

Eulogy for Avigdor (Victor) Hurowitz*

Delivered on January 21, 2013

by Shalom M. Paul

Victor, my dear friend, a great sorrow has fallen upon all of us. We bitterly lament and are distraught – the loss is overwhelming to us all: “Woe, my brother!” (1 Kings 13:30). You have gone to the next world before your time. Your sun should not have set so quickly.

In the invitation that was sent for the day of your *simchah* (on the publication of your commentary on Proverbs), that has now sadly turned into a day of mourning, I was invited to say some words in your honor. The title was to be, “From Apprentice, to Neighbor, to Colleague.” To this triple-cord that cannot swiftly be severed I must add – upon the literary model “on three and four” – the most important of them all: “Friend.”

That which came first – “Apprentice”: During my first year of instruction at the Hebrew University more than four decades ago, I was aided by your diverse and multitudinous talents as my teaching assistant. As is written in your beloved language, Akkadian, in which we used to converse with each other, *kabtu mali bēli imašši*, “An important man shall be equal to his master”; and *šamallu ummân imašši*, “An apprentice shall be equal to the scholar.” How these sayings become you! Yet you far surpassed them – from a teaching assistant you rose to become one of the world’s most distinguished scholars of Bible and the Ancient Near East.

“Colleague”: Victor, you have an extraordinary memory (lit. , “a lime-plastered pit that loses not a drop” – Mishnah Avot 2:8) and you have left our academic community bereft (lit., “a bottomless pit”). You are an erudite and prolific writer who has enriched us all by your enlightened and wisdom-imparting scholarly articles. Your wealth of knowledge in the hidden treasures of the past flows like a mighty stream that both refreshes and invigorates. The scent of the Tigris and Euphrates combined with the pleasing fragrance of the Bible permeate all your studies.

You never relinquished the writer’s pen or, better yet, the writer’s stylus. You may be likened to what was said of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, *ša nēmeqi Ea... kullat ṭupšarrūti iḫrusu karassu*, “His mind understands the wisdom of Ea (the god of wisdom), the perfection of scribal instruction.” You are the personification of knowledge, at once profound and innovative, a discerning scholar whose insights illuminate us all.

How you impressed us all by the photo in which you held, with justifiable pride, the two volumes of your recently published Hebrew commentary to Proverbs! You entitled the picture, “This is the day for which we had hoped – Father and Twins.” Permit me to add, as it is written in Akkadian, *tū’imi tulīd*, “You have given birth to twins.” The lengthy birth-pangs (known to many of us present here) resulted in two newborns – twins of beauty. I want you all to know that Victor was a *summa cum laude* graduate of the “University of Mesopotamia.” In your writings, the worlds of the Bible and Mesopotamia come alive. In accord with the term that you so aptly invented, you are a “cuneobiblicist” par excellence.

* Translated from Hebrew by Jeremiah Unterman and slightly adapted from the original by the author.

“Neighbor and Friend”: First, I shall read a poem you composed at an Assyriological Rencontre that testifies to your mischievous wit:

Sumerian Sirens, Babylonian Beauties

The summer Rencontre had come to an end
And assyriologists all had drunk a fine blend
Of Enkidu Beer¹ and *karān-šikaru*²
And their minds filled with visions of *sinniš-zikaru*³
They couldn't decide on a closing event,
So back to the lecture hall all of them went
And convened in emergency *ukkin*⁴ and *puḫru*⁵
And decided by *hé.am*⁶ the one thing to do
Wilfred and Sasson and Andrew and Van [Soldt]⁷
Were appointed the envy of every fine man
They were chosen to judge the “*Kuzbītu*⁸ Four”
Pamela, Chessie, Eva and Eleanor⁹
Who would stroll down the catwalk in *melammu*¹⁰ so bright
Wearing nothing much else on that glorious night
But it was not for their beauty they'd win an *agû*¹¹
But for the *eme*¹² they spoke and what each of them knew
And their talent to wow every young or old scholar
Who had chosen a field where one can't make a dollar
So ask them some questions, and give each a chance
To speak in Akkadian or in Sumerian dance
Ask them of society, astronomy, history
And check out which one has cuneiform literacy
And at the end of the pageant, the one still in situ
Will be granted the title of this year's *Kuzbītu*!

Yet another anecdote: We were accustomed to emailing each other practically everyday, or to conversing by telephone on scholarly and unscholarly matters. Allow me to read before those who are gathered here today one of these conversations: When you received the news this past May that my English commentary on Isaiah 40–66 was published, you wrote to me, “Mazal Tov,” along with a wish that my writings would continue to increase.

– I replied, “Thank you so much. The book just arrived.”

¹ A beer brewed specially for the Helsinki Rencontre, 2001.

² Akkadian, wine, beer.

³ Akkadian, female, male.

⁴ Sumerian, assembly.

⁵ Akkadian, assembly.

⁶ Sumerian, “so be it.”

⁷ Four prominent Assyriologists, leaders of the International Association for Assyriology.

⁸ Akkadian, sexually appealing.

⁹ Four stunning (and brilliant) Assyriologists.

¹⁰ Akkadian, divine radiance.

¹¹ Akkadian, crown.

¹² Sumerian tongue, language.

- You answered, “Then I won’t disturb you.”
- “No disturbance,” I said. “How can I read over 700 (!) pages all at once? I’ll save you a copy when the others arrive.”
- You wrote back, “Thanks. I look forward to it. In the meantime, I’m swamped with work, as usual. I still await final page proofs of Proverbs, and even as I wait I have six lectures scheduled for May–July. One will be given tomorrow *in absentia* in Japan.”
- “*Only* six? Are you slowing down, my friend?” I wrote.
- You replied, “Oops. Miscounted. I meant nine. Must have stood the digit on its head.”

Victor, you assisted me in matters both large and small. In large, in the comprehensive bibliographical material filed away in your mind; in small, in the diacritical signs of Akkadian verbs.

You are an erudite scholar of Torah and an exemplary Torah-reader, who prepared my son for his Bar-Mitzvah. As written in the Bavli, tractates ‘Eruvin (32a) and Pesahim (9a): “It is a legal presumption that a Fellow would not allow any unprepared thing to pass out of his hand.” We shall be constantly and continually nourished by your “prepared things.” Allow me to slightly alter the last verse in Jeremiah 52:34: “Your wisdom is permanently wise. It has been granted to us as a daily allotment, all the days of your life, until the day of your death.”

Last but not least: As a parting gift, know that as of today we hold in our hands 53 articles comprising more than 950 pages, written by some of the foremost scholars of Bible and the ancient Near East. These contributions were to be published in your jubilee volume, which, in our overwhelming grief and distress, will now be your memorial volume. You will be sorely missed. May your soul be bound in the bond of eternal life. May your soul find rest in Eden.

In Memoriam

Victor Avigdor Hurowitz was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 19, 1948. Summoned to the “Academy on High” on January 20, 2013, he is survived by his loving wife Ann Roshwalb Hurowitz; his devoted son Daniel Hurowitz; his three sisters Julia Bornstein, Leah Sherman, and Rachel Durlacher, and his brother Joseph Hurowitz. The second of six children whose parents were both schoolteachers, Victor was raised in a Conservative Jewish home, later adopting Modern Orthodoxy. While attending a public high school that groomed its students for academic excellence, he also studied in the Hebrew High School at the Har Zion Temple in Philadelphia, where the late Moshe Greenberg’s father, Simon Greenberg, had been the rabbi for many years. Victor originally planned to study Medicine, however early on in his college career he switched to Judaic Studies. He spent his junior year of college in Jerusalem at the Hayyim Greenberg Institute and the Hebrew University, where he was influenced especially by Dr. Gavriel Cohen to adopt a literary approach to the Hebrew Bible. He completed his BA in Hebrew Language and Literature at Temple University in Philadelphia in 1969, and at the same time attended Gratz College of Jewish Studies and the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia. That same year he settled in Israel and began his graduate studies in Bible at the Hebrew University. He wrote his MA thesis, “Temple Dedication Ceremonies in the Bible in the Light of Extra-biblical Materials,” under the direction of Professor Menahem Haran and completed his Ph.D. in 1975 under the supervision of Professors Aaron Shafer and Menahem Haran. Hurowitz often reminded us that he was especially influenced by his mentors Professors Hayim Tadmor, Moshe Greenberg, Aaron Shafer, and Moshe Weinfeld, all of blessed memory, as well as Professors Shalom M. Paul and Menahem Haran, may they be blessed with long life. During his years as a doctoral student, Hurowitz also began teaching at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In 1986 he received his first appointment as Lecturer in the Department of Bible, Archaeology, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Ben-Gurion University, and was promoted to Full Professor in 1999. During the 1991–1992 academic year he was a Fellow at the Annenberg Institute in Philadelphia, and in the 1997–1998 academic year was a Fellow at that same institution, now called the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Hurowitz also served with distinction on the editorial boards of *Olam Ha-Tanakh*, *Mo‘ed*, *Bet Mikra*, and *Shnaton: Annual for the Study of the*

Bible and the Ancient Near East, and this past year was selected as Israel's representative of the International Association of Assyriology. In his teaching capacity at Ben-Gurion University, he was very proud of his doctoral students, Ada Tagar-Cohen, Natalie May, Shirley Graetz, and David Shapiro.

Hurowitz investigated cultic worship in the Hebrew Bible in the light of material from Mesopotamia. His doctoral dissertation, subsequently revised and significantly expanded, was the subject of his first book, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings*, JSOT Supp. Series 115 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). In this work, Hurowitz analyzes the account of the building of Solomon's Temple in 1 Kings 5–9, demonstrating that the biblical account was based upon a Mesopotamian literary model of building accounts, and also clarifies ideas relating to temple construction, such as the need for divine approval of the building program, the dedication ceremony, and the reward the king receives from on high for his efforts. Hurowitz then went on to publish a series of articles on the subject of his first book: "Aspects of the Design and Symbolism of Solomon's Temple," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 422, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 2005), 63–110; "Solomon's Golden Vessels (1 Kings 7:48–51) and the Cult of the First Temple," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. D. P. Wright et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 151–164; "'Solomon Built The Temple and Completed It': Building the First Temple According to the Book of Kings," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. J. Boda and J. R. Novotny, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 366 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 281–302; "YHWH's Exalted House Revisited: New Comparative Light on the Biblical Image of Solomon's Temple," in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History, Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the University of Haifa, 2–5 May, 2010*, ed. Gershon Galil et al., *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 392 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 229–240.

Hurowitz succeeded in analyzing the Biblical text by bringing to bear upon it both epigraphic and iconographic materials from the ancient Near East. Among other things, Hurowitz showed that the Temple was conceived of as both God's dwelling

place and a kind of Garden of Eden. He was planning on collecting these articles for a full-length book on this topic.

It was Hurowitz's work on Mesopotamian building narratives that led him, in turn, to undertake literary analyses of royal inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian kings Sargon II, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. Hurowitz showed that the accounts of temple building in many of these inscriptions took a back seat to the writing of the history of a king's reign and exploits. Thus, what began as building narratives turned into important sources for the history of ancient Mesopotamia.

Hurowitz wrote articles analyzing boundary stones (*kudurru*) and also produced a book-length literary analysis of the famous one from the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar I, *Divine Service and Its Rewards: Ideology and Poetics in the Hinkel Kurru*, Beer-Sheva 10 (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1997). In it he showed that the elaborate literary structure of the text was designed to convince various deities that they should honor a particular priest to whom the king had granted real estate and tax exemptions.

An additional example of a royal inscription that Hurowitz examined from his unique literary perspective was the prologue and epilogue of the Laws of Hammurabi. In his book, *Inu Anum šūrum: Literary Structures in the Non-Juridical Parts of Codex Hammurabi* Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 15 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), Hurowitz demonstrates that the main purpose of the famous inscription was more to glorify Hammurabi's achievements than to establish justice.

Another important study by Hurowitz was "Hammurabi in Mesopotamian Tradition," in *An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing": Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, ed. Y. Sefati et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005), 497–532. There Hurowitz examined the esteem in which Hammurabi was held after his death, a subject that had not previously been investigated in depth. He also analyzed royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I, Samsuiluna, and Simbar-Shipak, the account of Sargon II's Eighth Campaign Written in the Form of a Letter to a Deity, and an "Old Babylonian Bawdy Ballad," published in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, ed. Z. Zevit et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 543–558.

Hurowitz contributed many commentaries on chapters and verses in the *Olam ha-Tanakh* series and important studies on Semitic lexicography and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Among Hurowitz's other seminal studies are works on divination, the function of the cult statue in the worship of the gods in antiquity, and Hebrew Wisdom Literature. Several of his contributions to this field include: "Advice to a Prince – A Message From Ea," *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 12 (1998), 39–53; "Literary Observations on 'In Praise of the Scribal Art,'" *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society* 27 (2000), 49–56; "The Wisdom of Šūpê-amēlī – A Deathbed Dialogue Between a Father and Son," in *Wisdom, Her Pillars are Seven: Studies in Biblical, Post-biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature*, ed. Shamir Yona and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Beer-Sheva 20 (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press), 109–124. It was to this last subject, Wisdom Literature, that Hurowitz devoted his longest and most recent publication, his monumental two-volume Hebrew commentary on the Biblical book of Proverbs, which appeared in in the Mikra LeYisra'el series (Tel Aviv: Am Oved; Jerusalem: Magnes Press) in December, 2012, a very short time before Victor's final illness, which precipitated his untimely death at the age of 64.