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Having far more limited resources than us, and being fundamentally much more serious and in closer contact with reality, an art such as ours that lacked significance would have immediately been seen as the degenerate thing it is. True art for the ancients, in other words, meant deep significance. Look now at the title of the present book. What effect does the use of the word "Myths" have on your thoughts before you even open the book? One of the senses of this word today is "lies" or "falsehoods." The word is also commonly used of the stories that were told and cherished and handed down by ancient peoples. These were serious people, and their 'stories' held deep meaning and significance for them, though we no longer require our own to have much meaning. But the title of Dalley's book flicks a switch in our mind and readies us for a bunch of mere stories, tales dreamed up out of thin air in idle moments. Personally, I remain unconvinced. I don't think that the ancients were as ready to waste their time and resources on mere entertainment as we are. Neither do I think that their stories were pure products of imagination about an imagined class of beings that (since it's safer) our scholars have agreed to call "gods." I think these stories are distant echoes of actual historical events involving real persons, and so does scholar and linguist Zechariah Sitchin, whose books on Ancient Mesopotamia you ought to read as they will help rescue you from the paradigm paralysis of the Official World. The story of Ancient Mesopotamia, of its various peoples and languages, its amazing civilization, its fantastic cuneiform writing system, and of the exciting discovery of hundreds of thousands of baked clay tablets, in various states of preservation, and their patient decipherment by dedicated scholars over the last hundred years or so, is a fascinating story but far too complex to go into here. All I can do is refer you to my Listmania List, 'Sumer for Beginners,' for some suggested reading. Assyriologist Stephanie Dalley, who has taught Akkadian (the Semitic language of the conquerors of Sumer), is one such scholar, and although I'm not a specialist myself but merely an enthusiastic Sumerophile, I think she would agree that knowledge of Sumerian and Akkadian is still in a highly imperfect state, and that 'definitions' of words in these languages should not be seen as fixed and more or less final, as they are in languages such as Latin or Greek, but rather as currently fashionable educated guesses by specialists, guesses which may turn out to be wrong. Personally I doubt very much that her use, for example, of the word "gods," accurately reflects what the ancients really meant. Once again, I think that we are dealing not with 'myth' but with history. Although Professor Dalley's book was designed for the general reader, it's quite a scholarly production nevertheless. After a brief Preface and Introduction, she gives us brisk, clear, vigorous and wonderfully readable translations of the following important texts: Atrahasis (the Flood Story); two versions of The Epic of Gilgamesh; The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld (The Journey of Ishtar to Africa?); two versions of Nergal and Ereshkigal; Apapa; Etana; two versions of Anzu; The Epic of Creation; the Theogony (sic) of Dunnu; Era and Ishum. All of these texts have been provided with their own brief introductions, and all gaps and losses of text in the original tablets have been indicated in the translations. In addition, all texts have occasionally helpful endnotes which in most cases total a page or two, although Gilgamesh has over 10 pages. The book also includes a Chronological Chart (in a miniscule font); a Map of the Near East showing places named in the 'myths' (which would have been more useful if it hadn't been so tiny); a page of line drawings illustrating 'Mythical monsters (sic) referred to in the translations;' a detailed 14-page Glossary; and a 6-page Selected Bibliography which should prove useful to polyglots who have access to an excellent university library collection of Ancient Near Eastern materials. The book is clearly and excellently printed on strong paper in a smallish but readable font, and bound in a glossy wrapper, but sadly has one of those detestable glued spines that crack on opening. Here is an example of Dalley's vigorous style, chosen at random from Gilgamesh, with my obliques added to indicate line breaks: "He washed his filthy hair, he cleaned his gear, / Shook out his locks over his back, / Threw away his dirty clothes and put on fresh ones. / He clothed himself in robes and tied on a sash. / Gilgamesh put his crown on his head / And Ishtar the princess raised her eyes to the beauty of Gilgamesh. / 'Come to me, Gilgamesh, and be my lover! / Bestow on me the gift of your fruit!" (Page 77). Within its limits, Dalley's is an excellent scholarly compilation of her wonderfully readable and vigorous translations, and should be of real interest to anyone who is seriously interested in these fascinating ancient stories. But instead of allowing Professor Dalley to decide in advance for you, it might be better if you were to make up your own mind as to whether they are merely "myths," or are instead a distant echo of our true history.

This pathbreaking work uncovers new translations of the main myths and epics written in Akkadian, including the Creation myths and the epic of Gilgamesh. The deities and heroes which figure in these stories are all of ancient Mesopotamia, and many of the original clay tablets, on which the stories were first inscribed, were discovered there. A striking collection of accurate and up-to-date renderings of the best-preserved cuneiform texts in current, readable English and discoveries of both new tablets and points of grammar and lexicography during the last twenty-five years, these translations will inevitably replace all previous versions. The book provides introductions to each item--giving insight into the sources and datings of the texts; notes to guide the reader through difficulties; an up-to-date glossary of deities, place-names and key terms; a chronological chart and map; and illustrations of some of the mythical monsters that are mentioned in the stories.

has the great merit of including not only the obvious Gilgamesh and Creation texts but also the Atrahasis, Adapa,

Etana, Anzu, and Erra stories and even the slight but highly suggestive "Theogony of Dunnu" Greece and Rome' handsomely produced book' A.R. George, SOAS Bulletin' her enterprise is to be warmly welcomed' John Dillon, Trinity College, Dublin, Hermathera Language Notes Text: English (translation) About the Author Stephanie Dalley is at Somerville College, Oxford.