

In memoriam
Erica Reiner
(1924–2005)

Assyriology has suffered a great loss with the death of Erica Reiner on 31 December 2005. She was mostly known as editor-in-charge of the *Assyrian Dictionary*, produced at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, a task which she fulfilled from 1973 to 1996, after having been involved with the project since 1956. Even after her resignation from the editorship, she continued to contribute to the *Dictionary* in various ways and was anxious to ensure that it would be successfully finished. (In point of fact, the manuscript of the three volumes remaining to be published is completed, and just needs to go through the several stages of printing.)

From her personal experience, Erica Reiner wrote a small book on the launching of the printed form of the *Assyrian Dictionary*, which she entitled ‘*An Adventure of Great Dimension*’ (2002) after a quotation from Benno Landsberger. The *Dictionary* does not just list possible translations for each Akkadian word; as is appropriate for a language belonging to a culture of the remote past, it also serves to some extent as an encyclopedia of Assyro-Babylonian culture. Erica Reiner combined expertise in linguistics and a wide knowledge of cuneiform texts not only in her person but also in the entries she wrote or edited for the *Dictionary*. When editing dictionary articles, she took care to arrange the manuscript so that the various meanings that can be attributed to the word in question were clearly visible to the reader.

She published *Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian* (1966) which applied the current methods of linguistics to this earliest Semitic language for the first time. The Elamite language, still only partially understood, was treated in her contribution to the *Handbuch der Orientalistik* (1969). Literature was one of her favorite topics. Apart from general surveys in handbooks, she also wrote a book on Akkadian poetry, *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut* (1985), using a line from an elegiac poem as the title. Here she carefully analyzed poetic texts from different times and places of origin in order to provide examples both of Akkadian literature and of the way she considered appropriate to explain it.

History of science in the widest sense became a topic of several of her publications when she began to work on an edition of Babylonian omens from events in the sky. In order to evaluate the astronomical significance of these texts, which in general would not have been considered 'scientific' by modern scientists, she got the help of David Pingree, a specialist in ancient astronomy (who passed away a short time before her).¹ In the course of time, there appeared four volumes of *Babylonian Planetary Omens* (1975–2005), the last only a few months before her death. Apart from her own books on the subject, she suggested and supervised the dissertation by Francesca Rochberg on Babylonian lunar eclipse omens (1988). This attraction of the Babylonians to the sky was the topic of another book of hers, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (1995), in which she collected the numerous but widely spread attestations in cuneiform texts of attempts to engage celestial forces for earthly purposes.

This is only a small selection from the many contributions of Erica Reiner to our knowledge of the ancient Near East.

All who knew her will always gratefully remember her.

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¹ See the memorial notice by Kim Plofker and Bernard R. Goldstein in *Aestimatio* 2 (2005) 71–72.