathers, return to the birds!"
- 66) And his hands raised the Tablet of Destinies of the gods;
- 67) the arrows, carried by the bowstring, could not approach his body!
- 68) The battle stilled, the combat ceased.
- 69) The weapons ceased functioning in the midst of the mountains; they did not vanquish Anzu.

While holding the Tablet of Destinies, Anzû commands that the arrow's shaft and feathers and the bow's frame and string return to their origins, both plant and animal. Thus the Tablet would be seen to exercise power over the nature of objects – both natural and those made by human hands. It is further worth noting that it is upon the *spoken* command of Anzû that the weapons' constituent elements return to their sources. This is akin to Marduk's commanding the constellation to disappear and re-appear in *Enuma Elish* IV, 19-28. As we have noted above, Logos is the plan or idea of all phenomena (seminal Logos), and in this regard could be viewed as passive; yet Logos is also the instrument (ὄργανον – universal Logos) through which the ideas are brought into existence, which is the active aspect of Logos. In this respect, the Tablet of Destinies could be seen as seminal Logos and the spoken command of the gods as instrumental or universal Logos.

When Marduk is approached to champion the younger gods against Tiamat his condition for becoming the avenger for the younger gods is that the gods *proclaim* his destiny supreme: "If I am really to be your avenger, (if) I am to defeat Tiamat and save your lives, (then) seat the Assembly, proclaim my destiny supreme! When you are seated together in *ubšukkinaku*, let me, with my utterance (*ipšú pīa*), determine the fates instead of you" (*Enuma Elish* II, 123-27). Similarly, in the Babylonian myth of the Twenty-one "Poultices," when Ea determines the fate for Nabû, he states "Bring me the document of my Anuship that it may be read before me, that I may decree the destiny for Mu'ati (Nabû) the son who makes me happy."⁶³ Thus it would seem that the

⁶¹ Cf. H. W. F. Saggs, "Additions to Anzu," *AfO* 33 (1986), 1-29.

⁶² George, "Sennacherib and The Tablet of Destinies,"

138.

⁶³ W. G. Lambert, "The Twenty-One 'Poultices,'" *AnSt*, 30 (1980), 78-79.

declaration of fate is not passive, in the sense that it is simply written out or thought out by the gods, rather there is an active quality – and specifically an active verbal

quality to the determination of fate. The divine word, once spoken, gives reality to the intentions of the god(s).

Conclusions

What I have tried to show is that the Akkadian literature of the second and early first millennia BCE was rife with expressions concerning the creative and organizing power of the divine word.⁶⁴ The poems, prayers, incantations, rituals and epics cited above provide the historical precedents for the semantic shift which takes *λόγος* from its most basic meanings ('spoken utterance/written word') to the richly multivalent term it becomes in Greek philosophy. In sum, as stated at the beginning, for the Stoics Logos was the principle of all rationality in the universe, and as such it was identified with God as the source of all creative activity. Certainly this has been found consistent with the Mesopotamian understanding of the role of divinity in creation, whose very speech, command or utterance brings life into being. Stoic philosophers referred to God as *λόγος σπερματικός* – seminal Logos which contains the essence or idea of all that is created; Logos also being translatable as 'plan.' The Akkadian texts have shown how the gods conceive the cosmic-plans (*uṣurāti*) for the

correct functioning of the world and universe. We have noted how Logos (universal Logos) is the instrument which acts on passive matter to generate all physical phenomena. In the Akkadian texts the god's speech enacts the cosmic-plans. The hymn to the moon-god Nannar/Sin (Text IV) provided explicit examples of how the god's word acted on the earth to create water, pasturage, green plants, etc. We have also noted that Logos cannot be separated from created phenomena (immanent Logos), but is the integral thread of continuity. Thus Logos is both the plan for the created universe and the power which brings it into existence and sustains it. Similarly, the gods of Babylonia whose utterance brought the universe into being, were also envisaged as being or holding the ropes or bonds (*riksu*, *markasu* and *ṣerretu*) by which the cosmos is controlled. The four aspects of Logos can be succinctly summarized in the following way: The god(s) conceive the cosmic-plans (seminal Logos), their speech realizes the plans (universal Logos), and they themselves

⁶⁴ Throughout the Akkadian texts cited, and especially apparent in the bilingual IV R. 9 above, are the Sumerograms/Logograms which lie behind several of the Akkadian terms we have related to Logos. Certainly all the terms we have cited have a "pre-history" – for instance, *amatu* 'speech/utterance' is the Akkadian rendering of Sumerian INIM (or ENEM in the Emesal dialect); *uṣurtu* 'cosmic plan/design,' is the Akkadian equivalent for GIŠ.HUR; and integrally related to these is ME, the Akkadian being *paṣṣu* 'office/function.' However, as the texts cited in this article date predominantly from the late second to the middle of the first millennium BCE, it is difficult to isolate meanings for the Sumerian terms inasmuch as they are largely understood through their Ak-

kadian translations. To get at a clear understanding of the Sumerian terms would require a serious look at the literature from the 3rd millennium which is beyond the scope of the present research. Two books which cover aspects of this study, but in the Sumerian language and literature, are: Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki"* and Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki*. It is perhaps in literary compositions concerning the Sumerian god Enki (Babylonian: Ea) that we find the most telling appearances of INIM. Enki's word or speech is noted for its power – both creative and destructive. Regarding the latter, cf. Mark E. Cohen, *Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 2 Vols. (Potomac, Maryland 1988).

hold the cosmic bonds (immanent Logos) which gives the universe cohesion. As the sum of all these, the gods of Mesopotamia – as symbolized in and through their powerful speech – stand as the precursor of the Stoics' universal governing principle.

In all its essential aspects Logos, as expounded by the Stoics, has precursors within the literature and thought of ancient Mesopotamia. How and where connections were made between the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the early philosophers of Ionia is, as stated above, immaterial. What

is of importance is that for at least two millennia prior to the rise of the Stoic school of philosophy, neighbouring civilizations in the East had produced literature which expounded ideas of a cosmic, creative principle, ideas which were organized around the divine speech or "word." It took the peculiar genius of Greek civilization to incorporate the idea into their philosophical vision of the world and thus put their indelible stamp upon it. But if the coin were minted in Greece, the ore came from Mesopotamia.