

(1553–54), contains the Catholic HB/OT with elements of highland Maya religious material from *Popol Wuj* (Book of the council). The latter was transcribed and redacted by K'iche' leaders between 1554 and 1558. Additionally, the K'iche' *Title of Totonicapán* (1554) contains a summary of Vico's treatment of the HB/OT and pre-Christian Maya religion in the *Popol Wuj*. The K'iche' adjust Bible concepts of *Theologia Indorum* and *Popol Wuj* constructing an innovative religious system (Sparks: 216–19).

Consequently, at an initial stage Mesoamericans adapted biblical scripture theologically to their ancient religious structure contributing to Mesoamerican Catholicisms and/or indigenous religions (*Sp. costumbres*).

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Lars Kirkhusmo Pharo

See also → Missionary Societies; → Native Americans

Mesopotamia

- I. Introduction
- II. Mesopotamia in the Bible
- III. Christianity
- IV. Islam
- V. Literature
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I. Introduction

The name Mesopotamia (from Gk. Μεσοποταμία, “[land] between rivers”) has been widely used since Greek and Roman times to designate areas within and along the Tigris-Euphrates river system, often with reference to the region's ancient civilizations. The Sumerian and Akkadian languages spoken by the people living in the region do not have a clearly

identifiable term fully corresponding to “Mesopotamia.” Initially comprising a territory limited to areas in northern Iraq and northern Syria east of the Euphrates, the boundaries of the geographical entity called Mesopotamia have been repeatedly redefined, most notably during the 19th and early 20th centuries and especially after 1914, when, as a result of British imperial ambitions, “Mesopotamia” began to refer to regions as far south as Kuwait. The use of the term has occasionally been criticized in post-colonial scholarship for unduly overemphasizing the differences between the ancient past of the region and its later history.

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Eckart Frahm

II. Mesopotamia in the Bible

The name Μεσοποταμία is derived from the Greek description of the land in the middle (μέσος) of the river(s) (ποταμός). In non-biblical ancient Greek writings the term usually denotes the entire region between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers from southern Turkey up to modern Kuwait (see e.g., [ps.-]Aristotle, *Mir. ausc.* 845b; Eratosthenes, *Geographica*, frag. 38, 63, 87–91; Hipparchus, *Fragmenta geographica* 28 *apud* Stabo 90–91: ὁ δὲ Τίγρις καὶ ὁ Εὐφράτης ἐγκυκλωσάμενοι τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν; Polybius 5.44.3; 5.48.16 etc.).

Originally, though, the corresponding Semitic name *Bīrūt nārīm* may have applied only to the northwestern part of this region around the city of Harran, in the middle of the great bend of the Euphrates (Finkelstein). This may explain the use of the name in the Septuagint – as a matter of fact one of the earliest attestations in ancient Greek writings – as a rendering for Hebrew *ʾĀram nahārayim*, “Aram of the two rivers,” (O’Callaghan) in Gen 24:10, 1 Chr 19:6; Ps 59(60):2 and *Padan ʾĀrām* in Gen 25:20; 28:2, 5, 6, 7; 31:8; 33:18; 35:9, 26; 46:15, simply *Padan* in Gen 48:7, *ʾĀrām* in Num 23:7; Deut 23:5, or without Hebrew counterpart in LXX Gen 27:43 (van der Meer). In these passages Mesopotamia primarily denotes the region of origin of the patriarchs and matriarchs in the Jacob cycle in the region around Harran. This also applies to the attestations in early Jewish literature (*T. Jud.* 9:1; 10:1; *Pr. Jos.* [= Origen, *Comm. Jo.*] 2.3.190; *Jub.* 29:12; Dem. [= Eusebius, *Praep. ev.*] 9.21.1, 2; Philo, *Post.* 76; *Congr.* 70; *Fug.* 48–49; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.276, 278, 285, 341, 342; 2.173, 177, 213; *J.W.* 4.531) and early Christian writings (Acts 7:2). Philo and Josephus also employ the name in the context of the Abraham narratives (Philo, *Abr.* 188; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.152, 157, 158, 244, 281).

In 1QapGen 17:9, we find the singular expression *ʾĀram ʾarʾā bīn nahariyaʾ*, “Aram, the land be-

tween the rivers,” applied to the king of Goim (Gen 14:1), a land “that is between the rivers” (*hī’ bīn naharīn*). Mesopotamia is also the home of Bileam son of Beor (Num 23:7; Deut 23:5; Philo, *Conf.* 65–66; *Mos.* 1.264, 278). It is the outmost region of king David’s conquests and Solomon’s empire (1 Chr 19:6; Ps 59[60]:2; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.121, 129; 8.61). Mesopotamia also figures predominantly in the Judith narratives (2:24; 5:7; 8; 8:26) undoubtedly because of the link between Nineveh, capital of Nabuchodonosor and Antiochia on the Orontes, seat of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The confusion about the exact location of Mesopotamia also resulted in Josephus’ (*Ant.* 12.393) misrepresentation of Bacchides’ *satrapy* ἐν τῷ πέδω τοῦ ποταμοῦ (west of the Euphrates; 1 Macc 7:8) as Mesopotamia. Josephus quotes a letter allegedly written by Antiochus III (*Ant.* 12.149) in which the resettlement of Jews from Mesopotamia and Babylon in Asia Minor is mentioned. Josephus also relates the fate of the Mesopotamian Jews in Nehardea (north of Babylon; *Ant.* 18.310–79) in the middle of the 1st century. In Acts 2:9 the inhabitants of Mesopotamia are mentioned explicitly as recipients of the Pentecost message.

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III. Christianity

The origins of the Syriac Christianity in northern Mesopotamia can be traced back to the 2nd century CE. The Peshitta (“straightforward, simple”) Syriac translation of the HB/OT was carried out in the 2nd century CE, probably in Edessa, by non-rabbinic Jews or/and Christians of Jewish origin (see Weitzman). Some of its readings contain parallels with Targums (especially in Proverbs and Chronicles). The NT Peshitta replaced the Old Syriac version and the Syriac Diatessaron in the early 5th century CE. The Peshitta’s influence on the East-Syrian literature, preaching, liturgy and spirituality was enormous (see Brock: 63–101; ter Haar Romeny; for other Syriac translations of the Bible used in Mesopotamia see Brock: 21–37).

The *Gospel of Thomas* (2nd cent., NHC II,2), the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (NHC II,7), and the *Acts of Thomas* (both first part of the 3rd cent.) represent the ascetic Christianity in northern Mesopotamia which demonstrated distinct interest for the apostle Judas Thomas, the alleged twin brother of Jesus (see Poirier 1996). This as well as other Syriac Mesopotamian biblical traditions were influential for early Manicheism (see Poirier 1998; Böhlige). Early Christian Mesopotamian writings of the 4th–5th CE century share with Jewish literature a significant number of exegetical techniques and motifs (see in

general Murray: 281–88; and Kronholm for Ephrem) and, at the same time, deliver severe criticism of the Jewish usage of the common biblical traditions (for Aphrahat, see Lizorkin).

The idiosyncratic East-Syrian ascetic terminology is likewise marked by biblical influences (for the “sons/daughters of the covenant” and the “single ones” see Griffith). The *Book of Steps* (early 5th cent. CE) divides all Christians in two principal groups: the Upright who are assigned the minor commandments consisting in their care for the social needs of the world (Matt 25:35–40) and the Perfect who are to fulfill the major commandments of following Christ (Luke 9:23).

In the beginning of the 5th century, some biblical commentaries written by Theodore of Mopsuestia were translated into Syriac. They were intensively used in the School of Edessa as well as in the School of Nisibis after expulsion of the community of Persian Christians from Edessa in 489 (see Becker: 77–125). In the following centuries Theodore became to be considered the foremost exegetical authority of the Church of the East, often called *the Interpreter*. The important East-Syrian exegetes Narsai (5th cent.), Theodore bar Koni (8th cent.), Isho’ bar Nun and Isho’dad of Merv (both 9th cent.) stand in his tradition (see van Rompay 1996: 2000).

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Dmitrij Bumazhnov

IV. Islam

There is no term for “Mesopotamia” in Classical Arabic or Persian, and ancient Mesopotamia fell into several administrative areas in the Islamic Empire. The terminology used for various Mesopotamian peoples was vague, and even though some terms reflect Mesopotamian history (Kaldānī = Chaldaean; Bābīlī = Babylonian; Āshūrī = Assyrian) there

was no clear idea of the great Mesopotamian Empires.

Pre-modern Muslims had little information on pre-Islamic Mesopotamian culture or history, either, and Muslim historians were aware of only a few Babylonian or Assyrian kings, which they mainly knew through biblical history. In Arabic and Persian literature, the stories of Abraham and his father Azar (already in S 6:74–83), Nebuchadnezzar, and Nimrod are well attested and Sennacherib and Semiramis are occasionally mentioned, but little was known about them.

Sūra 2:102 connects the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt in Bābil with magic, and based on this and the Late Antique reputation of the Chaldaeans as possessors of esoteric wisdom, Babylonia was seen as a country of magic. However, the names of these angels seem to come from Iran (Avestan Haurvatat, Amrtat) rather than Mesopotamia.

Al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 1050), and some other historians have preserved in their works lists of the names of Mesopotamian rulers. These go partially back to Greek sources, partially they are products of imagination. In his history of sciences, Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 1070) dedicates a short chapter to the Chaldaeans, but is unable to give a single genuine Mesopotamian name, listing instead a few esoteric authors and Greek scholars as Chaldaeans.

Persian national history, inherited by Muslims, was the frame of reference for world history, and this historical model followed the reigns of Persian kings as world rulers from the Creation until the Arab conquest of Iran. Hence, Muslim historians had problems in finding a place for Mesopotamian kings. Usually they were taken to have been sub-rulers or governors to the legendary Persian dynasty of the Kayanids, at times they were identified with some of them, and rather rarely seen as a separate dynasty, perhaps preceding the Kayanids – this last, and rarest, view coinciding with the biblical and Greek historiographical understanding as well as real history.

While Persians derived their origin from an ancient Empire, it seems that only the somewhat obscure Iraqi author Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 931) attempted to revive, or create, the idea that the Aramaic-speaking population of Iraq and Syria, the Nabaṭīs, were descendants of a great and ancient civilization, but his efforts had little influence on his contemporaries.

There have been attempts to find traces of direct Mesopotamian cultural influence in the Arab-Islamic culture, but few of these attempts can be substantiated with unequivocal evidence (Hämeen-Anttila 2014), and whatever influence Nabonidus' sojourn in the oasis of Tayma may have had on 6th-century BCE Arabs, nothing of this was transmitted to the Arab-Islamic culture that was born more than a millennium later.

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Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

V. Literature

Mesopotamia as a subject of interest in its own right surfaced in novels and popular writings only after the first archaeological excavations and discoveries at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Before that, references to Mesopotamian figures were mainly limited to those mentioned in biblical texts. That is the case, for instance, in Lord Byron's poem “The Destruction of Sennacherib,” which was part of a collection of poetry entitled *Hebrew Melodies* (first published 1815). Byron composed this collection in order to provide texts for musical compositions of the synagogue cantor Isaac Nathan who wrongly claimed that these melodies dated back to the time of the first temple of Jerusalem. Some passages of Byron's poem about the fall of Sennacherib have become famous, especially the beginning (“The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold”) and the end (“And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail, And the idols are broken in the temple of Baal; and the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!”). They are quite often quoted in other (especially popular) works (Ashton). The poem is based on the biblical account in 2 Kgs 18–20 (Isa 36–37) which recounts the failure of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE; in the poem, this failure becomes the sign of the inferiority of the pagan civilization of Mesopotamia in comparison to Judaism and Christianity.

The British excavations in Mesopotamia inspired Agatha Christie to write her Hercule Poirot crime novel *Murder in Mesopotamia* (first published in the UK in 1936). The story takes place in the context of an archaeological excavation in Iraq, and the details derive from Christie's visits to Ur and other places in Mesopotamia. During her first trip to Ur she met Leonard Woolley, the director of the British excavation. On her second trip she was introduced to Max Mallowan, Woolley's assistant, who later became her second husband. In her memoir she ex-

pressed her fascination for Ur and archaeology, which is also perceptible in her book:

I fell in love with Ur, with its beauty in the evenings, the ziggurat standing up, faintly shadowed, and that wide sea of sand with its lovely pale colors of apricot, blue and mauve, changing every minute ... The carefulness of lifting pots and objects from the soil filled me with a longing to be an archaeologist myself. (Quoted in Márquez-Rowe: 34)

The site of Ur also plays a role in the first volume of Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* (first published in German between 1933 and 1943). Mann started to write his most important work after a trip to Palestine in 1925. He was quite interested in biblical and archaeological research, and he used the results of the excavations in Ur to depict the hometown of Abraham's family with as much historical information as possible (Leich).

Mesopotamia is the background of the Jewish writer Jakob Wassermann's historical novel *Alexander in Babylon* (first published in 1905), which reflects the new public interest in Mesopotamia. Kafka knew this novel by Wassermann but did not appreciate it much.

Hans Henry Jahn's expressionist novel, *Perrudja* (1929; his style is sometimes compared to Joyce), although taking place in Norway, is largely inspired by Mesopotamian mythological motifs and topics. The ambiguous hero of the novel, Perrudja, wants to create a better world and tries to organize a second Flood; he has a close but complicated relationship to a woman named Signe, who has been understood by many critics as referring to the goddess Ishtar. More generally, one can read the entire novel as heavily inspired by the Gilgamesh epic.

The figure of Gilgamesh is certainly the most important Mesopotamian figure that appears in literature, including graphic popular novels (Ziolkowski). This is the case, for instance, in Marvel and DC comics in which Mesopotamian deities and heroes, such as Ishtar/Inanna, Lugalbanda, Ereshkigal and especially Gilgamesh appear. The Marvel comic book hero of Gilgamesh was created by Jack Kirby, and has then been employed by many other authors. Gilgamesh is a member of the Avengers, Marvel's team of superheroes, and some of his conflicts are inspired by the original epic.

In 2014, the Ukrainian writer Serhij Zhadan wrote a novel about his hometown Kharkiv, translated into German (2015), under the title *Mesopotamien*. The author compares his city, which is located on two rivers, to a modern Mesopotamia or Babylon. In this book, which has become a best-seller in Ukraine, Zhadan describes a growing and changing city that is reminiscent of some ancient fantasies about Babylon.

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Steven L. McKenzie and Thomas Römer

VI. Visual Arts

1. Ancient Art and Archaeology. Remains of ancient Mesopotamia were first systematically uncovered by English and French-led archaeological teams in the mid-19th century. Very soon afterwards, their numerous artifacts, initially consisting of many tons of Assyrian reliefs and other carved-stone, were put on display in each country's national museum: the British Museum and Louvre. By the early 20th-century Germany had matched, if not outdone, this imperial contest with the discoveries of ancient Babylon now enshrined in Berlin's Pergamon Museum. Other archaeological discoveries in the region continued the swelling of knowledge, as did the deciphering of cuneiform writing. The antiquities of Nineveh, Nimrud, Khorsabad, Lagash, Babylon, and many other places in modern-day Iraq posed a striking intervention in previous Western suppositions about the ancient past. Resembling neither ancient Egyptian nor Greco-Roman artifacts (the paradigms of the time), they presented a virtually new antiquity, an intimation of the many other varieties of the past known today.

But whatever opening to new paradigms they offered, Mesopotamia's artifacts were also quickly absorbed in preexisting beliefs and desires. Hardly least among them was the incipient discourse of race. Racial theorists found much to weigh and distinguish between Semitic and Aryan "tendencies" in the immensely varied and non-unified peoples and cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, however dubious, if not dangerous, their beliefs may now appear.

But surely the most overarching belief, the first and longest-lived of any of the interpretations of Mesopotamian artifacts, and one shared widely throughout different social classes, was as a validation of the literal truth of the Bible. This drive was particularly powerful in Protestant-dominated countries, then struggling with both textual and

scientific critics of the sufficiency of the Biblical account. Shawn Malley well states of the discoveries of Austen Henry Layard, the legendary British archaeologist who first excavated Nineveh, “First and foremost, Layard’s discoveries were universally celebrated as material verification of the historical truth of Scripture” (Malley: 2). Indeed, to take just one example, among Layard’s finds was the Obelisk of Shalmeneser, which included in its inscription the first independent mention of a king also named in the Bible: Jehu (see also “Jehu [King of Israel]”).

At the same time, biblical interpretation served also as a way to tamp down or deny other interpretations, an index of the ideological power of its adherents. In 1853, Sir Richard Westmacott, a renowned academic sculptor, was questioned by a Parliamentary panelist about whether Layard’s massive, powerfully carved discoveries might be seen as works of art, or even compared to the Elgin Marbles then in the British Museum, the very paradigm of artistic accomplishment. His answer was telling: “persons would look at the Nineveh Marbles and be thinking of their Bible ... but the interest of the Elgin marbles arises ... from their excellence as works of art” (Bohrer:124).

As Mesopotamian artifacts became more familiar and better-studied, they only came to pose a greater challenge to adherents of a privileged Biblical interpretation. An early high-water mark of this conflict was the “Babel-Bible” controversy in Germany of the early 20th century. After decades of close textual study, German scholars came to conclusions about ancient religious practice that stripped the ancient Hebrews of their claim to uniqueness. This “Panbabylonism” was proclaimed in several public lectures by Friedrich Delitzsch, under the direct patronage of the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Delitzsch claimed there was nothing “divinely revealed” to the Israelites, and that many other religions had similar practices, such as a holy seventh day. Though only making public findings that had long been known to specialists, the resulting uproar was one that still haunts scholars in the field. It also exemplifies the distinction between what biblical adherents wanted to find in Mesopotamia’s remains and what the stones actually brought, when the peoples of the Ancient Near East could first be seen in their own right. (FNB)

2. Later Receptions. In terms of visual receptions, the region of Mesopotamia as a whole is rarely depicted in biblical art; however, certain narratives set in specific locations within the region do have strong artistic receptions. Information about works of visual art related to these narratives can be found in corresponding EBR entries, e.g., “Babylon VIII. Visual Art” and “Middle Asia V. Visual Art.”

Of particular note are the visual receptions for accounts of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), discussed

in the entry “Tower of Babel VII. Visual Arts”; Abraham’s servant meeting Rebekah at the well (Gen 24), discussed in “Rebekah V. Visual Arts”; and the writing on the wall (Dan 5), discussed in “Belshazzar IV. Visual Arts.” For visual receptions of Mesopotamia in Islamic biblical art, see the entries “Art, Bible in III. Islam” and “Bible Illustration IV. Islamic Art.”

Additional information about the visual reception of Mesopotamia is found in EBR entries pertaining to the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, e.g., “Cain (Person) VII. Visual Arts,” “Abel IV. Visual Arts,” “Isaac (Patriarch) VII. Visual Arts,” “Jacob (Patriarch) VII. Visual Arts,” and “Laban (Person) IV. Visual Arts.” See also “Patriarchs VII. Visual Arts” and “Matriarch, Matriarchs VIII. Visual Arts” for further details. For other biblical figures whose narratives are partially or wholly set in Mesopotamia, see also the entries for “Jonah (Book and Person) VII. Visual Art” and “Nebuchadnezzar VI. Visual Art.” (DA)

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Frederick N. Bohrer and Devon Abts

VII. Music

In numerous instances biblical narratives, which have been substantially received in music, refer to places in Mesopotamia. However, rarely, if ever, is the region of Mesopotamia as such emphasized in such musical works. In the EBR, the musical reception of such biblical narratives and places is discussed in their corresponding entries. This concerns e.g., the wanderings of the HB/OT patriarchs in ancient Mesopotamia, for which the musical reception is discussed in “Abraham X. Music,” “Jacob (Patriarch) VIII. Music” and “Jacob and Esau, Story of VII. Music.” For the story of the Prophet Jonah and Nineveh (in Mesopotamia) which has also given rise to a substantial musical reception, see “Jonah (Book and Person) VIII. Music.”

Stephen Bertman’s *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* in its chapter on the legacy of Mesopotamia includes a brief section “Mesopotamia and Western Music” (Bertman: 333–34). Here the author points to several music dramatic works set in Mesopotamia. Among those with a biblical basis he points especially to Verdi’s *Nabucco* (see also “Babylon IX. Music,” “Drama VI. Music A. Music Drama,” and “Exile VIII. Music 1. The Babylonian Exile”) as well as to the inspiration from the Book of Daniel, mentioning here Handel’s oratorio *Belshazzar*. Sarah Hibberd has discussed how John Martin’s painting *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1821) in Paris led to “three reinventions” during the following decades, in which “music played an increasingly active role” (among them Giacomo Meyerbeer’s opera *Le prophète*, 1849).

These reinventions reconstructed the Belshazzar “narrative in ever more powerful and affective ways” (Hibberd: 109). Hibberd points to the contemporary political relevance of “Martin’s scenes of destruction and violent disorder in ancient Mesopotamia,” which documented “moments in the inherited narrative of Babylon and Assyria as sites of moral decay and corruption – and thus provided a vivid cautionary tale for the West” (Hibberd: 114). Numerous other musical works based on the Book of Daniel, which concern Assyria and/or Babylonia, are referenced in “Daniel (Book and Person) VIII. Music” as well as in “Exile VIII. Music 1. The Babylonian Exile,” “Jerusalem IX. Music 1. Old Testament f. The Destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian Exile” and “Kings (Books) VII. Music.”

Jörg Widmann’s recent opera *Babylon* (composed 2011–12 to a libretto by the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk), commissioned by and premiered at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, features a Jewish protagonist in the chaotic religious world of Babylon (Bruhn: 172–93). It is not based on a biblical narrative, but incorporates numerous biblical references along the way, among them to Josh, Ruth, Isa, and Ezek. Musically, Widmann also incorporates quotations from many of his own earlier works with musical contextual relevance, e.g., from his earlier *Mass*. Centrally in its action is a Babylonian sacrifice of the Jewish protagonist, musically contextualized with the music of the “Gloria” (notably the “Peace on Earth”) from his *Mass*. On the whole, the opera points to “the parallel between different religions, their hidden unity underneath any visible diversity” (Bruhn: 182–83, quot. 183). The opera was performed in a revised version at the Staatsoper in Berlin in 2019.

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Nils Holger Petersen

VIII. Film

Films seldom refer to “Mesopotamia” as such but rather to the various areas within that region, and they tend to center on Babylon. Babylon is the site for the early silent short *La vergine di Babilonia* (dir. Luigi Maggi, 1910, IT, *The Virgin of Babylon*), and it is also featured in *Slaves of Babylon* (dir. William Castle, 1953, US), which tells the story of the exile of Jews from Jerusalem enforced by King Nebuchadnezzar. Other movies set in Babylon include *Cortigiana di Babilonia* (dir. Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, 1956, IT/FR, *The Queen of Babylon*), *L’eroe di Babilonia* (dir. Siro Marcellini, 1963, IT/FR, *The Beast of Babylon Against the Son of Hercules*), *Le sette folgori di Assur* (dir. Silvio Amadio, 1962, IT, *War Gods of Babylon*), and *Io Semi-*

ramide (dir. Primo Zeglio, 1963, IT, *Slave Queen of Babylon*, also known as *I Am Semiramis*).

“Babylon” in film is seldom a neutral geographical site. Many films invoke it as a symbol of debauchery and wickedness. See, for example, Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927, DE), *Two Weeks in Another Town* (dir. Vincente Minnelli, 1962, US), and *The Devil’s Advocate* (dir. Taylor Hackford, 1997, US/DE).

Babylon also appears in many films as a symbol of tyranny over freedom. See, for example, *Alexander the Great* (dir. Robert Rossen, 1956, US/ES), *Ercole contro i tiranni di Babilonia* (dir. Domenico Paolella, 1964, IT), *Hercules and the Tyrants of Babylon*, and *Alexander* (dir. Oliver Stone, 2004, DE/US/NL/FR/UK/IT).

The most famous film set partly in Babylon is David Wark Griffith’s silent *Intolerance: Love’s Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916, US). Michael Seymour has shown how the sets for the Babylonian portions of *Intolerance* were influenced by 19th-century excavations of Babylon and Assyria, but also by European paintings (2015: 23–27).

While most films portray Babylon as a place of wickedness, the Babylon of *Intolerance* is a place of open toleration. Erin Runions explains, “Griffith’s portrayal of Babylon runs contrary to the biblical text, where Belshazzar is depicted as an arrogant and blasphemous enemy of Yahweh (Deut 5) and Cyrus the great liberator of the Israelites from Babylon (Ezra 1; Isa 45). In *Intolerance*, Belshazzar is the hero, and Cyrus the villain” (127). The Babylonian portions of *Intolerance* were later reedited and released as *The Fall of Babylon* (dir. David Wark Griffiths, 1919, US).

Other sites in Mesopotamia also are represented in film. For example, *La regina di Ninive* (dir. Luigi Maggi, 1911, IT, *The Queen of Ninevah*) takes place in that Assyrian city of upper Mesopotamia. The narrative *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Sumerian in origin) is evoked by the short adventure film *Gilgamesh* (dir. Peter Ringgaard, 2011, BH/DK) as well as by a 2014 horror film of the same name (dir. Richard Chandler, US).

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See also → Akkadian Language; → Aram-Naharaim; → Assyria; → Babylon; → Babylonia; → Chaldeans; → Exile; → Sumer, Sumerians; → Versions and Translations of the Bible

Messalians, Messalianism

The Messalians, a group originating in the late 4th century CE, were a charismatic, enthusiastic assembly whose characteristic trait was a contentious