Naked Bible Podcast Transcript
Episode 18
Taking the Bible's Own Context Seriously (Part 3 of 6-part series): ANE Texts in Translation
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The last episode of the podcast dealt with the need to tap into the intellectual output of the ancient Mediterranean world — the Bible's own context – in order to start thinking the thoughts of the biblical writers. This episode takes this recommendation further by directing listeners to the best volumes and websites for English translations of ancient literature pertinent to biblical studies. The episode focuses on the civilizations that give the OT its context – the civilizations of the ancient Near East (ANE). Dr. Heiser recommends books (whether hard copy or digital form) as well as websites for tapping into ANE literature.

Transcript

Welcome back to the Naked Bible Podcast. The last episode of the podcast dealt with the need to tap into the intellectual output of the ancient Mediterranean world—the Bible's own context—in order to start thinking the thoughts of the biblical writers. Specifically, the literature of the ancient Near East and the Second Temple Hellenistic Judaism period was the primary means at our disposal to become informed by the worldview of the biblical writers of the Old and New Testaments. I posted some links to academic books designed to be guides to this literature. In this episode, I want to take this recommendation further by directing listeners to the best volumes and websites for English translations of all this material. We'll start with the civilizations that give the Old Testament its context—the civilizations of the ancient Near East. In the episode that follows this one, we'll cover the Second Temple period (the primary context for the New Testament).

In what follows in this episode, I'll first recommend books (whether hard copy or digital form) that must be purchased. After those recommendations, I'll suggest some websites that have free content for texts in English translation. So let's start with books. The designation "ancient Near East" is used to describe the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia (which is Asia Minor, or what would now be considered Turkey), Canaan, Syria (which is a more modern term for ancient Ugarit), Phoenicia (which was also associated with Byblos), and the Transjordanian countries of Moab, Ammon, and Edom. Mesopotamia is further broken down into the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations. Anatolia is primarily describing the Hittite civilization.

All of these cultures (especially Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, and Ugarit) produced a good deal of literature, including everything from economic receipts, bills of sale, laws, personal letters, mythic epics, religious rituals, theological texts, and poetry about love and human suffering. But how can an English reader get into all that? Well, there are a number of print volumes that provide a broad exposure to this literature in English translation. I'll list the ones I recommend and whether those volumes are also available in digital form from Logos Bible Software (www.logos.com). You can check the links for all of these resources, whether they're books or digital form, at the "Bibliography" tab at www.nakedbiblepodcast.com.

General Collections

First there are general collections that include texts from all these cultures, not just focusing on one civilization. First in that category, there's something called The Context of Scripture , or what's known in the field as COS. This is a three-volume set. It's also available in digital form through Logos. COS is currently considered the most up-to-date academic English anthology for ancient Near Eastern texts. Since it covers all the civilizations, it is (by definition) selective in what it includes, and therefore not exhaustive. But it gives you literary examples (works) from civilizations all across the ancient Near East.

Second, there is Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts (known as ANET) This is a one volume hardcover edition of texts, and it's pretty expensive. But now you can get the material in a two volume paperback set that's much cheaper (vol. 1 and vol. 2). Now, ANET also has an accompanying volume of pictures, but we're concerned right now with just the primary texts. ANET is also available digitally through Logos. Like COS (Context of Scripture), it is selective and covers fewer texts than COS does because it's only one volume, as opposed to three volumes for the Context of Scripture. Before COS came along, this was the industry standard volume for ancient Near Eastern texts in translation.

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Third, there's the Society of Biblical Literature's series called Writings from the Ancient World. This is a 16 volume set. It's only available as a set if you want it digitally from Logos, but you can buy individual volumes in hard copy form on sites like Amazon.com. Some of the volumes in the set would include *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (that's one volume). There's a volume on *Hittite Myths*. There's another one called *Letters from Early Mesopotamia*, another one called *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt*. Now, the Amarna period was the period of Akhenaton (later New Kingdom). There's *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, *Hittite Prayers*, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, and so on. There's also a volume that covers the Ugaritic epic material called *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*. Again, *Writings from the Ancient World* is 16 volumes in all, and the only way you can get individual volumes is to buy them in book form.

Individual Civilizations

Those are the general collections. Let's move now to individual civilizations. We'll take ancient Egypt first. Aside from the volumes in the SBL Writings from the Ancient World series, there are several anthologies just of Egyptian literature. One is the three-volume set by Miriam Lichtheim, an Egyptologist. This is called Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volumes 1, 2, and 3. These are available in digital form from Logos, and they're available in paperback from a site like Amazon. They're not expensive. They're divided between the Old and Middle Kingdom (volume 1), then the New Kingdom, and then the Late Period.

Another example is Ancient Egyptian Literature: An Anthology by John L. Foster. It's a one-volume work. Its coverage might not be as much as Lichtheim (three volumes in paperback), but it is another well-known anthology.

There's another anthology called The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry; Third Edition. This is several Egyptologists: William Kelley Simpson (from Yale), Robert K. Ritner, Vincent A. Tobin and retired Professor Edward Wente Jr. (from the University of Chicago). It is just what it sounds like—an anthology. It includes stories, instructions (which is what we would call Egyptian wisdom literature), monumental inscriptions, autobiographies, poetry... it's a pretty broad spectrum. If you get that, make sure you get the latest edition (the third edition).

[Also from Bibliography page at www.nakedbiblepodcast.com: W. Moran, The Amarna Letters, and the digital version.]

If we move now to Mesopotamia, this focuses just on Mesopotamian materials (Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian). Other than Sumerian, the rest of that stuff is in the language known as Akkadian. The best set here is the two volume set called Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature by Benjamin R. Foster. That set is quite exhaustive. It's very good. It's something that scholars would use. There's actually a distillation of that set (the two-volume set) into one paperback volume. The one-volume work is called From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia. And the material in that is sort of pulled from the larger set (*Before the Muses*). It's also by Benjamin R. Foster. He selected the major things from the two-volume set to put into the one-volume set. I used that book for the Mesopotamia class I taught at the local university.

10:00   Another one volume work is Stephanie Dalley's Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others. This was published in 1989. Stephanie Dalley is a well-known scholar in Mesopotamian studies. It's a nice little paperback, not expensive at all. It will cover all the major creation epics (the Flood epic, Gilgamesh, that sort of thing).

I should also mention Thorkild Jacobsen's The Harps that Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation. Jacobsen was a well-known Sumerian scholar. This book

focuses on the poetic epic myths in Sumerian literature (creation epics and that sort of thing). It's somewhat dated, but Jacobsen was a major figure in Sumerian studies and so it's well worthwhile to have his translations.

Ugaritic literature... we can focus on that in particular. Aside from the volume in the writings from the *Ancient World Series* entitled *Ugaritic Poetry* (by Simon Parker), there are three other books that provide English translations of the Ugaritic epic material—things like the Baal Cycle or the Keret Epic. These are: Nicholas Wyatt's [Religious Texts from Ugarit](#) (that's also available [digital](#)ly from Logos), John C.L. Gibson's [Canaanite Myths and Legends](#) (also available from Logos [digital](#)ly)... That volume includes a number of Rephaim texts, in addition to the major epics. Finally, there's Michael Coogan's and Mark Smith's volume called [Stories from Ancient Canaan](#) (Second Edition). If you get that work make sure you get the second edition.

For the literature produced by the Hittites, Phoenicians, Moabites, and all the smaller Transjordanian civilizations, the best thing you can do is get access to COS (*Context of Scripture*) or ANET (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*). There are no separate works that really focus specifically on these smaller civilizations.

Websites with Free Content

Let's talk a little bit about websites where you can get access to material for free. Naturally, online resources (as you'd expect) are not as good as the published volumes. For one thing, they're often quite old. They're in public domain so you don't get the benefit of the most recent research and the results of that reflected in newer, more recent translations. You're also dependent on your own searching, in most cases, since these websites may or may not have the material organized in any coherent way and just require you to put in your own search terms to find whatever it is they have. But there's still a lot of good stuff there, so I don't want you to be completely discouraged about that. You'd be surprised at what's available. I'm going to give you three sites that are useful for accessing primary texts for free in the public domain.

One is a site called [ETANA](#) (Electronic Tools Ancient Near East Archives, [www.etana.org](#)). What you do when you go to this website is you select core texts from the tabs at the top and then type in a subject word or a key word in advance to search. For instance, if I type in "Egypt," I would find things like James Henry Breasted's five volume work on ancient records of Egypt. These are historical documents from all periods of ancient Egyptian history. There are things in Breasted that aren't published in any other work, either in public domain or the recent collections. This was a very important set, and actually still is. Breasted was an Egyptologist at the University of Chicago for many years. If I put in the key word "translation" I get things like Leonard King's two volume work *The Seven Tablets of Creation*. That was done in the 19-teens, just after the turn of the 1900's. It's an old translation of Babylonian creation stories. While you're on the ETANA website, you may want to also click on the tab that says "Abzu."

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These are free academic books collected from the web that cover all sorts of topics about the ancient Near East. You won't find core texts on Abzu (you'll have to use the ETANA search engine for that), but you will find thousands of books about the ancient Near East that are free, along with lots of other links to other sites (again, depending on your search terms). Thirdly, on the ETANA website there's also a news site known as "eTACT." It's just another tab on the ETANA website. This site, as its own wording explains, aims to be the definitive repository on the web for translations of Akkadian materials. So if you're on the ETANA website, click on the eTACT tab and you'll be taken to a page where you can browse that particular collection by category.

The second major site I want to direct you to is the Internet Sacred Texts Archive. Make sure you access the index, which you can do by going up to www.nakedbiblepodcast.com, clicking on Bibliography and then hitting the link for Internet Sacred Texts Archive [or use the link above]. This is really quite a good site that's been up for years. Whoever runs this site has really taken the time to cull the web for English translations of all sorts of ancient texts, not just the ancient Near East. The best part about it is that it's actually given some sort of coherent topical arrangement, so that it's not something that you're totally dependent on searching with your own keywords. I highly recommend that to get to public domain material and websites that have English translations of these ancient Near Eastern texts on them.

Third, there's something called the Internet Archive. The Internet Archive is an archive of free public domain resources on basically any subject that you can think of. It's not just about ancient studies, it's about anything that's available for free—either public domain or available for free otherwise. Once you're on that page, you search for key terms and you'll get access to books that have been scanned and made available because they're in public domain or converted to PDF. It's a very useful website, and you'll find lots of material on that.

I hope this is helpful. Just remember to visit www.nakedbiblepodcast.com and then click on the Bibliography tab for links to all the resources I've described here. In the next episode that follows, we'll take a look at the same sorts of resources for the Second Temple period—the primary context of the New Testament.