Roberta Binkley draws our attention to the work of Enheduanna, and the practice of rhetoric in Mesopotamia. She, like other scholars we have read this semester, questions the continued prominence of the ancient Greeks and their role in the origin of rhetoric. She writes that the “evolutionary models of the western tradition beginning with the Greeks often act as methodological subtext to historical discussions of rhetoric,” (54) and that while scholars are “aware that the Greeks did not suddenly create a high culture, but were influenced by early Near Eastern civilizations” (54) the work of those scholars rarely reflects that knowledge. This creates a binary and others work that exists before and outside of the ancient Greeks. She uses the terms “prerhetorical” and “protorhetorical” to describe the works that came before the ancient Greeks. According to Binkley, it is this process of keeping those texts outside of ancient rhetoric that also pits East/West against each other.

Personally, what I find interesting is that despite the community’s knowledge of these works, and of the influence the Eastern civilizations had on the Greeks there is still the notion that rhetoric began with the Greeks. To deny the Greeks influence on rhetoric would be impossible, but to deny that they themselves encountered influencing works and societies seems equally impossible. The importance of this chapter is not only gaining awareness of Enheduanna, and the influence of the near East on the West, but in widening the view of ancient rhetoric. In class we’ve discussed the importance of studying ancient rhetoric, and doing more work in that area of the field. This is clearly an area that demands more work and attention by modern scholars. If creating an identity as the other for works that exists outside the Greeks creates opposition which leads to suspicion, as Binkely suggests, then it seems clear that more work needs to be done to break down that notion of the area as a geographical other. This is evident with the work of Enheduanna, which has suffered because of her geographic location, and gender.

1. How does reading this chapter change your understanding of the origin of rhetoric? Does it change?
2. Do you agree that the similarities in the works point to the interconnectedness of these civilizations?