Preliminary recommendation regarding
Sophus Helle’s PhD dissertation:
*The First Authors. Narratives of Authorship in Ancient Iraq*

The Graduate School, Arts, Aarhus University has appointed an assessment committee consisting of:
- Professor Lis Møller, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University (chair)
- Associate professor Paul Delnero, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Johns Hopkins University
- Associate professor Jon Helt Haarder, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Southern Denmark

The main supervisor Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University has taken part in the work of the committee without the right to vote.

The dissertation is written in English in the form of a collection of articles of 291 pages including footnotes, bibliography, and illustrations, plus a concluding report (14 pages), plus an English and Danish summary (4 pages), plus appendices (112 pages), a total of 421 pages.

**Summary**

The overall objective of Helle’s dissertation is to examine the earliest known attestations of literary authorship, namely those from the cuneiform cultures of ancient Iraq, by combining methods and insights from two disciplines that are rarely brought into contact: Assyriology and Comparative Literature. The dissertation intends to answer two interrelated sets of questions: 1) How are authors and authorship depicted in cuneiform literature and how may one study authorship in ancient and/or non-Western cultures? 2) Why did authors and authorship become important in otherwise anonymous cultures? Which historical circumstances led to the emergence of the author? The two sets of questions account for the division of the dissertation into two parts, one methodological (“Studying ancient authorship”) and one historical (“The invention of authors”).
Part One introduces a key concept in Helle’s dissertation: “narratives of authorship”, that is, narratives attributing specific texts to named individuals. Arguing that authorship in the ancient world should be studied as cultural narratives rather than as an empirical reality, Helle demonstrates that narratives of authorship are “a crucial and often overlooked source of information of how literary texts were perceived, categorized, and evaluated” (67). Looking into two sets of tropes of authorship, weavers and dreamers (chapter 5) and gods and kings (chapter 7), Helle establishes that cuneiform narratives of authorship present the author as a mediator.

Part Two examines three periods during which authorship became especially important: the Old Babylonian period (chapter 9), the Neo-Assyrian period (chapter 10), and the Seleucid period (chapter 11). Helle’s main argument is that authorship rose to prominence in an otherwise anonymous culture during times of cultural crises. Each of the three periods witnessed a demographic, linguistic, and political upheaval that threatened the authority of cuneiform scholarship. Tradition had to be protected, and to do so, it had to be condensed into the figure of the author. The story of how authorship came into being, Helle concludes, is “a story of how power is created and maintained by institutions that invest certain individuals [the authors] with cultural capital” (179).

The dissertation draws on a wide range of cuneiform texts. However, two primary texts are dealt with in particular detail: *The Exaltation of Inana*, attributed to Enheduana, and *The Catalogue of Texts and Authors*. In addition, Helle evokes parallels from non-Western as well as Western literatures, from antiquity and onwards.

**Assessment**

The greatest strength of Sophus Helle’s dissertation is that it overturns decades of approaching the question of authorship in Mesopotamia, by showing, quite persuasively, that trying to prove or disprove that a purported author of a text was really the author is not only beside the point and methodologically flawed, but fails to consider how claims to authorship are historically and culturally significant. In cuneiform cultures, authorship was attributed to texts that were verifiably much older than the alleged author. In a positivist approach, such authorial anachronism would make the question of authorship meaningless. However, following Barbara Graziosi and Alexander Beecroft, Helle argues that stories where texts are attributed to people who cannot have written them do in fact have a lot to say, “not about the authors in question, but about the people who composed and circulated them” (47). Authorship is seen by Helle as “an origin story that accounts for the existence of a text” (59), and “author” thus “signifies both a single figure and a sequence of events, meaning that the authors condense the process of literary production into one body” (100).

Instigating a conversation between Michel Foucault’s and Roland Barthes’s seminal essays on the author on the one hand and cuneiform sources on the other, Helle sheds new light on both. Standing on the shoulders of Foucault’s and Barthes’ essays
on the author, he moves back some 4000 years to discuss texts that attribute their own creation to a specific person, an unusual operation in an otherwise anonymous textual landscape. And vice versa. Fresh readings of what the ancient texts have to say about textual production, enable him to find a way out of the stalemate between romanticism, where the author is seen as omnipotent, and poststructuralism where the author is a mere mouthpiece of anonymous structures: language, tradition, ideology. Helle opts for a conception of partial agency, the cuneiform author is a mediator, a weaver of threads or the medium of divine inspiration. Furthermore, being part of a collective process, she is considered not only a weaver, but also woven herself by others. The pronoun here is important, since Helle firmly places the high-priestess Enheduana as the first known author in literary history.

Helle has successfully facilitated an inspiring and impressive dialogue between modern essays on authorship and a large, ancient and difficult corpus of cuneiform texts. Such an ambitious operation must necessarily downscale or bypass a number of relevant materials and angles. Fifty years of reception history of Barthes and Foucault is represented with a small number of texts and there is no mention of the history of biography. This latter omission is surprising since the dissertation is based on the idea that authorship is, in a sense, biography. Authorship is understood as “the stories that are told about authors” or “narratives of authorship”. This narrative understanding of authorship is a compelling one. However, Helle does not quite show how these narratives have a beginning, a middle, and an ending (his definition of narrative), nor does he clarify how he sees the relationship between “narratives of authorship” and “tropes” of authorship. Furthermore, there seems at times to be a conceptual conflation of “claim to” and “attribution of” authorship.

Helle’s philology (particularly when he is translating and interpreting Sumerian texts) would occasionally benefit from a little more nuance. More concretely, he not infrequently puts forward one translation of a text and presents it in such a way as if it is completely certain or the only possible translation. Often there are significant grammatical and lexical difficulties that are overlooked or glossed over, concealing the limitations of what we can say about the passages in question with certainty from the readers of his work who are not experts in Sumerian. The key passage from The Exaltation of Inana – cited in Chapter 7 to bring out the sexual connotations and to argue that the use of a series of ambiguous pronouns makes Enheduanna seemingly indistinguishable from Inana – is fraught with difficulties and uncertainties. Helle’s translation is not only one of many possibilities, but also not one of the most compelling from a grammatical and philological perspective.

Furthermore, the argument Helle makes in the second part of the work, about claims of authorship, arising during times of cultural crisis, rests on assumptions for each of the three historical periods in his analysis (the Old Babylonian Period, the Neo Assyrian Period, and the Seleucid Period) that could be viewed as too monicausal and reductionistic. The argument that Mesopotamian scribes bolstered their elite identity through their knowledge and mastery of a dead language and literature, by investing
this language/literature with an importance that it was in serious danger of losing, has become very prevalent in the field over the past few decades, and is, in itself, uncontroversial and unproblematic. However, it seems unlikely that this was the sole purpose literature served in any of the three periods, and other functions that existed alongside elite identity formation, such as being directly or indirectly connected with cultic and ritual traditions accessible and known to more than just a small group of literate scribes is equally conceivable. Furthermore, while a case could be made that Sumerian literature was in danger of dying out in the Old Babylonian Period when Akkadian had become the main spoken language in Mesopotamia, applying the same type of claim again to the other two periods is less convincing. For example, even though Aramaic was gradually becoming more widespread as a ‘spoken’ language in the Neo Assyrian Period, there exists no body of Mesopotamian Aramaic texts of any type during this period that suggest Akkadian was in a state of crisis the way Sumerian might have been in the Old Babylonian Period.

Lastly, though mainly concerned with the author in cuneiform texts, Helle has interspersed his dissertation with numerous parallels to texts from the Western as well as the non-Western literary tradition in a time span from Antiquity to modernism, thus widening the scope of his thesis. These parallels are suggestive and thought provoking. However, in the present form, they are at times too freely dispersed to constitute a consistently grounded argument. One hopes that Helle, in his future research, will develop this point.

On the invention of authorship in times of crisis, Helle writes that, “preserving an outdated tradition often involves simplifying, reducing and reifying it, condensing its complexity into something singular and tangible and exaggerating some of its features while eliminating others” (182). Helle, too, does in some instances simplify and condense the complexity of his material. However, the single-mindedness of his argument is also what makes his work so compelling. The dissertation is carefully organized. It has two sets of clear and pertinent research questions: How were authors depicted? Why did authors become important? These research questions structure the argument and divide the dissertation into two well-defined parts. The argument is cumulative and consistent. Though labeled an article-based dissertation, Sophus Helle’s The First Authors successfully combines the article-based and the monograph dissertation. Of the dissertation’s eleven chapters (excluding the conclusion), five are academic articles, three of which have been published in high-ranking peer reviewed journals while one is in press and one in review. Interspersed between these articles are chapters that string the argument together and fill in its lacunae. Unlike many article-based dissertations, Helle’s thesis does indeed present a coherent claim. He has successfully straddled the divide between literary theory and Assyriology, and in so doing he has enriched both fields. While offering valuable and original insights into the study of authorship in Mesopotamia, this truly interdisciplinary study is widely accessible to scholars outside the field of Assyriology and ought to be read attentively by literary historians as well. Helle’s dissertation is extremely well written, lucid and
intelligent, and his obvious enthusiasm for cuneiform text is nothing short of infectious.

Based on the committee’s assessment of the dissertation, a unanimous committee recommends that Sophus Helle should carry out a public defence. This defence is to be held on June 19, 2020.

On behalf of the committee and following due authorisation

Date: April 27, 2020

Lis Møller
chair
Sophus Helle

THE FIRST AUTHORS

Narratives of Authorship in Ancient Iraq

Thesis submitted to the Department of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric, Aarhus University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Supervised by Mads Rosendahl Thomesen, Professor of Comparative Literature at Aarhus University, and Nicole Brisch, Associate Professor of Assyriology at the University of Copenhagen.
The following is an article-based dissertation. It consists of five academic articles, of which three have been published (chap. 4, 9, and 11), one is in press (chap. 6), and one is under review (chap. 10). The articles are accompanied by a series of chapters that tie the argument together and present some overall methodological and theoretical considerations (known as the kappe or “coat” of the thesis). Article-based dissertations, while common in the natural sciences, are still relatively rare in the humanities, so an introduction to the format is in order. The main advantage of the article-based thesis as opposed to a monograph is that the articles have already been reviewed and copyedited, substantially improving their quality, but the article-based format also has a series of drawbacks that I would invite the committee to bear in mind. First, structuring the dissertation as a sequence of independent studies makes it difficult to present a single coherent claim; instead, the argument of thesis is developed as a series of overlapping approaches to the same topic. Second, the articles all discuss similar issues, so I must restate some core assumptions and background information in each of them. This leads to a significant amount of repetition, which I ask the reader to endure patiently. Third, because the articles have been adjusted to the style guides of their respective journals, the thesis is not fully consistent with regards to citation styles, editorial choices, philological conventions, and so on. Finally, because a major portion of the thesis has already appeared in press, it will probably not be reworked into a book but instead made freely available on a non-commercial website.
Colophon

Sophus Helle, “The first authors: Narratives of authorship in ancient Iraq.”

Doctoral thesis submitted on February 28, 2020, to the Department of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at Aarhus University.

Primary supervisor: Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Aarhus University. Secondary supervisor: Nicole Brisch, University of Copenhagen.

592.110 characters (247 pages), including spaces, excluding bibliography, tables, appendixes, preface, abstracts, and acknowledgments.

The thesis is set in Georgia and Brill. Brill is a typeface developed by John Hudson for Brill Publishers that is freely available for non-commercial use: https://brill.com/page/BrillFont/brill-typeface

Chaps. 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11 have either been published or are under review as articles in academic journals. See the first page of each chapter for copyright details and bibliographical information.

Figures and tables

Figure 1, p. 28: Map of the ancient Near East, reproduced from Radner and Robson, “Introduction,” p. xxx.

Figure 2, p. 88: Caravaggio, The Inspiration of Saint Matthew (San Matteo e angelo), 1602. Église Saint-Louis-des-Français. © Pieux Établissements de la France à Rome et à Lorette, reproduced here with their kind permission.

Figure 3, p. 156: Cylindrical seal BM 134770. © The Trustees of the British Museum, reproduced here with their kind permission.

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English abstract

The present thesis examines the earliest written sources relating to literary authorship. The oldest known works of literature were composed anonymously, so the thesis studies why, when, and how ancient readers first became interested in the human figure behind the text. Authorship made its first appearance in the cuneiform cultures of ancient Iraq, so the thesis is primarily focused on those cultures, but it also explores parallels to and differences from a range of other historical contexts. Overall, the thesis seeks to bridge the divide between the philological discipline of Assyriology and the theoretical field of Comparative Literature. The argument is divided into two parts: the first is methodological, discussing how authorship is depicted in the ancient world and how it should be studied; the second is historical, examining the social, linguistic, and political circumstances that led to the emergence of literary authorship.

Following the lead of Barbara Graziosi and Alexander Beecroft, the first part of the thesis argues that authorship in the ancient world should be studied as a cultural narrative rather than as a historical reality, since the actual biographies of ancient authors are often unavailable anyway. If we instead examine the stories that are told about authors, significant patterns and recurrent tropes emerge, and these can help us understand how literature was conceptualized by ancient audiences. Chaps. 3 through 7 examine various aspects of the narratives of authorship told in cuneiform sources. Ancient authors are often depicted not as original creators but as medial transmitters,
relaying and reshaping texts received from elsewhere; they are often shown collaborating with a broader literary community, whose intervention is necessary for the authors to become authors in the first place; and they are often associated with gods and kings, which elevates the status of their texts.

The second part of the thesis examines three historical periods during which authorship became especially important in the otherwise anonymous literary cultures of ancient Iraq: the Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Hellenistic periods. In each case, the emergence of authors coincided with the death of a language and the gradual disappearance of its literary culture. My hypothesis is that the figure of the author became important as a way of representing an endangered literary tradition. The author could stand in for a broader, abstract cultural system, compressing it into the tangible form of a single person. Chaps. 8 through 11 consider each period in turn, finding that narratives of authorship are repeatedly used by scribes and scholars to depict the cuneiform literary corpus as their personal possession and heritage.

The main contribution of the thesis lies in its account of how and why the figure of the author first became important. Today, authors are a ubiquitous feature of literary culture, but the thesis demonstrates that this was not always the case: rather, the importance of authorship is the result of specific historical developments whose roots are buried in the distant past. Further, the thesis provides researchers with new methodological tools to study the history of authorship, including a focus on the tropes of mediation, on the concatenation of events in authorial claims, and on the authorial figure as the shared creation of a broader community. Finally, the thesis has sought to bring greater fame to the figure of Enheduana, the first known author in the history of world literature. Enheduana has been largely neglected in literary history, but she deserves a far more prominent position in the all too male- and Western-dominated history of authorship, so the thesis repeatedly emphasizes the importance of her works.

Inspireret af Barbara Graziosi og Alexander Beecroft argumenterer første del af afhandlingen for at oldtidens forfatterbegreb primært skal behandles som et kulturelt narrativ, snarere end en historisk virkelighed, idet forfatternes faktiske liv alligevel ofte vil være utilgængelige for moderne forskere. Hvis man i stedet undersøger de historier der blev fortalt om forfattere, vil man som regel finde frem til betydningsfulde mønstre og genvendende troper der kan hjælpe os med at forstå hvordan litteratur blev opfattet af oldtidens læsere. Kapitel 3 til 7 undersøger forskellige aspekter af de forfatternarrativer der fortælles i kleskriftskilder. Her bliver forfattere ofte afbildet ikke som originale genier, men som gendigtere der omskaber fortællinger de selv har modtaget.
andetsteds fra; de bliver ofte skildret i samarbejdet med et større litterært fællesskab som er med til at gøre forfatterne til forfattere i en egentlig forstand; og de bliver ofte sidestillet med guder og konger, hvilket øger deres værkers prestige.


Afhandlingens mest betydningsfulde bidrag er en redegørelse for hvordan og hvorfor forfatterbegrebet blev opfundet. I dag er forfattere et allestedsnærværende aspekt af den litterære kultur, men afhandlingen viser at det ikke altid har været tilfældet: tværtimod blev forfattere kun vigtige som et resultat af nogle specifikke historiske udviklinger hvis oprindelse er begravet i den fjerne fortid. Derudover præsenterer afhandlingen nye redskaber til at undersøge forfatterbegrebets historie, herunder en øget opmærksomhed på tekstlig mediering, på sammenkædningen af begivenheder i forfatternarrativer og på medskabelsen af forfatterfiguren i et større litterært fælleskab.

History makes the present strange. The conventions that structure our world, which it is almost impossible not to take for granted, can often be shown by historical analysis to be the products of long-gone circumstances and coincidences. Studying the origins of the norms by which we live our lives often reveals that these norms are not the natural common-sense premises we take them to be, but contingent results of past historical situations that have themselves faded from view, leaving only the institutions they inadvertently created. Take authorship. Today, authors are ubiquitous in the literary field. Books are sorted by their authors’ name, authors receive prizes and give interviews, and the name of authors can serve as metonyms for whole genres and styles, so that a text can be said to be “Shakespearean” without having been written by Shakespeare. It is easy to treat the importance of authors as a natural given. After all,

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1 Introductions to the study of literary authorship can be found in Bennett, *The Author*; Burke, *Authorship*; and Berensmeyer, Buelens, and Demoor, *Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*. 
authors are the human beings with whom books are most closely connected; why shouldn't they be afforded special prominence in relation to those books? But once again, history makes the present strange, showing that the literary field could easily have been organized differently. The oldest known literary texts, including poems from China, Egypt, and the cultures of ancient Iraq, are entirely anonymous. Authorship appears as a later historical development, often in the form of pseudepigraphic names retroactively projected onto originally anonymous works. This thesis focuses on the earliest known attestations of literary authorship, those from ancient Iraq, to investigate when, why, and how the transition from anonymity to authorship first took place. In short, the thesis asks how ancient readers first became interested in the person behind the text.

That cuneiform cultures—by which I mean the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures\(^a\)—should be the source of the earliest attestations of literary authorship does not mean that authorship was widespread in those cultures. On the contrary, the vast majority of cuneiform works are anonymous; authorship is the rare exception rather than the rule in ancient Iraq. In analyzing cuneiform authorship, I focus on a phenomenon that was not representative of those cultures in general, but an incipient, emergent idea whose outsize importance to the literary field only became apparent at a much later date.

In cuneiform cultures, authorship became important only at specific points in time and under specific historical circumstances, which I describe in detail in the second part of the thesis. Briefly told, I argue that authorship rose to prominence during times of cultural crisis, when the survival of Sumerian, Assyrian, or Babylonian literature, their relation to other cultures, and their institutional affiliation was cast into doubt. During the 1730’s BCE, the scribes in the city of Nippur were afflicted by a series of political convulsions in southern Babylonia. That is when the first known author, Enheduana, made her appearance in the historical record (by contrast, the first preserved mentions

\(^a\) For this use of the term "cuneiform culture," see Radner and Robson, “Introduction,” xxvii.
of Homer date to the 6th century BCE). Likewise, during the 8th to 7th century BCE, the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire dramatically transformed the status of Assyrian scholars, who had to define their identity in relation to a newly Aramaic-speaking population. That is when the most important cuneiform document relating to authorship, *The Catalogue of Texts and Authors*, was written. And during the 2nd century BCE, the last guardians of the cuneiform tradition tried to avert the complete obliteration of their culture, and that is when cuneiform authorship was most succinctly expressed, in a text known as *The Uruk List of Kings and Sages* (no. 5.1 in the appendix). In short, when an endangered cultural system had to be radically redefined, authors served as an effective way of embodying and organizing that culture, compressing it into a tangible figure.

In short, the thesis examines *the narratives of authorship told in Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures*. As I explain in chap. 3, the expression “narratives of authorship” refers to authorship understood as a culturally determined account of how texts come into being, rather than the historical fact of who wrote a given text. For example, the thesis does not examine how and by whom *Gilgamesh* was actually composed according to the criteria of positivist historiography, but it does study when the epic was attributed to Šin-leqi-unnenni, how that attribution was expressed, and why it became significant during the Neo-Assyrian period. It may be that Šin-leqi-unnenni was merely a pseudepigraphic invention, but that does not make his authorship any less significant as a cultural phenomenon. In other words, I understand authorship as an origin story told about a given text that may or may not match historical reality but which is always shaped by its cultural context.

In examining narratives of authorship from ancient Iraq, the thesis is guided by two main goals, a methodological and a historical one. The methodological goal is to develop approaches to authorship that are applicable to ancient and/or non-Western cultures. This is the focus of the first part of the thesis, where I introduce the notion of

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“narratives of authorship” and examine features of those narratives that are particularly widespread in the premodern world. I examine the depiction of authors as medial transmitters of works received from elsewhere (for example, as the recipients of a divine dream that they relay to a human audience). I also argue that the creation of authorial narratives often requires the participation of a broader literary community, so that even individual authorship becomes a collective endeavor. While these arguments are based on a close reading of cuneiform sources, I show that they are also applicable to a range of other cultural contexts.

The historical goal, which is the focus of the second part of the thesis, is to analyze the historical circumstances that led to the emergence of the authorial figure in the otherwise anonymous cultures of ancient Iraq. As noted above, cuneiform cultures witnessed three relatively short periods of interest in literary authorship, periods marked by social and political crises that affected the status of the scribes whose social standing was dependent on the prestige associated with Sumerian and Akkadian literature. The figure of the author is thus a prism through which one can analyze a series of historical turning points that redefined the role of cuneiform scholars.

Key sources and previous research

As noted above, cuneiform sources pertaining to authorship are relatively rare; they are exceptions in an otherwise anonymous cluster of cultures. Of these few sources, two are particularly important: The Exaltation of Inana and The Catalogue of Texts and Authors, referred to below as the Exaltation and the Catalogue.

The Exaltation is a hymn to the goddess Inana attributed to the Old Akkadian princess and high priestess Enheduana (23rd century BCE). The attribution makes her the first known author in the history of world literature, and what is more, the epilogue of the Exaltation describes how the poem itself was composed—that is, how Enheduana became an author (the passage is included as text no. 1.1 in the appendix).
The *Exaltation* thus constitutes a supremely important source in the early history of authorship, but its significance has been largely occluded by the controversy that has surrounded Enheduana for the past forty years (a controversy I return on p. 52–53 below). Enheduana was undoubtedly a real historical person; she was the daughter of king Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 BCE) and the high priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur. A central claim of the thesis is that authorial attributions deserve to be studied regardless of their veracity. The depiction of Enheduana’s authorship in the *Exaltation* and the significance this poem achieved in the 1730’s BCE have much to tell us about the literary culture of ancient Iraq regardless of whether Enheduana composed the poem herself (I expand on this argument in chap. 3).

The *Catalogue* is a much later text than the *Exaltation*. It is known from three manuscripts found in the royal library in the Neo-Assyrian capital of Nineveh, dating to the 7th century BCE (it appears as text no. 2.1 in the appendix). But whereas Enheduana was an isolated figure, the *Catalogue* is a comprehensive and systematic account of Sumerian and Akkadian authorship, listing a range of literary and scholarly works, including major compositions such as *Gilgamesh*, *Erra*, *Etana*, *The Babylonian Theodicy*, *Enuma Anu Enlil*, *Sagig*, and *Alamdimmû*, and attributing each of them to a named author. The *Catalogue* is significant because it attests to a widespread interest in authorship during the Neo-Assyrian period, and because it gives us a broader sense of what kind of figures the ancient scholars would have regarded as authors, and which kind of texts they would have attributed to them.

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5 See the references collected on p. 52 below.
The present thesis is the first book-length study of authorship in the cuneiform world. In general, the scholarly consensus has been that the cultures of ancient Iraq were entirely anonymous, and that the few authorial attributions that defy this rule are spurious and unreliable and therefore not worth studying.\(^6\) While this overall picture is not wrong, over the following chapters I show that the authorial attributions found in Sumerian and Akkadian sources, while indeed rare and generally unreliable, also have much to tell us about the literary culture of the ancient world. Authorship may not have been widespread in ancient Iraq, but that does not make it any less important as an object of study: exceptions are often as illustrative as the rules they confirm.

Despite this general skepticism, a number of Assyriological studies of authorship have appeared.\(^7\) Wilfred G. Lambert noted the connection between cuneiform authors and mythical ancestors in 1957, and he published an edition of the *Catalogue* in 1962.\(^8\) Another watershed publication came later that year, when Jan van Dijk published the *Uruk List*.\(^9\) Since then, discussions of cuneiform authorship have taken the form of either overview articles or brief discussions in connection with a broader argument. Among the overview articles, those by Benjamin R. Foster are especially noteworthy; he focuses on Akkadian literary texts that include a self-referential account of how they came into being, sometimes giving the name of the author.\(^10\) Also significant but more

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\(^8\) Lambert, “Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity”; Lambert, “Catalogue of Texts and Authors.”

\(^9\) van Dijk, “Inscribenfundie.”

varied in their treatment are the overview articles by Jean-Jacques Glassner. Other scholars have approached authorship from various perspectives. Piotr Michalowski takes a formalist approach, discussing the relation between the names of authors, the semiotics of power, the role of narrators, and the demographic developments of the first millennium BCE. Paul-Alain Beaulieu argues that attributing texts to authors depicted as incantation priests (āšipu's) was part of a general shift during the first millennium BCE that invested those figures with greater cultural authority. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum and Klaus Wagensonner view authorial attributions as one among several strategies that ancient scholars used to lend authority and legitimacy to a given text.

Marc van de Mieroop argues that in cuneiform cultures, what Michel Foucault terms “the author function” was not concentrated in a single figure but distributed among the composer, copyist, and owner of the text. Finally, the authorship of “scientific” or scholarly texts, especially the medical compendia and the author Esagil-kin-apli, has attracted a remarkable degree of attention, with prominent studies published by Nils Heeßel, Irving Finkel, Mark Geller, and Ulrike Steinert.

The thesis compiles, summarizes, and combines these arguments to give a rounded presentation of cuneiform authorship. In so doing, I draw upon the methodological approach to authorship developed by Barbara Graziosi and Alexander Beecroft in their studies of early Greek and Chinese poetry. I present this approach in more detail in chap. 3, but in a nutshell, Graziosi and Beecroft invite us to treat ancient accounts of...
authorship as a reflection of the underlying cultural assumptions that determined how ancient readers approached literary texts—what Beecroft calls the “implied poetics” of the audience.\(^8\) To take an example from my own argument, the depiction of cuneiform authors as weavers of threads reflects a specific understanding of textuality: texts were seen as composite entities, made up of preexisting parts that were brought together into novel arrangements (see chap. 5). I find the methodology proposed by Graziosi and Beecroft particularly useful because it relies on a combination of (1) philological attentiveness to the textual structure and historical context of the ancient sources and (2) the analytical and interpretative perspectives of contemporary cultural criticism. It is my hope that this combination will allow me to bridge the divide between the specialized field of Assyriological philology and the broader discipline of Comparative Literature.

The main theoretical reference points of the thesis are the seminal articles on authorship by Foucault and Roland Barthes that effectively founded the modern discipline of author theory in the late 1960’s.\(^9\) (Note that throughout the thesis, I refer to the English version of Barthes’s essay, which appeared a year before the French one.\(^{20}\)) Both articles have proven influential and controversial, and a number of scholars have questioned their applicability to literary history.\(^{21}\) However, I find that Barthes’s and Foucault’s essays remain excellent points of departure for understanding the cultural dynamics of authorship, even and especially when I disagree with them. The two most theoretically oriented chapters of the thesis, chaps. 4 and 6, summarize and engage with the arguments of Foucault and Barthes in closer detail. In chap. 4, I present a philologically based answer to Foucault’s question, “What is an author?”, to argue that

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\(^{9}\) Barthes, “Death of the Author”; Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?”


\(^{21}\) See e.g. Burke, *Death and Return of the Author*; Dobranski, “Authorship in the Seventeenth Century”; Greene, “What Happened to Medievalists.”
analyses of premodern accounts of authorship should be based on a notion of literary agency as a non-binary encounter with preexisting textual structures. In chap. 6, I juxtapose Barthes's claims about the “death of the author” with the scene of authorial birth depicted in the *Exaltation*, which leads me to argue that Barthes's notion of textuality as fundamentally impersonal—and thus as a force that obliterates the personal presence of authors in their texts—neglects the possibility that the literary collective in which texts circulate can continuously recreate the authorial persona, thereby re-establishing their textual presence.

**Definitions and delimitations**

The present thesis sets out to study “narratives of authorship in cuneiform cultures,” but each of those terms requires some clarification. By “cuneiform cultures,” I mean a set of cultures whose primary writing system was the cuneiform script: the Sumerian culture, whose main language was Sumerian, and the Babylonian and Assyrian cultures, whose main language was Akkadian. (I will give a more detailed introduction to these languages and their writing system in chap. 2.) This cultural cluster is also sometimes called “Mesopotamia,” but that term has a surprisingly complicated and contentious history. More importantly, the term “cuneiform cultures” is preferable because it allows one to refer to these “cultures” in the plural: even though they were closely linked, Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures were never just one entity. Further, the term “cuneiform cultures” makes clear that, as modern historians, our access to these cultures is shaped by the medium of writing: we see the ancient world through written sources, and therefore inevitably privilege the tiny subset of the ancient

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population that produced and had access to those sources. For all we know, a horde of intriguing narratives of authorship could have circulated orally among the non-literate population of ancient Iraq but be lost to us today.

I have chosen to focus on Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian culture because they evince the earliest known sources related to authorship, and because they are, despite their differences, closely entangled with one another. A parallel transition from anonymity to authorship also occurred in Egyptian, Hebrew, and arguably in Hittite and Ugaritic literature, but these were entirely separate developments, occurring in different social contexts and yielding different discursive effects. By contrast, in the interlinked world of Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian culture, authorial accounts are found in similar historical situations and employ similar tropes and narrative structures, and it is therefore reasonable to study these cultures as a composite entity. However, that does not mean that I am myopically focused on cuneiform literature. Throughout the thesis, I explore parallel cases and revealing contrasts from throughout the premodern world, including ancient Greece, Rome, and China, and Medieval France, Germany, England, Italy, Iran, India, and Georgia.

So much for “cuneiform cultures”; what of “narratives of authorship”? As I noted above and explain at length in chap. 3, the thesis deals not with the factual question of which person or persons composed cuneiform works of literature, but rather with the cultural imaginary, biographical legends, and discursive structures that surrounded the figure of the author in the cuneiform world. For example, as I note repeatedly in the articles that make up the thesis, I am not interested in whether the historical Enheduana composed the Exaltation, but in how authorship is depicted in the poem itself and why it gained such prominence in the Old Babylonian school system.


See, respectively, Loprieno, “Authorship in Ancient Egypt”; Wyrick, Ascension of Authorship; Singer, Hittite Prayers, 13–14; Wyatt, “Evidence of the Colophons.”
But if a “narrative of authorship” is a narrative about authors, what then is an “author”? No less than half the thesis is dedicated to answering that question, or at least answering it in a way that is sensitive to my object of study: I spend most of chaps. 3 through 7 building up a definition of authorship that is applicable to cuneiform cultures in particular and premodern literature in general. Chap. 4, entitled “What is an author? Old answers to a new question,” was rather serendipitously published on the fiftieth anniversary of Michel Foucault’s “Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?”[^25] and it is striking that even after five decades of scholarship, the question of what an author is remains so bogglingly bothersome. But despite these caveats, a brief answer would be:

An author is a person who is culturally perceived as responsible for creating the final form of a given text, especially a literary or scholarly text.

A definition of authorship designed to fit the modern literary field would probably emphasize not the finished form of texts, but the initial spark of originality that sets the author’s artistic intervention apart from other agents of literary production, such as editors or translators. But as I argue in chap. 4, if one takes a wider historical perspective, authors are most commonly depicted as transmitting, reshaping, and authorizing a text received from elsewhere: Homer repeats the song of the Muse, Dante claims to weave anew the words of his predecessors, Romantic poets channel the force of inspiration, and so on. Historically speaking, it is therefore more appropriate to say that authors are defined by finalizing a specific version of a text, not by summoning it out of thin air.

However, a wider historical perspective also reveals much variation between periods and cultures: an action that defines authorship in one context does not necessarily do so in another. To be an author, one must be perceived as such according to the cultural logic in which one operates. Crucially, different cultures view the “final form” of a given

[^25]: Foucault's paper was published in August 1969, mine in June 2019. I must add that the title was not my idea; it was suggested to me by the journal editor Marshall Brown. I already thank Marshall in the acknowledgments and will do so again in chap. 4, but really, I cannot thank him enough, so this seems like a good occasion to do so again.
text differently. Beecroft emphasizes that in ancient Greece and China, there is a significant overlap between authors and singers.²⁶ Not so in cuneiform cultures, where they are treated as sharply distinct: first, a named author composes a text; later, an anonymous singer performs it.²⁷ In cuneiform cultures, the “final form” of the text was a sequence of words composed by authors that the singers merely delivered, while in archaic Greece, the text found its “final form” only in the moment of performance, which might include a significant degree of variation and improvisation.²⁸ But crucially, in both cases the author is the person who shapes the text into the form in which the audience will receive it.

There are two final words in the definition I want to clarify: “person” and “text.” As for “person,” the present thesis deals only with human or partly human authors—a specification that, while perhaps odd today, is necessary in a culture where works of literature were regularly attributed to gods, especially to Ea, the god of wisdom and creativity.²⁹ Divine authorship is a fascinating topic in itself and certainly deserves further study, but that study will have to be carried out elsewhere. Here, I limit myself to human authorship for two reasons. First, if one includes ritual incantations and the like, divine authorship becomes a sizeable topic, one that cannot be accommodated in the constraints of this thesis. Second, what interests me most about the invention of authorship is the creation of a specific kind of individual: a special role in the literary field, a special identity and subject position. I am interested in the historical process whereby texts came to be attributed to a single and somehow singular individual. The inclusion of gods, who always hold a special position and a singular role in the universe,

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²⁶ Beecroft, Authorship and Cultural Identity, 3, 16–17, and passim.
²⁷ See e.g. the Exaltation, where the text is first composed by Enheduana and then recited by a gala priest (no. 1.1, l. 138–40); or the epilogue to Erra, where the poem is first revealed to its author Kabti-ili-Marduk and later performed by a singer (no. 1.2, V 42–44 and 53–44).
²⁸ See e.g. Saussy, Ethnography of Rhythm, chap. 1.
²⁹ Notably, Ea is the first author listed in the Catalogue (no. 2.1, section 1, l. 1–4).
would therefore muddy the picture. However, I do include figures who were regarded as only partly human, especially the *apkallu's* or “sages”: primordial creatures that were part god, part human, and part fish (see p. 154–57 below).\(^{37}\)

Finally, the definition of authors cannot be separated from that of the objects they create, namely texts. Our notion of what a text is unavoidably shapes our notion of what an author is, and in chap. 5, I analyze the notion of textuality that emerges from cuneiform accounts of authorship. But here, I would like to deal with a different question: what *kind* of texts do authors create? As Foucault notes, one of the most important functions of the authorial figure is to differentiate between texts that have been “authored” and texts that have merely been “written.”\(^{39}\) Constructing the figure of the author inevitably involves establishing a difference between these two kinds of texts. To use Foucault's example, if one were to assemble the collected works of Nietzsche, one might well include his diary entries, but hardly his laundry bills. Likewise, writing just one book would make me an author, but writing a million tweets would not. But as Foucault also notes, the division is a modern convention, since different historical periods draw the line between “authors” and “writers” differently. So how was it drawn in cuneiform cultures? Giving a blanket answer to this question is not really possible, in part because the term “cuneiform cultures” spans such a large of number of different cultural contexts: a text might easily count as “authored” in the early second but not in the late first millennium BCE. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I had to establish a working definition of what texts would be included. In doing so, I have primarily been guided by the selection of the *Catalogue*, as it is the most comprehensive cuneiform document relating to authorship. All texts that appear in the *Catalogue* have been counted as “authored,” but I have also included texts that are similar to those of the *Catalogue*, especially hymns. For example, Bel-remanni’s brief

\(^{37}\) Admittedly, the list of authors in the *Catalogue* also includes a horse, but the passage is too fragmentary to allow for analysis (no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 20’).

\(^{39}\) Foucault, “Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?,” 79.
bilingual hymn to the god Nergal (text no. 1.4 in the appendix), is not included in the Catalogue as preserved. But the Catalogue does list another brief bilingual hymn to Nergal (section 4, l. 3’), so it is reasonable to assume that the former was also perceived as “authored.”

Further, following the Catalogue leads me to include texts that today would be seen not as literary but scholarly, religious, or scientific, including medical compositions, omen compendia, ritual incantations, and ritual laments.32 For example, the Catalogue includes the medical series Sagig, meaning that it could be seen as “authored” in the same sense as an epic or a hymn (no. 2.1, section 1, l. 2). Today, we would treat Sagig as science and Gilgamesh as literature, but the distinction might not have been meaningful to the ancient scribes. Indeed, the term “literature” only crystallized into its present form relatively recently. Writing in 1826, the essayist William Hazlitt mentions Isaac Newton and John Locke as “the two greatest names in English literature,”33 though neither would be treated as a literary figure today. Beecroft notes that the Chinese word wenxue (文學) underwent a similar shift in the 19th century, as it went from denoting a broader discursive field that included historical and philosophical writing to denoting only “literature” as we understand it now.34 The closest cuneiform equivalent to such a term might be ṭupšarrūtu, “the corpus of the scribe,” though the conceptual boundaries of that term are never made explicit. A similar ambiguity is found in the Poetics, where Aristotle explicitly includes Homer, Sophron, and Socrates in the same category, though the first authored epic poetry, the second satiric prose, and the third philosophical dialogues (1447b).35 While the present thesis is in principle a study of literary history, it

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32 On the applicability of the term “science” to cuneiform scholarship, see Rochberg, Heavenly Writing.
33 Hazlitt, Selected Essays, 523.
34 Beecroft, Ecology of World Literature, 203–5.
must be accepted that the “literary” was a different category in the ancient world than it is today.

However, even as the discursive field outlined in the Catalogue does include medical and divinatory texts, there are also a number of genres it leaves out. Texts that do not appear in the Catalogue include historical chronicles, state treaties, administrative texts, contracts, astrological diaries, satirical and comedic texts, technical recipes, and, perhaps most surprisingly, royal inscriptions and letters. The last two are important because they are, in many other senses of the word, “literary”: both genres frequently employ poetic language and intertextual allusions, and exemplars of both are included in the anthology of Akkadian literature compiled by Foster. But crucially, neither royal inscriptions nor letters appear in the Catalogue, so I have not included them in my study either. It would seem that, however flowery their prose, the ancient scholars who compiled the Catalogue did not view these genres as “authored.” The thesis is therefore limited to the study of narrative and epic poetry, hymns, debates, proverb collections, medical compositions, omen compendia (including hemerologies), ritual incantations, and ritual laments.

**Conventions and overview**

To summarize, the thesis investigates Sumerian and Akkadian sources that pertain to the creation of literary or scholarly texts by a specifically identified human or semi-human person, regardless of the historical accuracy of those sources. As noted above, this investigation falls in two parts. The first introduces the concept of “narratives of authorship” and examines how those narratives were told in the premodern world; the

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36 Foster, *Before the Muses.*

37 For the authorship of royal inscriptions, see the references collected in Frahm, “Keeping Company with Men of Learning,” 521–22.
second turns to the historical contexts in which those narratives circulated and the reasons they became culturally significant.

Chap. 2 gives a (necessarily very brief) introduction to the world of cuneiform cultures. Chap. 3 presents the thesis’s overall approach to authorship and its focus on authorship as a cultural narrative. Chap. 4 focuses on one recurring aspect of that narrative, namely the depiction of authors as textual mediators, so as to clarify what is meant by the term “author.” Chap. 5 applies the results of that analysis to cuneiform cultures, examining recurrent tropes in Sumerian and Akkadian authorial accounts, as well as the notions of textuality implicit in them. Chap. 6 zooms in on one particular narrative of authorship, the *Exaltation*, arguing that it depicts authorship as a collaboration between authors and a broader community. Chap. 7 builds on that argument to examine how authors are juxtaposed with two important sets of figures: gods and kings.

Chap. 8 then introduces the second part of the thesis, turning the focus from the structure of authorial narratives to their historical context. I argue that in the cuneiform world, narratives of authorship are repeatedly associated with moments of cultural crisis, language death, and intensive cross-cultural contact: the invention of authors was part of the scholars’ response to those developments. The following chapters examine three key instances of that dynamic. Chap. 9 studies how the figure of Enheduana circulated in the school curriculum of the Old Babylonian period, especially in Nippur in the 1730’s BCE. Chap. 10 analyzes the Neo-Assyrian corpus of sources pertaining to authorship and how they relate to issues of professional identity and cultural heritage. Chap. 11 zooms in on the *Uruk List*, examining its selection of authors in the context of late Seleucid Uruk. In the conclusion, chap. 12, I present a summary of the thesis and suggestions for further study.

The thesis also includes an appendix, which presents a commented transliteration and translation of selected cuneiform texts relating to authorship. In the chapters that have not previously appeared as articles (chap. 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 12), cuneiform sources
are presented in translation along with a reference to the transliteration provided in the appendix. For example, the siglum “no. 5.2, l. 2” refers to line 2 of the second text in the fifth section of the appendix. An overview of the texts included in the appendix and their respective sigla can be found on p. 271.

Following Assyriological convention, the transliteration of Akkadian is given in italics and that of Sumerian in plain typeface. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Reversely, unless otherwise noted, all transliterations follow that of the cited text edition. Sumerology employs a number of competing conventions for the transliteration of cuneiform; I have followed the readings of the “Leipzig-Münchner Sumerische Zettelkasten.”

Non-philological readers should be aware that some names can be rendered differently depending on how one interprets the phonemics of cuneiform writing: Enheduana, Enheduanna, and En-ḫedu-Ana; Inana, Inanna, and Innana; Nisaba and Nidaba; Ashurbanipal and Assurbanipal; Enmekar and Enmerkar; Kabti-ili-Marduk and Kabti-ilani-Marduk; Šîn-leqi-unnenni and Šîn-leqe-unnini (or several variations thereof); Bulussa-rabi and Bullutsa-rabi, Berossus and Berossos. Either way, the spellings refer to the same person. The titles of compositions and the names of persons are given in Anglicized format (that is, Gilgamesh rather than Gilgâmeš, Šîn-leqi-unnenni rather than Šîn-lēqi-unnennî), but key emic terms are presented in normalized transcription (like āšipu, “incantation priest”). However, these conventions could not be followed consistently in the chapters that were published as articles, as they had to abide by the style guides of the respective journals. Finally, note that I follow the Middle Chronology, and that the regnal years accompanying the names of king refer to the chronological tables provided by van de Mieroop.

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38 Available at: https://www.assyriologie.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/sumglossar/zettelkasten2006-99.pdf

Chapter Two

The cuneiform world

Cuneiform writing was invented in the city of Uruk, in what is now southern Iraq, around the middle of the fourth millennium BCE.¹ It is the earliest known writing system and it was used continuously for more than three millennia, up to the first centuries CE. It was presumably invented by a Sumerian-speaking people, but it was eventually adapted to represent a large number of other languages as well: Akkadian, Eblaite, Amorite, Hittite, Hurrian, Luwian, Elamite, Urartean, and, in modified form, Ugaritic and Old Persian.² Cuneiform was primarily written on tablets made of clay, a material that—unlike papyrus, parchment, or paper—does not easily decay with time,

¹ Useful overviews of the history of ancient Iraq include van de Mieroop, History of the Ancient Near East; Foster and Foster, Civilizations of Ancient Iraq; and Radner and Robson, Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture. The standard anthologies of Sumerian and Akkadian literature are, respectively, Black et al., Literature of Ancient Sumer; and Foster, Before the Muses.

though it is prone to breaking. As a result, more than half a million cuneiform sources have been excavated, but the vast majority of them are fragmentary. The study of these sources, their languages, cultural context, and historical background is known as Assyriology.

Cuneiform was primarily written by pressing a reed stylus into wet clay, yielding a sequence of wedge-shaped impressions. There are a little under 1,000 different recorded cuneiform signs, but of these, only around 600 were commonly used. The most striking feature of the cuneiform writing system is its polysemy. Each sign carried many different meanings, and each syllable could be represented by a number of different signs. For example, the sound /u/ could be written with the signs $u$, $u₂$, $u₃$, $u₄$, and so on, while the sign $u₄$ could also mean $ud$, $tam$, $pir$, $par$, $laḫ$, $ḫiš$, and so on. Further, the signs could also signify in different ways. A sign could represent a syllable, as in the examples above, or an entire word: the sign $u₄$ could also mean “when,” “white,” “Sun,” “day,” “monster,” and so on. The result is a vast semiotic system that may be complex and difficult, but which also offers endless possibilities for creative expression and for the interpretation of connotative chains.

The two main languages studied in the thesis are Sumerian and Akkadian. Sumerian is a linguistic isolate, meaning that it is unrelated to any other known language. During the third millennium, Sumerian came into close contact with Akkadian, as they were spoken in the same region and influenced each other. Akkadian is a Semitic language, related to languages such as Arabic and Hebrew. Towards the end of the third millennium—the precise date is contested—Sumerian died out as a spoken language, though it continued to be used in religious ceremonies and as a written language of scholarship and literature for the next two thousand years, much like Latin in post-Classical Europe. Meanwhile, Akkadian split into two dialects: Babylonian, spoken

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3 Ryholt and Barjamovic, 25; see also Streck, “Großes Fach Altorientalistik.”
4 Borger, Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon; Charpin, Reading and Writing, 8.
5 Michalowski, “Lives of the Sumerian Language.”
roughly to the south of where Baghdad lies today, and Assyrian, spoken in the north. As shown in table 1, the modern convention is to divide the history of the second and first millennium into periods based on which dialect of Akkadian was spoken at the time: Old, Middle, Neo-, and Late Babylonian or Assyrian. However, at any given time these dialects coexisted with a number of other languages, including Amorite, Kassite, and Aramaic. There was also a Standard Babylonian dialect that came into use during the Middle Babylonian period, which was not a spoken language but a literary idiom like Homeric Greek or High German, replete with rare expressions and archaizing forms.

Since the term “cuneiform cultures” covers more than three millennia of history, a geographical area ranging from Iran to Syria and Turkey to Bahrain, and a large variety of languages, demographic groups, and political institutions, one cannot give a general description of these cultures without being simplistic in the extreme. All the same, I want to highlight two recurring aspects of cuneiform cultures: the importance of cities and of human-divine communication.

The Sumerian and Babylonian cultures (and to a lesser extent, Assyrian culture) revolved around the city. Cities were the fundamental building blocks of civilization, the centers of human endeavor, and the residences of the gods. The earliest periods of cuneiform history were politically characterized by the prominence city states: independent political entities that each comprised an urban core and its immediate hinterland. The cities were bound together by a common language and pantheon but retained a strong sense of local identity, even when they were later subjugated under larger empires or regional states. Each city had its own deity and its own claim to importance: Eridu was thought to be the world’s oldest city, Nippur was the main religious center, Kish was seen as the source of royal power, Uruk boasted a history of legendary kings (including Gilgamesh), and so on. During the reign of king Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE), Babylon rose to political prominence, and the cultural imaginary that

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INTRODUCTION

The resulting book is not structured by periods (see Table 0.1 or places (Figures 0.1 and 0.2) but around seven themes: 'Materiality and literacies', 'Individuals and communities', 'Experts and novices', 'Decisions', 'Interpretations', 'Making knowledge', and 'Shaping tradition'. Each of these sections encompasses a brief introduction and five chapters. While these chapters cover three thousand years of cuneiform culture from the late fourth millennium to the 2nd century BC, The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture seeks to be exemplary rather than exhaustive, focusing on methodologies rather than on blanket coverage.

Several of the authors have used a deliber-

Figure 1. Map of the ancient Near East, showing the location of a selection of ancient sites. Reproduced from Radner and Robson, "Introduction," p. xxx.
### Table 1. Overview of cuneiform literary history. Dates are approximate and BCE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Literary History</th>
<th>Political and Demographic History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Assyrian empire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-911 BCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Babylonian empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>636-539 BCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Babylonian period</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>539-75 BCE</td>
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</tbody>
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**Dates (C.E.)**

- 3400–3000 BCE: First Dynasty of Ur (Ur III)
- 2000–1595 BCE: Early Dynastic period
- 2100–2000 BCE: Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr period
- 2350–2100 BCE: Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III)
- 2900–2350 BCE: Old Akkadian empire
- 3400–2900 BCE: Earliest large cities, state formation, complex social hierarchies, and professional specialization.
- 2900–2350 BCE: Invention of writing.

**Religious traditions of previous periods**

- The Assyrian empire collapses and is replaced by a Babylonian dynasty.
- Highly multiethnic society.

**Literature and scholarship centered and refined at the imperial court, especially at the Library of Nineveh**

- Literature and scholarship centered and refined at the Library of Nineveh.
- Akkadian becomes the regional lingua franca.

**Territorial states coalesce; Babylon gains central position.**

- A number of large states keep each other in check.

**Akkadian branches into two dialects.**

- Centralized, highly bureaucratic state based in Ur.

**Babylonia ruled by a succession of foreign empires: Persian, Seleucid, and Parthian.**

- Antiquarian fascination with the literature, script, and religious traditions of previous periods.

**Invention of writing.**

- Earliest known literature, e.g., *The Instructions of Shuruppak*.
surrounded the city was revised accordingly: its god Marduk, originally a minor, local agricultural deity, became the king of the gods. In short, the historical vicissitudes of the cities profoundly shaped the history of cuneiform culture. The cities that will be most important to my argument are the following (see fig. 1 for their location).

- **Nippur**, seat of Enlil and religious center of Sumerian culture during the third and early second millennium.
- **Ur**, seat of the moon god Nanna and capital of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Enheduana served as high priestess in Ur.
- **Uruk**, seat of the goddess Inana and the sky god An. Along with Babylon, Uruk was one of the last places to preserve the cuneiform tradition in the final centuries BCE.
- **Babylon**, seat of Marduk. During the second millennium, Babylon became the main cultural and political center of southern Iraq, leading to Marduk’s replacement of Enlil as king of the gods.
- **Nineveh**, capital of the Assyrian empire from c. 700 BCE onwards, home of the royal library collected by king Ashurbanipal, and the main center of learning and scholarship during the Neo-Assyrian period.

The second aspect of cuneiform cultures I want to highlight is the semiotic system that was used to communicate between gods and humans, as it is the foundation for much of the scholarship and literature I examine in the following chapters.

As noted above, each city had its own deity—Enlil resided in Nippur, Enki in Eridu, Inana and An in Uruk, Nanna in Ur, and so on—though of course each god could be worshipped by anyone anywhere.\(^8\) Taken together, the deities formed a pantheon where each god was associated with a set of different duties and domains. Enki, the god of the subterranean waters, was connected with creativity, wisdom, and magic; Utu, the all-seeing sun god, presided over justice and divination; while Inana was the goddess of

\(^8\) The classic study of religion in ancient Iraq is a chapter in Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pointedly entitled "Why a ‘Mesopotamian Religion’ Should Not Be Written."
sex, destruction, transformation, and paradox. As the Sumerian and Akkadian cultures came into close contact, their gods were eventually syncretized in a theological syncretism that resembles the *interpretation graeca* of the Classical world. The goddess called Inana in Sumerian was called Ishtar in Akkadian, Nanna was Sin, Utu was Shamash, An was Anu, Enki was Ea, and so on.

Crucially, much of cuneiform culture was dedicated to mediating between gods and humans. According to the epic *Atra-hasis*, gods and humans had once been able to communicate directly, but this was made impossible by the events leading up to the mythical Deluge—a cosmic flood that almost destroyed the entire human race. After the Flood, humans and gods could only communicate indirectly, using an elaborate system of codes and signs. Humans showed their reverence to the gods through regular offerings of food, drink, and perfumed smoke. The gods in turn announced their decisions through omens, which the humans had to interpret: to do so, the Babylonian scholars gathered enormous compendia of signs and their meaning. Finally, if the will of the gods was found to be adverse, the human priests could attempt to sway it by performing rituals, reciting magical incantations, singing laments that glorified the gods, and presenting yet more offerings.

If the delicate relation between gods and humans was brought out of balance, the results could be catastrophic, as exemplified by the story of the Flood. The scholars and priests therefore worked tirelessly to secure the goodwill of the gods, and the textual corpus they left behind reflects this pursuit. Cuneiform literature includes hymns that

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10 But as noted by Nicole Brisch, “Technical Terms,” “syncretism is in ancient Mesopotamia is still poorly understood and in need of more comprehensive studies.”

11 See e.g. Rochberg, “Canon and Power,” 222; Lenzi, “Mesopotamian Scholarship,” 145; Beaulieu, “Late Babylonian Intellectual Life,” 479.

12 For the text of the epic, see Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis*; with Shehata, *Annotierte Bibliographie*. Gösta Gabriel and Annette Zgoll are currently preparing a study of human-divine communication as it unfolds over the course of the poem.
The First Authors

exalt the power of the gods, epics that tell of the interactions between gods and men in days long past, collections of omens and their interpretation, instructions for how to perform apotropaic rituals, and so on. This focus on human-divine relations pervades even a genre like medicine, because diseases were thought to be caused by the gods revoking their protection from the patient.\(^3\) The physician thus had to both cure the physical symptoms of the disease and remedy its underlying cause, which meant restoring good relations between the patient and their personal deity. As Beaulieu puts it, “[t]he entire corpora and disciplines of the exorcist, lamentation singer, and diviner make perfect sense as a vast intellectual construction celebrating the absolute power of the gods, and alleviating human subjection to their unfathomable will.”\(^4\)

The world of the scribes

The notion of authorship first emerged from, and was therefore shaped by, a manuscript culture. As in all cultures before the invention of the printing press, literary and scholarly texts in ancient Iraq were for the most part produced by scribes copying other texts—either manuscripts they had before them, compositions they had memorized, or texts that were dictated to them.\(^5\) In manuscript cultures, the identity of the author was often not important except insofar as it guaranteed the authority, antiquity, and significance of a text. If a work of literature could be traced back to a notable historical figure, or better yet a divine source, that would prove it worth the time it took to copy, collate, and circulate the text.\(^6\) Otherwise, all that mattered was that the composition was copied accurately, so that it could be transmitted faithfully to the next scribe. As

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\(^3\) Heeßel, Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik, 47–60.

\(^4\) Beaulieu, “Late Babylonian Intellectual Life,” 479.


will become clear over the course of the thesis, when the scribes eventually did become interested in the person behind the text, the incipient concept of authorship bore the mark of the anonymous manuscript culture in which it developed. The scribes and scholars that produced and circulated the narratives of authorship created the figure of the author in their own image, and used that image to make sense of their position in society. Understanding the world of the scribes is therefore key to understanding the emergence of authorship.

In ancient Iraq, access to cuneiform writing was always limited.\(^7\) During the early second millennium BCE, a simplified and easily accessible form of cuneiform did exist, and so literacy may have been higher that in other periods. But especially during the first millennium BCE, when most written transactions took place in the far more straightforward Aramaic script, only a minute portion of the population would have been able to read and write cuneiform. The world of the scribes was therefore never representative of the ancient world in general, nor was it meant to be. Cuneiform literacy gave the scribes special privileges, and they jealously guarded access to those privileges. However, the social standing of most scribes was also dependent on the king for whom they worked, meaning that their elite status was always precarious. Even scholars serving at the highest levels of the Neo-Assyrian empires complained of being underpaid and living in squalid conditions.\(^8\) Though such laments may have been nothing but rhetorical hyperbole, they still illustrate how completely dependent the scribes were on the goodwill of the king. As a result, the scribes occupied a rather unique position in ancient societies. They could read, write, and calculate, and were therefore essential to the administration of the state and the temples; their education bestowed a cultural capital on them that was inaccessible to any other member of society; they

\(^7\) Veldhuis, “Levels of Literacy”; Lion, “Literacy and Gender”; Michalowski, “Literacy, Schooling.”

\(^8\) See e.g. Luukko and van Buylaere, Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon (SAA 16), no. 89; or Parpola, Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars (SAA 10), no. 294.
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had a strong sense of self-importance; but they were also fully dependent on larger social forces, especially royal favor.

The world of the scribes is best understood through their relation to the four institutions that shaped their life: the family, the school, the temples, and the palace. One can think of them as four “houses,” since their names in Sumerian all begin with the sign $e_{2}$, “house”: the family was the house of one’s father, the school was the “house of tablets,” the temple was the house of the god, and the palace was the “big house” ($e_{2}$-gal). The interrelations between these institutions and the way they affected the self-perception of the scribes will be a central topic in the second part of the thesis. But to put it briefly, scribes often came from families of scribes, they became scribes themselves by attending school, and they found employment either as priests at the temples, in the state administration, or as ritual practitioners at court: in short, their path through life took them from one “house” to the next. Since the institutions shaped the scribes’ social world, they also determined how the sources produced by the scribes were transmitted. The majority of cuneiform texts that survive today originate from one of these four contexts: tablets copied by school students and tablets deposited in the archives of a scribal family, a temple, the state administration, or a royal library.¹⁹

The school was a particularly important institution, but perhaps also the most vaguely defined of the four “houses.” During the Old Babylonian period, schools were known as edubba’a (Sumerian for “house of tablets,” or perhaps, “house where tablets are distributed”). In literary sources they are depicted—often in humorous accounts of the miseries of school life—as a physical building where children would gather for education, just as we think of a “school” today. But this depiction may not be entirely

¹⁹ The distinction between “state archive” and “royal library” and even the personal tablet collection of the king is debated. See e.g. Lieberman, “Canonical and Official”; Veenhof, “Cuneiform Archives,” 4; Pedersén, Archives and Libraries, 2–4; Potts, “Before Alexandria,” 22–23; and the papers collected in Ryholt and Barjamovic, Libraries before Alexandria, 2019.

²⁰ Volk, “Edubba’a und Edubba’a-Literatur,” 2–5.

²¹ Volk, “Edubba’a und Edubba’a-Literatur.”
accurate.\textsuperscript{22} It is possible that most education took place privately in the family home, and that the “school” was not a single institution but a set of practices, curricula, and transmitted ideals that shaped the education of the scribes.\textsuperscript{23}

During the first millennium BCE, cuneiform scholars were generally divided into five main categories of expertise: incantation priests, lamentation priests, divination priests, astrologers, and physicians.\textsuperscript{24} Of these, the first three are the most commonly associated with authorship, and they will appear time and again in the thesis.

- The divination priests or bārū’s specialized in the interpretation of omens, particularly those that appeared in the entrails of sacrificed animals.
- The lamentation priests or kalū’s were tasked with soothing the gods if the omens revealed them to be angry, and did so by reciting ritual laments that extolled their power. Since the laments had to be performed at specific times in the lunar calendar, the scope of the kalū’s also came to encompass the complex mathematical astronomy needed to predict when a given celestial phenomenon would occur. The kalū’s had their roots in the third millennium, when they were known in Sumerian as gala’s. Because the laments were performed in Emesal, a dialect of Sumerian that was otherwise reserved for women, it has been argued that the gala’s, who are depicted as male in most other contexts, belonged to a third gender of sorts. This may have been so for the gala’s of the third and even early second millennium, but it is unlikely to be the case for the kalū priests of the first millennium.\textsuperscript{25}
- The incantation priests or āšipu’s, also known as mašmaššu’s and also translated “exorcists,” were the true polymaths of the cuneiform world.\textsuperscript{26} Whereas the rituals of the kalū’s were meant to avert divine anger in general, the incantation priests mostly

\textsuperscript{22} Robson, “Tablet House,” 39.
\textsuperscript{24} Parpola, Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars, xiii–xiv.
\textsuperscript{25} Gabbay, “Akkadian Word for Third Gender”; Peled, Masculinities and Third Gender, chap. 2; Helle, “Only in Dress?”
\textsuperscript{26} Beaulieu, “Social and Intellectual Setting,” 10.
performed rituals centered around a single person (especially the king), using rituals, offerings, and incantations to restore good relations between their client and the gods. Because both physical diseases and mental illnesses were thought to be the result of divine displeasure, the incantation priests also specialized in medical and psychological diagnoses. Finally, they were tasked with interpreting those omens that did not fall under the purview of the bārû’s or the astrologers, including the vast compilation of terrestrial omens known as Shumma Alu.

All five types of scholars could find employment at court, and sometimes a scholar would specialize in more than one of these disciplines. Finally, expert scribes could rise to the position of “chief scholar,” or ummānu. The title ummānu generally designates an expert in any given profession, but when applied to scribes, it is generally taken to mean a scholar who held a prominent position at court, perhaps even serving as direct advisor to the king—or, in the words of Eckart Frahm, “chief ideologue.”

Cuneiform literature

It remains unclear how ancient cuneiform scribes themselves categorized their literary tradition, but for the sake of convenience, modern scholars divide cuneiform literature into a set of broadly defined genres—though these divisions are rarely if ever consistent. But, mutatis mutandis, the most important genres of cuneiform literature are generally thought to be: narrative poetry, hymns, dialogues and debates, personal

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27 Lenzi, “Mesopotamian Scholarship,” 147.
prayers, collections of proverbs or moral instructions, royal praise poetry, elegies, love lyrics, and humorous compositions. Further, one might add those genres that are not “literary” in the contemporary sense of the world, but which were an important part of the textual domain of the scribes, as described on p. 20–22: primarily omen compendia, medical compositions, ritual laments, and ritual incantations.

The very broadly conceived genre of “narrative poetry” includes what we today would call epics as well as stories about kings of the past, like The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin (no. 1.5). Three Akkadian epics will be particularly important to the argument of the thesis: Gilgamesh, Enuma Elish, and Erra (no. 1.6, 1.8, and 1.2). Today, Gilgamesh is by far the best-known work of cuneiform literature, but in the ancient world, these three compositions appear to have been roughly equal in popularity, judging by how many manuscripts were produced by the scribes. Gilgamesh is the story of the eponymous king of Uruk, who in the first half of the epic befriends the wild man Enkidu and with him defeats the holy monster Humbaba and the enormous Bull of Heaven. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh is cast into depression and departs on a quest for eternal life. He fails to achieve this goal, but instead learns the secret story of the mythical Deluge. Enuma Elish tells of how Marduk became king of the gods and created the known universe. It begins in a time when the world was made of nothing but water, and describes how the gods are first created by and then revolt against the primordial seas Apsû and Tiamat. Marduk eventually kills Tiamat, shapes the world out of her body, and is crowned king of the universe. Erra can be seen as a counter-text to Enuma Elish, describing how the cosmic order established by Marduk was later overturned by Erra, the god of war and pestilence. Feeling restless and disrespected, Erra goes on a rampage that destroys almost the entire world, before finally being soothed by his councilor

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30 On the respective canonical status of these three texts in both the ancient and the modern world, see Helle, “A Subversive Foundation.”

Ishum. Erra’s rampage is described using an innovative poetic technique that blends internal monologue and external narration, yielding what can best be described as a “stream of murderous consciousness.”

As noted above, another text that will be crucial to the following chapters is the *Exaltation* (no. 1.1), which interweaves the (pseudo?)autobiographical account of Enheduana with a hymn to Inana. I will deal with the structure of the text in much more detail in chap. 6, but here I would like to highlight the hymnic qualities of the poem. Hymns in both Sumerian and Akkadian mainly consisted of an address to the deity being glorified, listing their epithets, showcasing their qualities through metaphor and symbolism, and often interweaving allusive references to the mythical exploits of those deities. In Akkadian, there is a set of hymns which all consist of precisely 200 lines, today known as the “Great Hymns.” One of them, *The Great Gula Hymn* (no. 1.3), is addressed to the healing goddess Gula and her consort Ninurta, and was attributed to Bullussarabi. In Sumerian, there was also a genre of hymns that magnified the beauty, size, and cosmic importance of various temples—and with them, the cities in which they stood and the deities they housed. *The Kesh Temple Hymn* (no. 1.7) is noteworthy for being one of the earliest preserved literary texts, found in copies from as early as the 26th century BCE, but the main exemplar of the genre is the collection of 42 hymns known as *The Temple Hymns* (no. 3.1), which was also attributed to Enheduana.

The thesis will of course discuss a number of other literary texts as well, and these will be introduced as they become relevant. However, one key text I would like to highlight is *The Babylonian Theodicy* (no 4.1), whose authorial claim is embedded in the text itself in the form of an acrostic, as described on p. 145–46. The *Theodicy* is a debate between two friends, one of whom argues that the universe is fundamentally unjust and meaningless, and one of whom believes in a divine plan that may not be apparent to

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32 Foster, *Before the Muses*, 880.

33 Geraldina Rozzi is currently preparing a thesis on the Great Hymns.

34 Biggs, “Archaic Sumerian Version.”
humans, but which nonetheless guides the world towards justice. Strikingly, the text ends without a true resolution, as it is unclear which of the friends is proven right: the poem merely offers the reader two irreconcilable visions of the world, essentially asking us to choose for ourselves.\(^\text{35}\)

The textual history of these compositions is often long, complicated, and difficult to reconstruct. Many of the compositions exist in several successive versions, making them difficult to date precisely. A question such as, “When was Gilgamesh written?”, cannot be answered with any kind of precision—or, indeed, concision.\(^\text{36}\) Gilgamesh exists in an early Sumerian version that was not one poem but a cycle of five independent compositions. The stories about the hero were then brought together into a single epic in Akkadian during the Old Babylonian period. Over the following centuries, it spread across the ancient Near East and was translated into Hittite and Hurrian, but also branched off into a number of differing variants. These were collected, edited, and updated in the Standard Babylonian dialect towards the end of the second millennium BCE—we do not know exactly when, but the 11th century BCE is a likely candidate.\(^\text{37}\) This Standard Babylonian version is primarily known from copies written several centuries later, in the Neo-Assyrian period, as school exercises or copies from the royal library in Nineveh.

This pattern is common in cuneiform cultures. Often, we know literary compositions from school exercises or library copies, and the colophon tells us when the physical manuscript was made. But the composition itself was presumably made earlier—sometimes much earlier. This is the case with Enheduana, as I return to in the following chapters, but she is far from an isolated case. For example, the *Theodicy* is traditionally

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dated to the late second millennium and *Erra* to the early first millennium, but the grounds for doing so are far from solid.\(^{38}\) Both poems are only known as copies from the Neo-Assyrian period or later, so for all we know, they could have been composed on the very same day.

Another key problem is whether the literary texts had an oral background, and whether they were performed orally after their written composition. Both questions are practically impossible to answer definitively.\(^{38}\) But as Nathan Wassermann points out, cuneiform cultures were unlike ancient Greek culture in that written and oral traditions coexisted from early on.\(^{40}\) In ancient Greece, a potentially very long period of oral composition and transmission was followed by the introduction of writing, and with it, a period where oral texts were written down and redacted. In cuneiform cultures, by contrast, writing was already available from the early third millennium on, so any oral literary tradition in ancient Iraq would have existed alongside and overlapping with a written one. That being said, the simple fact is that oral literature leaves much fewer traces than written literature. The existence and extent of an oral tradition of poetry is unavailable to us except through glimpses and allusions—as in *Erra*, where it is said that singers who recite the epic will be spared an untimely death (no. 1.2, V 53), or peculiar phonemic writings on some manuscripts which may have aided performers reciting the text.\(^{41}\)

Whether through a primarily written tradition, or as seems more likely, through a mixture of oral and written transmissions, literary texts continued to circulate in the cuneiform world for centuries and even millennia. The *Instructions of Shuruppak* is

\(^{38}\) The *Theodicy* is sometimes dated to the reign of Adad-apla-iddina because the *Uruk List* places Saggi-kin-ubbib as his chief scholar (no. 5.1, l. 17'), but that is hardly a reliable source. See Oshima, *Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 121–25.

\(^{39}\) On orality in cuneiform literature, see the papers collected in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout, *Mesopotamian Epic Literature*; Alster, *Dumuzi's Dream*; and Delnero, “Texts and Performance.”

\(^{40}\) Wasserman, “Lists and Chains.”

\(^{41}\) Delnero, “Texts and Performance.”
found in copies from as early as the 26th century and as late as the 11th century; *Gilgamesh*, as already noted, circulated in one form or another from at least the 21st century to the very last centuries BCE.\(^4\) Leo Oppenheim coined the term “stream of tradition” to account for this extreme textual longevity, but the term has since proven controversial, since it can be used to paint cuneiform cultures as static, un inventive, and conservatively minded.\(^4\) This is certainly misleading: over the millennia, cuneiform cultures witnessed remarkable developments in literature, mathematics, theology, medicine, astrology and astronomy.

But more to the point, it can be surprisingly difficult to tell traditionalism from innovation. For example, during the first millennium cuneiform scholars began composing commentary texts, which explained difficult words in older compositions whose dialect had become obsolete. The commentaries can at first sight be taken as evidence that the scholars were not interested in composing new texts but only in establishing the proper understanding of the received tradition. But in fact, as shown by Eckart Frahm, the commentaries often contain radically new interpretations of the older texts, reflecting groundbreaking developments in the scholars’ understanding of cuneiform semiotics.\(^4\) The present thesis makes a similar argument. The study of ancient authors certainly reflects an antiquarian interest in the past and in the origins, authority, and faithful transmission of the received tradition. But it is also a striking innovation in the literary field, replacing the general anonymity of cuneiform cultures with a new conception of how texts come into being—an innovation that continues to have significant consequences for literature today, as the figure of the author has only become more important for how books are read and received.

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\(^4\) Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*. 
Part I

Studying ancient authorship
We may debate whether Homer existed or Enheduana composed the *Exaltation*. But what of the Akkadian epic *Etana*? No one would insist with much ardor that it was composed by a man who drove a dragon out of Ishtar’s temple, but that is what the sources tell us. In the *Catalogue, Etana* is attributed to Lu-Nanna, who is known from other sources as a sage of Ur (no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 11’). He is mentioned in various rubrics and colophons as the author of magical recipes, including a collection of drugs against witchcraft and one of poultices against epilepsy, as well as a compilation of six astral rituals intended to restore a man’s happiness (no. 3.8, 3.9, and 3.10). In these texts, Lu-Nanna is invoked as a source of authority guaranteeing the efficacy of the prescriptions. We learn more about him in a list of mythical sages from the incantation series *Bit Meseri*, where he is mentioned last: “Lu-Nanna, who was two-thirds of a sage and who drove a dragon out of E-Ninkarnuna, Shulgi’s temple to Ishtar” (no. 5.4, l. 24–27’). Shulgi was a king of the late third millennium (2094–2047 BCE), and there is in fact another source that places Lu-Nanna during his reign. A chronicle written in 251 BCE
states that Shulgi indecently altered the rituals of the sky god Anu together with “the blind Lu-Nanna, the scholar” (no. 5.5, l. 11). In the script-centered world of cuneiform literature, a blind scholar is almost stranger than a dragon-slaying one, but more to the point, the story of Shulgi disturbing Anu’s rituals has no basis in fact. It is a product of the Late Babylonian scholars’ attempt to resuscitate the worship of Anu and to elevate his position in the pantheon by claiming that earlier kings had impiously neglected him.¹

The sources mentioned so far all date to the Neo-Assyrian and Late Babylonian periods (8th–7th and 3rd–2nd century BCE, respectively), more than a millennium after Lu-Nanna’s purported lifetime. They comprise a mix of mythological and pseudo-historical anecdotes, and the tradition is not consistent: Lu-Nanna is invoked as a figure of authority in the medical texts and as a figure of disrepute in the Late Babylonian chronicle. As sources about the actual author of Etana, they are dubious at best. If no new sources surface, the historical reality of how and by whom Etana was composed will likely remain forever unknown. However, a central claim of the present thesis is that this inaccuracy does not rob the sources relating to Lu-Nanna of all heuristic value. Though they may have little to tell us about the circumstances of Etana’s composition, they are ideal as sources about the cultural narratives that circulated among Neo-Assyrian and Late Babylonian scribes, revealing what notions were prevalent at the time regarding the status, value, and circulation of literature. These narratives are interesting in their own right, even and perhaps especially if they do not match historical reality.

Let us return, then, to the texts that mention Lu-Nanna with an eye not for their veracity but for their cultural significance. First, the stories about Lu-Nanna show that literature was thought of as inherently bilingual. His name is Sumerian, and he is said to have served under a Sumerian king, but Etana is an Akkadian text.² The collection of

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¹ Beaulieu, “Antiquarian Theology”; Krul, Revival of the Anu Cult.
² There may have been a Sumerian forerunner to Etana, but it is clearly the Akkadian version of the text (iškūr Etana) that the Catalogue attributes to Lu-Nanna.
astral rituals is also bilingual: five are Sumerian, one Akkadian. Likewise, the text that describes Lu-Nanna’s encounter with the dragon is bilingual, with each line given in both Sumerian and Akkadian. Though scholars today often note the interactions and influences that link Sumerian and Akkadian poetry, these are still often treated as distinct domains that are to be studied separately, but the myth of Lu-Nanna embodies a view of the two traditions as thoroughly entangled. Further, he is not said to have authored texts in any other language than Sumerian and Akkadian, showing that cuneiform literature was perceived as bilingual, not polyglot.

Second, the texts attributed to Lu-Nanna comprise a variety of genres: epic poetry, medical prescriptions, and ritual incantations. Today, we would treat the first as literature, the second as science, and the third as religion, but Lu-Nanna’s authorship straddles all three genres. The cuneiform concept of authorship is not tied to any one of these domains; it does not differentiate between what we would call literature and science. The texts are treated as part of the same discursive domain and could therefore be attributed to the same individual.

Third, Lu-Nanna’s authorship is related to questions of textual authority. The attribution of the medical and ritual prescriptions to this ancient sage bolsters their credibility, and Lu-Nanna’s placement in a bygone time, when dragons still had to be driven from temples, lends the weight of antiquity to his words. Likewise, Bit Meserī refers to the sages as those “whose broad intellect lord Ea brought to perfection” (no. 5.4, l. 29’–31’), which also reinforces Lu-Nanna’s claim to authority: he was granted intellect by none other than the god of wisdom. Conversely, in the Seleucid chronicle, the figure of the blind scholar is used to ridicule Shulgi’s demotion of Anu. Narratives of authorship can thus be used both to lend and deny authority to a text.

Two last points are worth noting. As I discuss in chap. 7, cuneiform authors are repeatedly juxtaposed with gods and kings, so it is no surprise to find Lu-Nanna associated with both king Shulgi and the gods Ea, Isthar, and Anu. Further, as I discuss in chaps. 10 and 11, the dating of the sources is significant. In ancient Iraq, narratives of
authorship came to the forefront during three specific periods, including the Late Assyrian and Seleucid periods, so it is likewise no surprise to find that the sources about Lu-Nanna date to that time.

In sum, the figure of the author can delimit what is included in the category of literature, organize how texts are related to one another, and assign a specific value to them. Ancient narratives of authorship may not correspond to our modern notion about what actually happened, but as the case of Lu-Nanna shows, that mismatch does not make it any less relevant to study how, when, and for what purposes the narratives were told: they are richly informative in their own right.

The study of ancient authors

The example of Lu-Nanna is far from exceptional. In ancient Iraq, as elsewhere in the premodern world, we have little or no access to the historical reality of literary authorship. Most compositions were completely anonymous, largely because cuneiform cultures were manuscript cultures, as noted above. The cuneiform scribes saw themselves as links in a chain of textual transmission, where a scribe would receive a manuscript, copy it, and pass it on to another scribe, who would then do the same. But the first link in that chain was not particularly important; what mattered was only that it was kept going. In the epilogue to Enuma Elish, the author refers to himself as “the first one” (mahru, no. 1.8, V 157), meaning the first in an ongoing sequence of copyists and readers. His identity is not important; what the epilogue emphasizes is that Marduk himself approved the composition, stressing that the text should be repeated, discussed, and taught to children throughout eternity (V 145–162). In manuscript cultures, textual perpetuation takes precedence over authorship.

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Even when texts are attributed to authors, these authors typically come to us only as free-floating names. For example, the Catalogue tells us that the author of Gilgamesh was named Sin-leqi-unnenni and that he was an incantation-priest, but we are given no other information about him (no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 10'). Even when the names of authors are accompanied by biographical snippets, as with Lu-Nanna, the veracity of those snippets is often suspect. And even with a figure such as Enheduana, who was an actual historical person and whose authorship is accompanied by a lengthy autobiographical account, it is still uncertain whether that account matches historical reality. How does one deal with such a situation? Do we dismiss the notion of authorship entirely, discarding all sources about ancient authors as pure fiction?

I would argue for a different approach, one spearheaded by Graziosi and Beecroft. They propose that we treat stories about authors as sources of information, not about the authors in question, but about the people who composed and circulated those stories. The narratives may not be accurate, but that does not make them any less interesting, because they can still reveal what conceptions of literature were prevalent at the time. For example, ancient debates about whether or not Homer was blind reveal differing conceptions about whether epic poetry was fundamentally oral or written, since a blind bard could not have composed a written text. As Graziosi puts it,

> the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer's life does not warrant our "disregard". Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences.

In other words, Graziosi and Beecroft remind us to differentiate between what can be termed “etic” and “emic” approaches to authorship. These terms, derived from

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4 Graziosi, Inventing Homer; Beecroft, Authorship and Cultural Identity.
5 Beecroft, “Blindness and Literacy.”
6 Graziosi, Inventing Homer, 3.
linguistics and later popularized by cultural anthropology, refer to different approaches to cultural artefacts. The “outside” perspective of an etic approach seeks to relate a given cultural product to a general, context-independent system of knowledge, while the “inside” perspective of an emic approach seeks to describe the logic of that culture on its own terms. An etic approach to narratives of authorship would thus ask whether those narratives are reliable as objective historical sources about what actually happened, while an emic approach would ask what they meant to the people who circulated them. Both approaches are valid, but they should be kept separate.

The etic approach has generally dominated investigations into ancient authorship, but Beecroft and Graziosi invite us to shift our attention towards the emic. This new perspective allows us to treat stories about authors not as flawed representations of an elusive reality, but as narratives that are revealing in themselves. As Beecroft’s study of authors in ancient Greece and China makes clear, narratives of authorship can illuminate a whole range of topics, including the ancient readers’ conceptions of what literature is, how it was composed, what role it should play in society, how it was circulated, and why it should hold special significance.

In the following chapters, I hope to show that cuneiform narratives about authors are no less informative than their Greek and Chinese counterparts, but my study will have little to say about how and by whom ancient literature was actually composed. I focus on what narratives of authorship meant for the way literature was circulated, understood, and categorized, not on whether they were true in any objective sense.

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8 Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity*.
9 Compare Beecroft, 19.
Previous studies of cuneiform authorship

To illustrate the necessity of shifting one’s attention from an etic to an emic approach, I turn to a brief survey of previous studies of cuneiform authorship. These have yielded a number of valuable insights, but Assyriologists have often been led astray by an attempt to uncover the historical reality that supposedly lurks beneath the ancient narratives. There are three problems with this approach: the failure to differentiate between emic and etic information, the methodological difficulty of deducing etic facts from emic narratives, and an exaggerated emphasis on unanswerable etic questions at the expense of emic investigations.

The first problem is exemplified by the case of Sîn-leqi-unnenni, the purported author of *Gilgamesh*. As noted in the previous chapter, *Gilgamesh* existed in a number of different versions, including one composed during the Old Babylonian period, known by the opening line “Above All Kings” (*šūtur eli šarri*), and a revised version composed during the Middle Babylonian or “Kassite” period eight centuries later, known by the opening line “Who Saw the Deep” (*ša naqba imuru*). The latter is also known as the Standard Babylonian version, after the dialect in which it is written. According to the *Catalogue*, *Gilgamesh* was composed by Sîn-leqi-unnenni, but his name is of a type that only came into use during the Middle Babylonian period, so he cannot have been the author of the Old Babylonian version.\(^5\) Andrew George concludes that Sîn-leqi-unnenni may have been an actual historical person who produced the Standard Babylonian version towards the end of the second millennium BCE, and that an oral memory of his work was preserved for centuries until it came to be included in the *Catalogue*, around the 7th century BCE.\(^11\)

Though the evidence is scant, George’s argument is certainly a valid interpretation of the sources, but problems arise when scholars then seek to deduce emic conclusions.

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\(^5\) Lambert, “Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity,” 5.

from that etic reconstruction. William Hallo, for example, argues that Sin-leqi-unnenni cannot be regarded as an author “in the strict modern sense, for even if we date the canonical version of Gilgamesh to the Kassite period, it is clear that it built on earlier versions and that the Kassite ‘author’ was in part simply an adaptor.”12 That is, Hallo argues that Sin-leqi-unnenni is not an “author” because he did not compose the original version of *Gilgamesh* but merely its Standard Babylonian recension. Based on the same argument, Dominique Charpin concludes that Sin-leqi-unnenni “worked more as an ‘editor’ than as an ‘author’,”13 and a similar argument is made by Foster.14 This conclusion has significant consequences for the present study, as it would mean that Sin-leqi-unnenni should be excluded from a study of cuneiform authors. But Hallo, Charpin, and Foster conflate two different perspectives, the literary historiography of modern philologists and that of the ancient scribes—that is, an etic and emic approach.

Today we trace the development of *Gilgamesh* through successive stages and track historical changes in naming practices, but there is no evidence that Assyrian scholars did the same. According to the *Catalogue*, Sin-leqi-unnenni was the author of *Gilgamesh* pure and simple, not just one version of it. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that the Assyrian scholars were even aware that the version of *Gilgamesh* available to them was a revised version and not an original composition. To them it was just “Who Saw the Deep,” and this is the text they attributed to Sin-leqi-unnenni. This attribution may be incorrect in a historical sense, but it is crucial for understanding the *Catalogue* on its own terms: Sin-leqi-unnenni is listed as a composer, not an adaptor. This is made clear by the *Uruk List of Kings and Sages*, whose two manuscripts date to the 2nd century BCE. Here it is stated that Sin-leqi-unnenni served as chief scholar during the reign of king Gilgamesh himself (no. 5.1, l. 12). Again, the claim is certainly false in historical terms, but it demonstrates that the writer of the *Uruk List* saw Sin-leqi-unnenni as the original

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author of Gilgamesh’s story, not as an editor of its later version. In short, while both emic and etic approaches to ancient authors are legitimate, they should be kept separate, since etic reconstructions of historical events may distort our understanding of emic narratives about those same events.

The second problem is that philologists often seek to deduce a “kernel” of historical truth from clearly fictitious narratives, even if they have no reliable methodology for doing so. As argued above, the stories about Lu-Nanna are interesting for any number of reasons, but as historical evidence regarding the actual author of Etana, they are largely useless. Nonetheless, Michael Haul argues that, despite their dubiety, the sources are likely to preserve an accurate memory of a historical author onto which a mythological elaboration was later grafted. Lu-Nanna, he claims, was indeed a scholar at Shulgi’s court, and “[d]ie ihm zugeschriebene Drachenvertreibung aus eiem Tempel Šulgis lässt sich als spätere mythische Überformung der Tradition ansehen. Seine Kultreform higegen könnte eine tatsächliche historische Überlieferung darstellen.” It is true that a number of individuals named Lu-Nanna are mentioned in sources dating to the Ur III period, including one who is described as “the scholar, the son of the king.” But the name Lu-Nanna was common at that time, and there is no compelling reason to identify any of those individuals with the Lu-Nanna to whom Etana would be attributed more than a millennium later.

Haul concludes that “Lu-Nanna war demnach ein hochangeshener Gelehrter und vielleicht gar ein Sohn Šulgis.” In other words, Haul sifts the preserved narrative of authorship for accurate historical evidence, deducing historical facts from cultural constructions. The problem is that he has no solid method with which to do so, except gauging whether a source appears plausible to modern eyes. The expulsion of a dragon

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51 Haul, Das Etana-Epos, 38.
52 Lu,-Nanna um-mi-a dumu lugal, l. v 1-2, quoted in Haul, 37–38. See Lafont and Yildiz, Tablettes cunéiformes de Tello (TCTI 1 896); with Owen, “Review,” 443.
53 Haul, Das Etana-Epos, 38.
is plainly impossible and must therefore be explained as mythical embellishment, while cultic reforms are humanly feasible and may therefore represent historical reality. But _pace_ Sherlock Holmes, there is no reason to assume that when the impossible has been eliminated whatever remains must be the truth. It is just as likely that Lu-Nanna’s fight with the dragon and his reforms of Anu’s worship are equally fictitious, particularly since the latter fits so well into the context of the Seleucid scholars’ fascination with Anu. To sum up, a focus on reconstructing etic reality, rather than understanding emic narratives in their original context, runs significant methodological risks, as there is no guarantee that ancient stories will be accurate merely because they appear plausible.

This leads me to the third and final problem, namely the exaggerated emphasis on etic questions. The search for a historical truth behind ancient narratives has led to a neglect of emic investigations, especially in the case of Enheduana. As described in chap. 6, the _Exaltation_ includes an account of how Enheduana composed the text, thereby becoming an author. But investigations into Enheduana’s authorship have focused almost exclusively on whether the texts were composed by the historical Enheduana. The problem has been discussed by Michalowski, Foster, Glassner, Lambert, Miguel Civil, Annette Zgoll, Aage Westenholz, and Jeremy Black, among others, and the debate remains open. But because the discussion has such a narrow focus on Enheduana’s historicity, there has been little interest in how Enheduana’s authorship is actually portrayed in the text, or in why her authorship should have mattered to the ancient scholars in the first place. A notable exception is Brigitte Lion, who argues that the idea of Enheduana’s authorship is important in and of itself, even if it was just a posthumous invention.

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9 Lion, “Literacy and Gender,” 97.
A telling index of the distortion of this debate is an article by Civil, “Les limites de l’information textuelles.” A brief remark in that text is the single most cited ground for denying Enheduana’s authorship, since Civil claims that the vocabulary and grammar of *The Hymn to Inana* does not support an Old Akkadian date, and therefore cannot have been composed by Enheduana. But this inference is problematic for several reasons. Civil discusses only one of the texts attributed to Enheduana, not the entire corpus; he adduces no philological evidence to support his argument; and his claim is explicitly based on a tentative subjective evaluation: “L’examen de sa langue et de son vocabulaire me fait soupçonner que le texte date de l’époque de Larsa” (that is, the early second millennium BCE, centuries after Enheduana’s death). But more to the point, the overall thrust of Civil’s article is to encourage a heightened historical skepticism, where cuneiform texts are taken not as reliable depictions of ancient reality, but as narratives that were meaningful to specific readers in specific, culturally determined ways. While Civil’s article has been used to claim that we can know for sure that Enheduana was not an author, it actually argues the opposite, that we cannot achieve certainty one way or the other. Civil emphasizes the limits of textual information and of the kinds of knowledge it affords: the distorting prism of our sources mediate our access to ancient reality, and we should limit our claims to certainty accordingly. Instead of taking the *Exaltation* as a transparent representation of Old Akkadian politics, it should be treated as a document that circulated in a given context with a given meaning ascribed to it. That is, it should be treated emically rather than etically. In short, Civil’s argument is not a reason to disregard Enheduana’s authorship, on the contrary, it is a reason to study it all the more closely.

To summarize, most studies of cuneiform authorship have been impaired by an exclusive focus on historical reality, leading to a neglect of the cultural narratives of

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21 Civil, 229.
The fictionality of authors

Many of the figures I discuss in the following chapters were probably not real individuals but pseudo-historical characters created long after the texts they were said to have authored. But this does not imply that there is never any historical truth to be found in ancient narratives of authorship. It is perfectly possible that the historical Enheduana actually composed the *Exaltation*, or that a real incantation-priest named Sin-leqi-unnenni created the Standard Babylonian version of *Gilgamesh*. But the fact

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that a cuneiform text could be attributed to an author was a radical break with the traditional anonymity of ancient Iraq, whether or not the attribution was accurate. So even if an ancient narrative of authorship could be shown to be unimpeachably precise (a far cry from the current state of our evidence), we would still have to ask why it became important, meaningful, and even possible to tell it—that is, how literary works came to be seen as the product of a named individual rather than of a collective, anonymous tradition. My analyses of stories about Enheduana and Sin-leqi-unnenni in the following chapters should not lead one to conclude that they cannot have been actual authors, only that their authorship became important at a specific point in time for specific historical reasons and took on a specific narrative form.

In fact, authorship always involves a degree of narrative reshaping, not only in the ancient world. Authorship is never a purely objective event or a mere linking of text to person; it always entails a story being told. In examining the invention of authors, I necessarily take authors to be something that could be “invented,” and not a universal constant or a logical necessity. For as long as there have been stories, there must have been people composing them, but only during specific periods did those people become “authors,” that is, named individuals who were seen as meaningfully distinct from the surrounding collective, and whose name became an integral part of the reception of their texts. The moment when composers became authors was thus the moment when a new kind of story began to be told about them.

In ancient Iraq, this transformation was due to a change not in the material conditions of literary production but in the cultural narrative about it. Authorship did not become important because an anonymous manuscript culture gave way to a new technology of writing, though it is possible that this was the case in other periods. Elizabeth Eisenstein argues that authorship came into its modern form during the late 17th and early 18th century CE specifically due to the influence of the printing press, which made it possible for authors to retain control over the final version of their texts—as opposed to the previous manuscript culture, where authors surrendered their text to
the mediation and emendation of copyists.\textsuperscript{24} However, a similar argument cannot be made for cuneiform compositions like \textit{Etana}: the text circulated in largely the same material form both before and after its attribution to Lu-Nanna. The technology of literary production remained the same; it was the narrative that changed. To understand the invention of authors as a historical event, one must therefore focus on the narratives and not the reality of composition.

My focus on the often fictional narratives of authorship is thus not only predicated by a lack of sources. Even if the extant texts did allow us to accurately reconstruct the biographies of individuals like Lu-Nanna, the non-historical, narrative, and fictional quality of the stories about them would still be worthy of attention. The notion of authorship invariably implies some degree of fictionality—or at least, the reshaping of historical facts into a narrative form that makes them meaningful and relevant—and this is no less true in the modern world, where sources are generally abundant. Even with plentiful biographical material about writers available to us, our perception of those writers is still shrouded in a swirl of expectations and connotations, and that is what makes them “authors.” As William Butler Yeats puts it, “even when the poet seems most himself (…) he is never the bundle of accidents and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete.”\textsuperscript{25} Our idea of the author relies on a received narrative, a fixed set of ideas about what the role implies and why it matters. Without such a narrative, we would have nothing but writers and biographical data whose importance we would not take for granted. But with the invention of authorship, it became possible to mould those facts into a recognizable and inherently significant story, turning a “bundle of accidents” into an author.

Andrew Bennett notes that in the modern world the figure of the authors vacillates between fiction and reality.\textsuperscript{26} Authors are, at one and the same time, actual historical

\textsuperscript{24} Eisenstein, \textit{Printing Press as an Agent of Change}, 121–22.

\textsuperscript{25} Yeats, \textit{Later Essays}, 204.

\textsuperscript{26} Bennett, \textit{The Author}, 118–23.
individuals and imaginary narratives constructed around their literary works. Franz Kafka is both an insurance officer who lived from 1883 to 1924, and a figure of our imagination that is irrevocably shaped by our encounter with Josef K. Authors are poised on the border of literature, neither fully inside their works nor fully distinct from them. In other words, they are literary figures who exceed a purely literary existence. Rather than defining “the author” as either person or construct, bundle or idea, Bennett insists that authorship must be understood as an oscillation between the two. As he puts it, “there is a relation of undecidability here: we cannot finally decide whether the author is that individual or an ‘empty’ gesture of reference.” In short, narratives of authorship form an integral part of authorship as such, which can never be entirely limited to the historical reality of the writer. Potentially fictional narratives of authorship are therefore crucial to understand the construction of authorship as such, regardless of whether reliable biographical information is available.

In this chapter, I employ the word “narrative” to refer to the culturally constructed dimension of literary authorship. But why “narrative”? Bennett speaks of “gestures of reference,” and Yeats of the “idea” of the poet. Beecroft refers to “scenes of authorship,” building on Derrida’s notion of scène de l’écriture, and as I return to below, Foucault speaks of an “author function” (fonction-auteur). Boris Tomashevsky notes that Romantic poets became conscious of the narrative quality of authorship and began actively engaging with it, staging their own biography as an integral part of their literary oeuvre: he refers to such fictionalized life stories as “biographical legends” (biograficheskie legendy). Rita Felski has written a history of feminist literary criticism through “allegories of authorship,” that is, “not empirical descriptions of female authors so much as potent, densely packed metaphors” that have shaped our perception of

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27 Bennett, 121.
28 Beecroft, Authorship and Cultural Identity, 18, fn. 30.
29 Tomashevsky, “Literature and Biography.”
authors, like madwomen in attics or gender-fluid masquerades. With so many terms to choose between, why employ the term “narrative”?

I would argue that authorship is shaped, not only by its partly fictional quality, which would be captured equally well by a term such as gesture, idea, scene, or allegory, but also by a specifically sequential quality. In short, the notion of authorship necessarily implies a sequence of events with a beginning, a middle, and an end—in its most stereotypical form, one that leads from inspiration through writing to reading. By “narratives of authorship,” I therefore do not mean only those snippets of life stories that are told about authors, such as Lu-Nanna’s encounter with the dragon; rather, I understand the idea of “the author” as an inherently narrative concept. The notion of authorship takes the form of a story regardless of whether a story is attached to it. Even with a figure like Sin-leqi-unnenni, of whom we are told nothing but his name and profession, we can still speak of a narrative of authorship. The attribution of Gilgamesh to Sin-leqi-unnenni implies a specific understanding of how literature is composed: as the output of a singular, named, and identifiable individual. As such, the authorial attribution takes the form of an etiology, an origin story that accounts for the existence of a text.

Origin stories inevitably have a narrative structure. In tracing a text back to the person who is said to have created it, the concept of the author implies a transformative sequence of events that leads from the beginning of a text’s existence to its present state. The notion of authorship involves not a single moment in time but a causal connection between episodes, including inspiration, composition, production, performance, circulation, and reception. An author who composes the text in their mind without passing it on to others is no author at all. The text must be composed, then recited or written down, and finally received by an audience. The notion of authorship is thus structured as a concatenation of events.

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39 Felski, Literature after Feminism, 59.
Take Enheduana's authorship. The composition of the *Exaltation* is described in the poem's epilogue as follows:

> Queen, beloved of Heaven! I will recount your wrath.  
> I have piled up the coals, I have prepared the purifying ritual.  
> The Temple of the Holy Inn awaits you. Will you heart not have pity on me?  
> (My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:  
> what I have told you in the dead of night,  
> a gala singer shall repeat for you at midday.  (no. 1.1, l. 135–40)

I will have much to say about this passage in the following chapters, so here I focus only on its general form: a small story. Enheduana first recounts her intention to glorify Inana, then tells of her encounter with the goddess in the Holy Inn. She next describes how the text emerged like a child from her womb, to be performed first in a nighttime intimacy between Enheduana and Inana, and then by a singer on the following day. The passage describes the making of Enheduana’s authorship, but that authorship does not reside in any one of the quoted lines. Rather, it is the transition from one to the other—from intention to composition, from private conversation to public performance—that constitutes Enheduana’s authorship. As I return to in chaps. 5 and 6, the passage is structured by a series of binary transitions, leading from night to day, private to public, composition to performance. Enheduana’s words exceed her own self and are repeated by a singer, yielding a series of contrasts between self and other, inside and outside, origin and repetition. The “author” that emerges in this passage is thus not a singular, self-contained figure, but a symmetrical structure of binaries and transitions. Authorship comes into being as a narrative *peripeteia*, a turning point in the story, not an immutable storyteller.

The author’s function as a compressed etiology is with us still. In contemporary popular discourse, authorship is generally depicted as a process leading from an ill-defined
concept of “inspiration” through the act of writing to our reading of the text. But in turn, the figure of the author compresses that sequence of events into one body.

The narrative structure inherent in the concept of “authorship” carries over to the related, but somewhat different concept of “the author.” Authorship is a process that may involve multiple authors or even no authors at all, if the text is anonymous. Authors, by contrast, are figures—not events but individuals. However, our perception of those figures is shaped by the narrative dimension of the process that defines them. We cannot think of authors without implicitly thinking of authorship, and we therefore inevitably end up making authors into narrative characters. The “author” is thus both a single being and a sequence of events, a person and a process. At first sight, the notion of “Homer” simply refers to the (probably fictional) person to whom the Iliad was attributed, but we cannot bring that person to mind without framing him in a narrative about how the Iliad was composed—through the collection of oral stories into a composite text, or through the relaying of a story received from the Muse (“Tell me, oh goddess...”). The idea of “Homer” makes no sense except as the embodiment of a process, and his name refers to nothing but the condensation of a series of events into one person.

In an analysis of the New Tang History (11th century CE), Anna Shields provides an illuminating example of the interaction between authorship as narrative and authors as embodiments. The New Tang History reshaped traditional biographical material about famous Chinese poets to fit the political narrative of Confucianism. As a result, the stories about the poets were streamlined and made more coherent, and further, excerpts from their poems were integrated into their biographies, yielding a more seamless fit between their life and their work. Shields refers to this process as the “emplotment of unitary authorial identity,” that is, the creation of a consistent image of

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31 For a detailed analysis of those stories, see Graziosi, Inventing Homer.
32 Shields, “Creating Authors.”
the poets through a narrative rearrangement of episodes from their lives. The person of the author is thus produced through a process of narration, whether to present them as a figure in flux, like the *Exaltation*, or a stable identity, like the *New Tang History*. Either way, the author's body is saturated with narrative.

In this project, I am interested in the invention of authors as a process that is distinct, however subtly, from the invention of authorship. That is, I focus not on the practice of composing literary texts—which may include anonymous and collective compositions—but on the way in which that practice was compressed into a single, identifiable human being. This is the true innovation that took place in ancient Iraq. When the concept of the “author” had eventually become established, it became increasingly difficult to think about authorship except through the lens of authors. Today, the notion that first appeared with Enheduana has become dominant almost to the point of exclusivity: we invariably compress our understanding of literary production into the person of the author. When we imagine the creation of a literary work, we generally bring to mind a single human being composing it, rather than a collaboration between multiple writers or a dispersed and anonymous tradition. We condense the abstract concept of authorship into the tangible figure of the author, and the thesis explores how that compression first came about.

**Authorial anachronism**

Foucault arrived late to the Collège de France on February 22, 1969, when he was to give the lecture entitled “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?”. He was introduced by the existentialist philosopher Jean Wahl:

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33 Shields, 9.
Nous avons le plaisir d’avoir aujourd’hui parmi nous Michel Foucault. Nous avons été un peu impatients de sa venue, un peu inquiets de son retard, mais il est là. Je ne vous le présente pas, c’est le “vrai” Michel Foucault, celui des *Mots et les choses*, celui de la thèse sur *La folie*. Je lui laisse tout de suite la parole.  

What is noteworthy about these remarks is that they unwittingly illustrate the theory that Foucault was just about to present. For Foucault, the author is not to be understood as the creative source from which a text springs but an epistemic function created around and by the texts themselves. The “author” is not identical with the writer who produces a text but is rather a principle of classification attached to that text within its discursive domain. In this guise, the “author function” groups different texts together (for example, the name “Shakespeare” denotes not only a human being but also a corpus of plays and sonnets), it establishes some texts as “authored” in contrast to those that are merely “written” (as mentioned in chap. 1, Nietzsche’s collected works would not include his laundry bills), and it fixes the meaning and interpretation of texts.

In short, the author function organizes and structures the literary field. This is not something that writers themselves do consciously, rather, it is an effect of the very concept of authorship. The “true” Foucault is therefore literally “celui des *Mots et les Choses*.” Foucault’s name groups together a set of texts (*The Order of Things* and *Madness and Civilization*), and knowing those texts is sufficient to know their author. The mere mention of the titles is enough to fully introduce Foucault and account for his importance. Foucault, as an author rather than a human being, is the creation of his works, not the other way around. Insofar as authors serve to order and assess their texts, those texts must necessarily come first; the author as a classifying principle is retrojected onto works that already exist. Like Foucault himself, the figure of the author arrives late.

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34 Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?,” 75.
In analyzing ancient narratives of authorship, I will be treating authorship as something that occurs after the composition of the text in question. As Beecroft puts it, “authorship is a property ascribed to a text rather than a fact about its origins.” That is, rather than taking authorship to denote the way a text is composed, I study authorship as an account that is told to make sense of that text—an account that is merely set in the past tense, relaying how a now-existent text first came into being. The narrative of authorship is thus an inherently anachronistic concept. In rhetorical terms, it functions as a *hysteron proteron*, a figure of speech where that which would logically come later is placed first, a famous example being Aeneas’s exhortation to his troops: “Let us die, and charge into the midst of arms” (*moriamur et in media arma ruamus*, *Aeneid* II.353).

Likewise, the narrative of authorship is constructed after and around the text but claims to have revealed something about the text before it even came into being, reversing the actual order of events.

In the modern world, narratives of authorship are often based on true events, but those events are reshaped into a meaningful narrative only after the text in question has entered public circulation. The story of Sylvia Plath committing suicide just after she completed *Ariel*, or of Mary Shelley writing *Frankenstein* as Lake Geneva was lit by lightning, or of Samuel Taylor Coleridge composing “Kubla Khan” upon waking from a dream—all these events may well be true, but they gain meaning, import, and heuristic potential only in retrospect, in the slipstream of the texts to which they are attached. Coleridge’s dream tells us something about “Kubla Khan” only because “Kubla Khan” has since gained canonical status. Without that reception, the dream would not be worthy of narration; it would be a non-event. The poem thus creates the significance of its own scene of composition.

Authorship therefore purports to precede and thereby explain the event that actually creates it: the circulation of the text. In the ancient world, this delay and

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reversal is often particularly striking, since it unfolds over centuries. For example, Christian Schwermann describes how the Chinese philosophical treatise *Guan Zi* was created as a composite work that “accumulated over a long period, probably from the fourth to the first century B.C.E.” Eventually, it came to be attributed to Guan Zhong, a statesman who lived during the seventh century BCE. The end point of the text’s gradual emergence was thus the reinvention of its starting point. Guan Zhong’s authorship is placed before the text’s creation, retroactively explaining it as a single moment of composition rather than as a slow accumulation.

A similar process applies to cuneiform authorship as well. A number of scholars have insisted that it is anachronistic to speak of authorship in a cuneiform context, because it would impose a modern concept of literary creation onto a manuscript culture where texts came about differently: through a collective and gradual process of compilation, accumulation, and adaptation of traditional material. I don’t disagree, but I would argue that this anachronism was already carried out by the Babylonian and Assyrian scholars themselves, who attributed originally anonymous works, such as *Etana*, to at least partly fictitious authors, such as Lu-Nanna. As such, the anachronism of authorship is not a reason to disregard the concept entirely but is itself an interesting object of research.

Take the literary history of *Gilgamesh*. As sketched out above, the epic went through a series of versions, probably beginning with an oral tradition, then passing through a cycle of Sumerian poems, an epic composed in the Old Babylonian period, Hittite and Hurrian translations in the mid-second millennium, and a revised Standard Babylonian version in the late second millennium. There is no one *Gilgamesh*, but a palimpsest of revisions; and since there is no one text, there can be no one author in any historically meaningful sense either, but that did not stop the Babylonian and Assyrian scholars from attributing it to Sīn-leqi-unnenni. Tellingly, the *Uruk List* places him during the reign of king Gilgamesh himself, a hoary antiquity that, if it were mapped onto the

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37 See, for example, van de Mieroop, *Philosophy Before the Greeks*, 19–35.
timelines of modern historians, would precede the earliest known version of Gilgamesh' story by centuries. As with Guan Zi, the end point of the epic's ancient history is the reinvention of its starting point. The authorial attribution anachronistically projects a textual stability that was only achieved at a later stage in the epic's development onto a mythical time before this development had even begun. The *hysteron proteron* of authorial narratives fixes the text in place, establishing it as a stable and completed composition, and further imagining that stability to have existed all along.

The case of Sîn-leqi-unnenni is of course an extreme example, since the narrative of authorship was created millennia after the earliest versions of the text: the delay of authorship could hardly be clearer. However, as authorship became an increasingly central part of literary culture, the authorial delay also began to function differently. The narrative of authorship may have begun as an imaginary reconstruction, but with time it became also a cultural role that would-be authors had to negotiate. Retrojections became expectations. Today, one must live up to the popular image of the author if one is to be acknowledged as an author.

In other words, the idea of the author functions as a cultural narrative, but it is a narrative that individuals can occupy and emplace themselves in. As Bennett reminds us, today the author is caught between a physical and a fictional existence, oscillating between narrative and reality. Though these expectations have become particularly strong in the modern world, early intimations can already be found in the cuneiform sources. In the epilogue to *Erra*, the author Kabti-ili-Marduk describes how the god Erra inspired him to compose the text: “He (Erra) let him see it (the epic) at nighttime, and

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38 The existence of a historical king named Gilgamesh is debated. Scholars who claim that the epic is based on a real historical person generally place him in the early centuries of the 3rd millennium BCE— see e.g. Tigay, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, 13–16. The *Sumerian King List* dates his reign to c. 7800 BCE, a claim that is certainly exaggerated, but which nonetheless gives an indication of the scope of the historical retrojection involved in Sîn-leqi-unnenni’s authorship.
when he (Kabti-ili-Marduk) recited upon waking, he neglected nothing, nor did he add a single line to it” (no. 1.2, V 43–44). The phrasing finds a precise parallel in a colophon attached to a miniature hymn, where the author notes that the goddess “let Ahassu-Sherua see it at nighttime, and [he recited (?)] these lines about it [in the morning (?)]” (no. 3.2, l. 6–8). I discuss the trope of authors receiving their text in a dream in chap. 5, but what is remarkable in this context is how exactly the two claims overlap. They both employ the same verb (ušabrišu, “(s)he let him see”) and the same temporal specification (ina šāt mūši, “at nighttime”).

It is possible that one of the texts directly influenced the other, but it is difficult to say which came first. Ahassu-Sherua’s hymn can be dated to 733 BCE, but Kabti-ili-Marduk has variously been placed in the 9th, 8th, and 7th century BCE. However, one way or the other, it is clear that the two texts employ the same vocabulary of composition. A similar narrative of authorship thus accounts for both Kabti-ili-Marduk’s Erra, one of the most innovative and experimental compositions in all cuneiform literature, and Ahassu-Sherua’s far more modest contribution. One if not both must have taken an already existent formula for describing literary authorship and used it to describe his creation. When a narrative of authorship is established, it becomes possible for others to inscribe themselves in it. Authorship becomes a cultural script through which literary production can be understood in familiar, recognizable terms—not least by the writers themselves.

In short, the author becomes, in Foucault’s terminology, a “subject position.” By taking his place at the podium at the Collège de France and being introduced as “celui des Mots et les choses,” Foucault stepped into a discursive role set in place for him by the broader cultural imaginary. What we see in cuneiform cultures is therefore the invention of authors in a double sense: authors were invented both in that originally anonymous texts were attributed to (at least partly) fictional characters, and in that a

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39 See Franke, “Der Zorn Marduks,” 320 with references.
40 Foster, Akkadian Literature of the Late Period, 65–67.
new subject position was brought into being, which in turn allowed other writers to emplace themselves within it. The image of the author is thus both a story that is created around the text, retrojected onto it to account for its origin, status, meaning, and intertextual relations, and a set of expectations by which writers are expected to abide. Much later, writers would become able to actively shape the authorial narratives surrounding their works, yielding what Tomashevsky calls “biographical legends”; and even fold these authorial narratives into the works themselves, in a complex interplay of content and context that Jon Helt Haarder terms “performative biographism.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the approach to ancient authorship that will guide my analyses in the following chapters. In a nutshell, I study the authors of cuneiform cultures as narratives told about the texts attributed to them—not as historical individuals whose life I can reconstruct. This focus on cultural constructions has a number of advantages. Narratives of authorship are a crucial and often overlooked source of information about how literary texts were perceived, categorized, and evaluated by the ancient scholars and scribes. Further, focusing on authorship as a narrative sidesteps many methodological pitfalls that have troubled previous studies of cuneiform authors, especially the thorny relation between etic reconstructions and emic accounts of literary composition. But even aside from those methodological advantages, a focus on the narrative of authorship is warranted by the nature of authorship itself. Because authorship is unthinkable without a narrative component—that is, a progression of events with a beginning, a middle, and an end—a study of the invention of authors will have to include a study of how that narrative was told, including its partly fictional dimensions. As a result, authorship will be treated as a

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question of circulation, not composition. I will be the first to acknowledge that this approach leaves a number of questions unanswered. Who actually composed *Etana*? How did that composition take place? Is there a kernel of historical truth to be found in the stories about Lu-Nanna? These are questions I cannot answer, because I have chosen what seems to me a more promising avenue of investigation.

In the following four chapters, I explore how the narrative of authorship was told, examining the structure and the recurrent patterns of authorial claims. However, the question that must be answered first is whether these cuneiform figures can indeed be considered “authors,” since they are often depicted as not the original creators but the medial transmitters of texts, and it has been argued they were therefore not authors at all (see p. 96–97). The following two chapters will counter that objection. First, I argue that authors have always been depicted as mediators, making this notion of authorship the rule rather than the exception. Then, I apply the results of that survey to cuneiform cultures specifically. One important facet of premodern narratives of authorship is that they depict authors as intermediary figures placed midway through the story. Chaps. 6 and 7 then explore two consequences of that medial position. The first is that, since the text is created as part of a broader process that involves both the author and other individuals, like singers and copyists, authorship itself is dependent on a collaborative effort. If authorship is understood as mediation, then one cannot become an author alone, and as a result, the figure of the “author” will be seen as a communal creation, shaped and circulated by a number of people working together. In short, authorship itself is co-authored. Chap. 7 pursues this view of authors as mediators between the text and society. Specifically, I examine how the figure of the author is employed to determine the social standing of a text. Cuneiform authors are repeatedly juxtaposed with gods and kings, an illustrious association that in turn confers prestige and authority onto their texts. This analysis sets the stage for the second part, which examines why it became necessary to elevate the social standing of literature.
Chapter Four

What is an author?
Old answers to a new question

The following version is the accepted manuscript; the final published article is available at [https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-7368183](https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-7368183), © 2019 by University of Washington.
The premodern author poses a methodological problem.¹ In premodern sources, authors are most often attributed neither full control nor complete passivity in relation to their works; instead, they are depicted as, say, weaving anew existing threads of tradition or reworking texts received half-finished from elsewhere. This constitutes a curious problem for historians of literature, for despite the widespread recurrence of authors depicted as textual mediators rather than original creators, we lack a methodologically apt approach to study the partial linguistic agency involved in such mediations.

Depictions of authors as poised midway between the text and its “actual” origin can be traced back to the very root of the concept of the [p. 114] author. The first authors known to us, those studied in the schools of Babylonia and Assyria long before Homer, were described either as relaying words revealed to them in dreams by a god or as binding the tangled threads of received material into new compositions (Foster 1991; Wee 2015: 251–55). Similar figurations of authorship, as mediation rather than original creation, abound throughout literary history, though they appear in many guises and with many different connotations. The notion of inspiration, for example, relocates intention, agency, and self-knowledge away from the writer, leaving inspired authors with only partial access to their own words. In the European Middle Ages, the ideal of authorship lay in the rediscovery, translation, and popularization of forgotten older works, a role that assigned authors an honored but not a primary place in literary tradition (Bohler 2006). If no forgotten manuscript was forthcoming, the trope became a necessary fiction, employed to conceptualize the activity of authorship within a well-known frame.

The question is how to approach such situations today. It cannot suffice to gauge the roles of premodern authors only through their distance from one of the two models of authorship prevalent today, the Romantic and the poststructuralist. It is clear that the

¹ My heartfelt thanks go out to Marshall Brown, Stephen Hinds, Astrid Rasch, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, all of whom made invaluable improvements to the essay.
partial agency attributed to most premodern writers falls short of the now-dominant ideal of the author, shaped as it is by eighteenth-century demands of absolute originality. The theoretical debates of the 1960s did much to undercut this ideal, with Roland Barthes (1967) claiming to overthrow the tyranny of the “Author-God” and Michel Foucault (1969) analyzing the function of authors not as creators but as discursive principles of classification. I will not quarrel with their conclusions but only state that these views do not aid us much in analyzing the various medial roles attributed to premodern authors.

As Andrew Bennett (2005a: 66) argues, “One of the problems with debates concerning the death, life, resurrection and rebirth of the author that have raged in literary theory and criticism since the late 1960s is their unsatisfactory polarization.” The oscillation between extremes has problematic consequences for historiography, since both models preclude the study of premodern notions of authorship on their own terms. The author of the theoretical debates is either dead or alive—god or scribe, tyrant or mere function—while actual premodern authors are most often depicted in a “middle” position: inspired but not passive, indebted but not shackled to tradition. If we are to study the significance and structure of such medial depictions, neither theoretical extreme seems promising. An author claiming medial agency can be described as “not quite” an author in the modern sense, or as a principle of discursive organization in Foucault’s sense, and while neither claim is wrong, neither allows us to study the historical case on its own terms. In short, our methodological options have been limited by theoretical polarization.

Merely asserting a middle ground between the extremes of agency underestimates the methodological challenges involved in studying it. Unless the wide variety of middles is described, we risk reverting to a new binary: between binary and nonbinary notions of authorship. Instead, we have to treat nonbinary depictions of authorship not just as “not binary” but also as multiple and complex in individual ways. To Plato, divine inspiration meant that human authors had no individual importance; to the Romantics, it meant the exaltation of poets to superhuman status. We must avoid reifying a medial
model of authorship as if it were a single thing, and treat it as a shifting and dynamic frame of investigation.

Further, the difference between authorship as mediation and authorship as original creation does not fully overlap with the difference between premodern and modern notions of authorship. Rather, the modern emphasis on originality came about not as a radical break with the common premodern focus on transmission but as a gradual rearrangement of already existing terms and tensions within the concept of authorship. Indeed, some premodern authors, such as Ovid, arrogate for themselves an extreme degree of agency. To be more specific, then, my claim is this: a model of authorial agency as mediating, nonbinary, and partial is a better starting point for writing the history of authorship than the now-dominant model of authorship as original creation, since it takes in more variation, complexity, continuity, and change.

An engaged investigation into the history of authorship therefore requires that we answer a number of questions following from the claim of partial agency. Is “partial agency” even a meaningful theoretical concept? What does such a middle position look like in practice? How can we study it? What does it tell us? How would a focus on partial agency affect the historiography of authorship? These are the questions I set out to address below. On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of [p. 116] Foucault’s seminal essay “Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?” (“What Is an Author?”), it is high time to reexamine the various premodern answers to his question.

The study of the historical author

In the thirteenth century Saint Bonaventure provided a classification of four ways that a man could make a book. One copying an existing work was a scribe; one copying from multiple sources, a compiler; one copying existing works but adding his own explanatory remarks, a commentator. Finally, one who copied the words of existing
texts and then added his own, but with the latter in the primary place, was an author (Bonaventure 2014: 14–15, book 1, foreword, question 4).

In modern scholarship the list generally provokes one of two reactions. The first is to note that there is no extreme at the end of the list to match the modern notion of the author as pure creator, since even Bonaventure's fourth role transcribes and reacts to the words of others. The possibility of radically original composition is simply not entertained (e.g., Schwermann and Steineck 2014: 7). The second reaction is to remark that the activity of the author is not qualitatively separate from that of the scribe. J. A. Burrow (2008: 29), for example, observes that “Bonaventure's scheme combines into a single continuum two functions which seem fundamentally different to us: composition and the making of copies.” Neither reaction is wrong, but they still illustrate the methodological challenges in current studies of the historical author. They register nothing so much as the distance between Bonaventure's agential continuum and the modern preference for agential antitheses, by propping up two models of authorship: his spectrum, our binary. Consequently, they fail to take his subdivisions as meaningful in their own right. The premodern conceptualization of authors is approached only through its distance from our current nonmedial ideal of authorship, and in that process we lose a way of measuring, cataloging, and describing the middle ranges of authorial activities in all their variety.

This polarization is largely due to the aftereffects of Romanticism and deconstruction, which have produced two main approaches to the historiography of authorship. The Romantic approach, prevalent in the study of English literary history, is organized around the notion of [p. 117] the modern author, defined by principles of originality, ownership, and ethical accountability. While the ideal has been forcefully critiqued, it still serves as the focal point in investigations driven by a narrative of emergence. Scholars seek to track the processes by which, somewhere between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the still-familiar notion of the author first appeared. Many explanations have been proposed to account for the development—discursive, juridical, economical, technological, ideological—revealing that the
modern author is no historical universal but a constructed ideal specific to recent centuries (see, e.g., Dobranski 2014; Eisenstein 2009: 121–22; Pask 2005; Woodmansee 1984: 425).

However, this kind of study still takes the modern author to be the natural center of investigation. In the endless retracing of the steps that led from Shakespeare to Shelley, the appearance of the modern author is made the most important event in the history of authorship, to such an extent that Milton, for example, has been named “the first author” (Bennett 2005a: 30)—not the first modern author but the first author, pure and simple—as the emerging ideal is taken to define not just a portion of the history of authorship but its center, direction, and goal. The “weak” premodern author is then relegated to a prologue to the seventeenth century, where early intimations of later developments may be found but whose significance derives primarily from their relation to and distance from that subsequent ideal. In the teleological narrative of emergence, the partial agency of premodern authors is studied only as an embryonic stage from which the full agency of modern authors later sprang.

The second approach is organized around the poststructuralist notion of the “author function.” Foucault (1969) described authors not as the creative principle behind a given literary text but as an organizing principle produced around and by the texts themselves. The Foucauldian author groups, delimits, and qualifies the textual unity of literary works. Christian Schwermann and Raji C. Steineck (2014) turn Foucault’s theoretical insight into a historiographical method by cataloging the roles that can be ascribed to authors. They present the author as a “composite of textual functions” such as discursive organization, ethical accountability, and creative origination. But their method also evaluates the medial role of historical authors through its distance from the full set of characteristics attributed to authors today. Schwermann’s implementation of the method reveals that the composite of functions essentially serves as a checklist of expectations that a given author may or may not meet. In his analysis of early Chinese bronze inscriptions, Schwermann (2014: 39) argues that the author function was not held by a single person but was distributed among the donor,
the composer, the calligrapher, and the caster of the inscription. He thereby makes the functions that he attributes to the author on purely theoretical grounds the primary object of historical research, meaning that they can be detached from any person actually identified as the composer of the text in the original sources. Once more the role of authors is defined in advance with reference to a modern understanding of the term, and the historical evidence is then gauged in relation to the present definition.

In short, too often the historiography of authorship consists in noting the distance of a specific case from a contemporary idealized position, so that we end up fixing the significance of authorship beforehand. I do not mean to imply that the approaches are not valid; both are certainly legitimate on their own terms. But those terms are a modern construct that obscures the role of authors as portrayed in premodern texts. If we wish to understand the role of historical authors as anything more than a deviation from their contemporary counterparts, we have to move beyond these teleological approaches, and to do that, we have to move beyond the polarized concepts of agency that produced them.

The middle ranges of agency

In 1992 Seán Burke (2008) published a counterargument to a conclusion often drawn from the essays of Barthes and Foucault, namely, that authors should be excluded from the study of literature. Against this view Burke points to the myriad theoretical complications that would follow from this omission. While he does not reject the claim that subjects are constituted through the workings of discourse, he argues that there is a crucial difference between the constitution and the full determination of agency. Authors can be created by discourse while also being, in turn, the creators of new texts. Burke proposes, rather than an author “dead” [p. 119] on arrival into discourse, an

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* For a similar approach, see, e.g., Van de Mieroop 2016: 19–25.
authorial agency that is neither authoritarian nor nonexistent but limited and dialogic (see esp. 167).

While I am sympathetic to Burke’s proposal, this seems to me a facile compromise. To state that there must be some position midway between the extremes of agency is necessary but insufficient; merely positing a middle ground risks underestimating the challenges of studying it. In his counterclaim Burke glosses over a series of important problems. Does the view that subjects hold limited agency in relation to the linguistic structures that constitute them make theoretical sense? And if such a middle ground is indeed possible, how was it realized in its historical variability? In short, if the study of historical authors is to be viable, we need an understanding of agency that is more nuanced both theoretically and historically.

For that reason I turn to the theory of nonbinary agency developed by the queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick (2003: 10) first employs the phrase middle ranges of agency in Touching Feeling as part of her “project of getting away from dualistic modes of thinking” and toward more spatial, gradual, and textile notions of power and affect. She emphasizes the importance of thinking in finitely many values, that is, of working with a number of analytic categories greater than two and less than infinite. However uncontroversial that may sound, she points out that in the humanities scholars often propose binaries, critique binaries, or replace binaries with a stream of infinite and amorphous variation, but they rarely engage in the subdivision of infinity into a definite number of categories (108–12). The scholars who note that Bonaventure subdivides authorial agency into a spectrum and not a binary without further scrutinizing his four categories are an example of the problem. What is lost by disregarding such graduations, argues Sedgwick, is a sense for the middle grounds between the binary and the infinite—a tragic loss, for it is “only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity or change” (13).

Sedgwick (2012) returns to the middle ranges in The Weather in Proust, in which she critiques a Freudian understanding of agency that equates power with omnipotence. The Freudian child desires but fails to achieve omnipotence, and in that failure lies
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Oedipal maturity. By contrast, the psychological development proposed by Melanie Klein envisions a child who both desires and fears power, since it is perceived as inherently destructive. Accordingly, the discovery of a kind of power that sidesteps an “all-or-nothing understanding of agency” is experienced as a relief, not a disappointment:

The sense that power is a form of relationality that deals in, for example, habits, negotiations, and small differentials, the middle ranges of agency—the notion that you can be relatively empowered or disempowered without annihilating someone or being annihilated, or even castrating or being castrated—is a great mitigation of that endogenous anxiety, although it is something that requires to be discovered over and over. (20)

Our travails in approaching authorial agency as neither the free expression of a genius nor the mechanical copying of a scribe may thus be related to a psychological structure that makes it difficult to distinguish omnipotence from agency. As Sedgwick notes, the fantasy tends to persist and so has to be overcome again and again—even a Kleinian child keeps reverting to a Freudian imaginary of power. The persistence may be related to the structure of most Indo-European languages. Sedgwick claims that the distinction enforced by grammatical transitivity between subject and object splits our conception of agency into power and passivity, making it “almost impossible for any language user to maintain a steady sense of the crucial middle ranges of agency” (79). (One wonders if the theory of authorship would truly have been different if it had been written in an ergative language, in which the distinction between subject and object is structured differently.)

Grammar and Freudian fantasies thus conspire to make us equate agency with omnipotence, and the equation has plagued the heavily polarized theory of authorship. That the issue of the subject-object dichotomy applies to the theory of authorship is illustrated by Foucault’s (1969: 76) description of his own earlier work in the introductory remarks of “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” as “ce qu’il m’est arrivé autrefois d’écrire.” The idiomatic expression, difficult to translate exactly and omitted from the
English translation, presents the act of writing as something that has descended on Foucault from elsewhere, as a strangely passive kind of activity: literally, the writing has “arrived to him.” Foucault is not the sentence’s subject but its indirect object. The syntactic discomfort of the phrase registers an unease about positioning authors as the unambiguous agents of their writing. [p. 121]

In fact, Sedgwick (2012: 79) argues that the notion of authorship is not just one example among many of the difficulty of middle ranges but a particularly drastic example, since the materiality of writing engenders the fantasy of “all-or-nothing understanding of agency.” Skilled writers are “liable to develop such grandiose illusions of magical omnipotence in relation to language—exactly because, unlike making things, speech and writing and conceptual thought impose no material obstacles to a fantasy of instant, limitless efficacy.” That is, because the movement of pen on paper or fingers on keyboards is experienced as effortless and immediate, authorship comes to be perceived as unhindered agency. The question, then, is how to perceive it differently.

One may find an instructive counterpoint to the illusion of authorship as effortless immediacy in the theory of writing proposed by Jacques Derrida. By setting down his words in writing, argues Derrida (1967: 227), the author inevitably enters “a logic where his discourse cannot, by definition, completely dominate the system, its regularities and idiosyncrasies. He can use it only by allowing himself to be—in a certain fashion and up to a certain point—governed by the system” (une logique dont, par définition, son discours ne peut dominer absolument le système, les lois et la vie propres. Il ne s’en sert qu’en se laissant d’une certaine manière et jusqu’à un certain point gouverner par le système). Derrida’s account of authorship yields a kind of agential Möbius strip: authors use language by being used by language; they are governed by the system of writing but only insofar as they allow themselves to be thus governed. Within the loops of this logic, it becomes difficult to talk about agency in any clear terms. What is most vexing about the passage is the crucial indeterminacy at its heart. Granted that authors cannot “completely” dominate writing, does it then follow that they can dominate it a bit? Conversely, if authors are governed by writing “in a certain fashion and up to a certain
point," what fashion might that be? And how can we describe that “certain point” more fully, beyond merely stating that it is neither absolute nor nonexistent?

In much the same way, Sedgwick’s insistence on working with finitely many values is both theoretically refreshing and practically frustrating. How exactly should we go about measuring nonbinary values in literary history? We risk reifying nonbinary agency as a single category if we do not emphasize its full variety and complexity—premodern authors are [p. 122] ascribed very different kinds and degrees of activity, even if all of them should fall somewhere between omnipotence and passivity. But how do we deal with that variety in meaningful terms? It would, after all, be nonsensical to draw up a universal scale of authorial agency—one imagines Milton awarded a score of 7.83, beating Homer’s 2.54, though closer to Hesiod’s 5.21. But what then?

**Visions of authors**

In this essay I am interested not in the actual circumstances of premodern authorship but in how those circumstances are depicted in our sources. Accordingly, I would propose that we approach the medial agency of authors with a focus on evocative images that disrupt our modern assumptions about the term. Alexander Beecroft (2010: 18, 2) calls attention to the importance of ancient “scenes of authorship,” descriptions of authors that may reveal little about their actual biographies but instead disclose an “implicit poetics” behind the text, a larger cultural system determining how literary composition was depicted. Beecroft builds on the work of Barbara Graziosi (2002), who insists that ancient accounts of authors’ lives are interesting regardless of their veracity. Homer’s blindness, for example, should be approached not as a purported fact for historians to assess but as a “powerful symbol” to be unpacked (238). Likewise, Rita Felski (2003: chap. 2) has written a history of feminist literary criticism through a series of “allegories of authorship.” These “potent, densely packed metaphors,” by which feminists over the past fifty years have conceptualized authors, reveal more about the
intellectual mood in which they were produced than about the historical reality they sought to describe (59).

Graziosi, Beecroft, and Felski share a distinctly historical sensitivity to their sources. They all take the obliqueness and the richness of the metaphors as a starting point for examining the implicit assumptions compressed into the deceptively simple figure of the author. Using a similar approach to the mediality of premodern authors, Julia Rubanovich (2009: 130, 131) presents four key metaphors of authorship in medieval Persian prose. An author can present himself as a bride dresser, who has found a book languishing in obscurity and adorned it anew so that it may marry its reader; or as a merchant, who sells the book [p. 123] to his patron, having acquired it from elsewhere, or asserting that he never works with “borrowed capital”; or as a gardener, who either tends trees planted before his time or resolves never to smell flowers “previously sniffed and touched upon”; or as one who names a child, either as its true father or as a teacher who adopted it and brought out its qualities. The metaphors all negotiate a tension between views of authorship as original creation and as textual transmission. Their internal graduations (from bride dresser to father) and their individual ambiguities (e.g., the merchant as retailer and as craftsman) map out a field of medial positions. Rubanovich’s study illustrates how we can employ metaphorical figurations to examine nonbinary ranges of authorial agency without reducing them to either dichotomies or inflexible taxonomies.

Sedgwick’s discussion of agency springs from her reading of Proust and his portrayal of the figure of the genie. It may not be unreasonable to suggest that we take those “ontologically intermediate, tutelary spirits” as our guides in thinking about authors (Sedgwick 2012: 23). Crucially, this would replace the limitless power of the genius with the localized agency of the genie. “For all their extraordinary powers,” writes Sedgwick, “genii are caught up, like people, in the cycle of strength and weakness, death and rebirth. Genii are especially prone to get entrapped in objects” (18–19). Those statements work just as easily as descriptions of authors, dead and reborn as they have been in literary theory. Their sometimes extraordinary literary skills do not amount to
omnipotence, as attested by the frustration, the agonizing, and the alternation of setbacks and breakthroughs commonly reported by authors. Further, authors are bound to objects with an insistence bordering on the magical: they are bound to their books, which create their authorial image and thus a series of expectations and discursive operations by which they are entrapped. If Sedgwick’s concept of “middle ranges” resists the conflation of agency into omnipotence and passivity, Proust’s genii present medial agency in a way that makes it more than just “not binary.”

Weaving vowels

In this section I zoom in on one particularly common and complex trope of medial authorship: the weaving of words. The idea of authorship as textile labor is ubiquitous in literary history. It is found in fourteenth-century India, where the poet Namdev writes of abandoning a family of tailors to pursue a different kind of stitching (Novetzke 2003), and in sixteenth-century England, where the poet Isabella Whitney describes her authorship as needlework (Trettien 2015). It is found in Cicero, in Callimachus, and in Cynewulf, the Old English poet (Ad familiares 9.21; Aetia 26; and Elene 1237–39, respectively). It is found embedded in the literary vocabulary of many languages. Latin gives us the word text, meaning “woven,” and carmen, both “a song” and “a carding instrument.” Greek gives us rhapsody, meaning “a song sewn together,” and hyphos, both “a web” and “a text.” Arabic has the roots ġ-z-l, related to sewing things together and composing love songs, and n-s-j, related to weaving and writing poetry. In the Odyssey both Calypso and Circe sing while weaving (5.61–62, 10.221–23), and some have suggested that the association springs from the rhythmic quality of both activities (Sanga 1995: 112). The metaphor of weaving can be traced back to the earliest authors, those from ancient Iraq. The very first author known to us, the Old Akkadian high priestess Enheduana, is referred to as a “weaver of tablets” (lu₂, dub zu₂, keše₂-da) (Temple Hymns 543; see Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 49).
The conclusion to one of Enheduana’s works, an anthology of hymns to Sumerian temples, states that with the composition of that text, “something has been created that no one had created before” (niĝ₂-tu na-me lu₂ nam-mu-un-u₂-tu) (Temple Hymns 544). However, Enheduana probably composed the hymns not from scratch but from collected and reworked older material. So how can she claim that the result was unprecedented? An answer may be found in the logic of weaving. Weaving authors do not produce their threads from nothing, spider-like, but take up existing materials and arrange it anew. Unlike the ideal of Romantic originality, the resultant “newness” is not a radical break with what came before but a unique patterning of older threads. Another author from ancient Iraq, Esagil-kin-apli, notes that he worked with materials that “since the days of yore had not been fastened in a new ‘weave,’ but lay tangled like threads” (ša uļtu ulla šarā lá šabtū u kīma qē etgurū; see Wee 2015: 253–54). The image places Esagil-kin-apli midway between past and future, stressing both the innovation of his work and its connection with “the days of yore.” Here originality and tradition are not opposite forces but are composed of each other. [p. 125]

Despite the ubiquity of weaving authors, I do not claim that the trope had the same meaning and function in all periods in which it appeared. It meant something very different in the context of Homer’s oral craftsmanship than in the context of Callimachus’s textual scholarship. However, the image is a good starting point for cross-cultural comparisons. Its historical recurrences and textual resonances reveal a good deal about what authorship was thought to be at any one time. One striking example comes from Dante, who in the Convivio (Banquet) makes weaving central to the definition of authorship. He derives the Latin word for “author,” auctor, from the verb auieo, “to tie words together,” commenting that the verb displays its own meaning, since it is composed of nothing but vowels, the sounds that tie words together. Further, the arrangement of the vowels also forms a tie: “Beginning with A, it then turns around to U, and goes straight through I into E, then turns around again and comes back into O, in such a way that it truly portrays this figure: A, E, I, O, U, which is the image of a knot” (Cominciando dall’A, nell’U quindi si rivolve, e viene diritto per I nell’E, quindi si rivolve
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it contributed to my generation, and that it is a partial reason for my existence (Mio volgare fu congiungitore delli miei generanti, che con esso parlavano. . . . Per che manifesto è lui essere concorso alla mia generazione, e cosi essere alcuna cagione del mio essere) (Convivio 1.13.4). Dante depicts himself as an outcome of the will-to-weaving that he identifies in language: having bound his parents together, it has produced a poet who will in turn bind words together through meter and rhyme. At once weaving and woven, Dante's agency is thus determined by his position between linguistic desire and poetic creation; he acts as a participant embroiled in a broader, self-perpetuating generative movement.

In the Divine Comedy the historical width and weight of that movement is dramatized through the double figures of Virgil and God. Both are positioned as the author's author, representing the double influence negotiated by Dante: Christian and classical. To Virgil, Dante says:

You are my teacher and my author,
you alone are the one from whom I took
the beautiful style for which I am renowned.

[Tu se’ lo mio maestro e’ll mio autore
tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore.]

(Inferno 1.85–87; Alighieri 1966–67, vol. 2)

When Dante speaks, Virgil speaks through him, so that he is not the sole author of his poems. As with Esagil-kin-apli, there is a double movement [p. 127] of self-assertion and self-effacement here, since Dante both highlights his own renown and exposes the historically mediated nature of all literary esteem (Ascoli 1992).

But Virgil's original influence is in turn shown to be yet another medial modification of an even more fundamental kind of authorship. Progressing into Paradise and so leaving Virgil behind, Dante is quizzed by Saint John about his goals. He replies that he desires nothing but God's love, for God is “Alpha and O of all the writing / that Love has
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read to me, lightly or loudly” (Alfa e O è di quanta scrittura / mi legge Amore o lievemente o forte) (Paradiso 26.17–18). Dante refers to God by the conjoining of two vowels — incidentally, perhaps metonymically, the first and last of auieo. I have noted that for Dante, vowels represent the force binding words together, making God, “the true author” (verace autore) (Paradiso 26.40), an ontological realization of that principle of interconnectedness. The result is a distinctly literary kind of omnipresence, represented through the building blocks that pervade all writing.

God thus becomes the name for a desire inherent in language and literature whose generative force ties letters to letters, words to words, and parents to parents, forming the ultimate precondition for all authorship—which, in this admittedly extreme perspective, is necessarily always medial. Dante refers to Virgil as his author in lines 85–87 of the first canto, and in lines 85–87 of the last canto he gazes into the light of God and sees there, “bound with love into one volume, / all that seems spread out across the world” (legato con amore in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna) (Paradiso 33.86–87). The implicit claim is both humbling and hubristic, and magnificently so. The agency of weaving authors is made a minute mirror of nothing less than divine presence, separate from it in the maximum degree but not in kind (Ascoli 1992: 64).

Far from the radical separation of the Romantic “lone genius,” Dante's weaving authors thus emerge from and participate in a global interweaving of words. Each thread of the text carries both the weight of past literary tradition and a rhythmic forward force, a generative desire embedded in the structure of language. I would stress that a notion of medial agency is crucial for a full appreciation of this model of authorship. If we take weaving authors either as shackled to their threads or as free and unbounded creators, we miss the defining complexity of the [p. 128] metaphor. Barthes (1967), for example, argues that “the text is a tissue of citations” and therefore that the “only power [of the author] is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others, so as never to sustain himself by just one of them.” This seems to me a willful misuse of the word only. In the recombination of writing lies a powerful creative potential, and, as emphasized by Enheduana, the author arranging older threads anew
still creates something no one created before. The other extreme is to take weaving simply as a metaphor for pure creation, forgetting that the threads of the trope are imbued with both historical weight and a force of their own, leaving weaving authors entangled in a negotiation with their material.

In culture after culture the position midway between history and creation is held to be the defining space of authorial activity. However, each culture represents that position differently: medial authorship can carry various implications and be imbricated in various discursive negotiations. To me, writing a history of authorship essentially means tracking the development of such differences and following the unfolding of tensions and transformations within the frame of medial agency. But what might such a history look like?

A history of multiple middles

An understanding of authors as primarily transmitters of texts is a far better frame for writing the history of the term than a focus on authors as original creators. First, the frame is more inclusive geographically and historically: the metaphor of weaving authors alone lets us compare literature from ancient Iraq, medieval India, and Renaissance Italy. Second, many turning points in the history of authorship concern the status and the configuration of a specifically medial position. For example, Bennett (2005a: 36) writes that the history of authorship revolves around a tension between two views, of the author “as divinely inspired, as sacred, as a seer, on the one hand, and as a craftsman of words whose allegiances and influence extend only to his power over language, story, and rhetoric itself, on the other.” Crucially, both visions assign authors a medial role. I have shown how weaving authors, as craftsmen of words, engage with existing material, and likewise how vatic poets receive their words from elsewhere. Because a model of authors [p. 129] as intermediaries encompasses both sides of the divide, it can aid us in describing the tension between them and the transformations
they underwent. This in turn leads us to recognize the wide historical variety within the concept of the author, both synchronically and diachronically. In this section I want to sketch out what a history of authorship based on such a model would look like.

The notion of inspiration illustrates the two advantages. First, like weaving authors, inspired poets are found across a multiplicity of cultural contexts, dramatically expanding the reach of the history of authorship. One may again invoke Enheduana, who writes of her nocturnal communion with the goddess Inana, or turn to Homer, who like Foucault portrays himself as not the subject but the indirect object of his own words: “Speak to me, Muse, of that ever-twisting man” (ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον) (*Odyssey* 1.1; Homer 1995). Or one may note the topos of authors claiming inspiration from dreams: Coleridge dreaming of Xanadu; the Old English poet Cædmon receiving his eloquence in a dream; or another author from ancient Iraq, Kabti-il-Marduk, who transcribed the *Epic of Erra* from a dream.

Second, inspired authors are a key site of historical contestation. In Plato's *Ion* Socrates describes authors as iron rings hanging from a magnet, representing the power of the god by which authors are enthused. From the authors’ rings, then, hang the rings of the rhapsodes who dramatized their poetry. The force of the god flows through the composing author, the performing rhapsode, and the enraptured audience, animating each in turn. A more striking instance of premodern authors being assigned an intermediary agency can hardly be found. However, here it does not exalt but criticizes authors, relocating literary accomplishments away from their human creators, in keeping with Plato’s denigration of poets in the *Apology* (22a–c) and the *Republic* (3.386a–398b).

Inspiration can thus be invoked both to glorify and to deprecate authors, but again, the divide is best understood as a tension within the frame of medial agency. In a nutshell, the history of authorship is an account of how diachronic developments rearranged, transformed, and reevaluated such tensions. We might consider, for example, the contrast between Plato’s inspiration and that depicted two millennia later...
Figure 1 [figure 2 in thesis]. Caravaggio, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew (San Matteo e angelo)*, 1602. Église Saint-Louis-des-Français. Courtesy of the Pieux Établissements de la France à Rome et à Lorette.
in Caravaggio’s *Inspiration of Saint Matthew* (fig. 1), in which the body of the [p. 131] aged apostle is contorted by his attempt to write and listen simultaneously. The twisting of his body—his face turned to the angel above him, his body launched upon the desk — places him at the focal point of the painting, and the orange of his cloak radiates against Caravaggio’s characteristically black background. Here, to be placed in a medial position is to appear at the center of the action, in keeping with the Renaissance ideal of human individuals positioned at the center of the natural world. In different periods with different notions about the status of the human subject, the same trope may be used for opposite ends.

The gradual displacement across centuries of the meaning of medial agency resulted in the coexistence of contradictory demands for authors to negotiate. Danielle Bohler (2006) argues that in their self-presentations medieval French authors alternate between two poses, profile and frontal. The profile pose identifies authors turned toward the past, discovering a manuscript in an obscure corner of the library, translating it, and so bringing it to deserved fame. The frontal pose indicates that the narrative does not assign them a subservient role, since they still assume a dominant speaking position. The interplay between poses enables authors to reconcile the double expectations of self-effacement and self-assertion—a tension I have noted also in Dante, who makes himself both central to the persistence of his language and a mere by-product of its desire.

It was this kind of negotiation within the frame of medial agency that produced the modern understanding of authors as originators. No radical break with prior conceptions, the ideal of the author as an original genius came about through the gradual dislocation of terms and tropes already in place. One such term, as remarked by Bianca Del Villano (2012), was *invention*. Etymologically derived from *invenio*, “to find,” the term originally denoted the recovery and rearrangement of older material but over time came to mean the opposite—artistic creation *ex nihilo*. Del Villano shows how, during the eighteenth-century shift in the authorial image, critics began to use previously prized metaphors of authorship to denigrate nonoriginal writers. Whereas
theatrical adaptation, for example, had once been awarded a dignified status, it was now seen as mere entertainment, and the metaphors used to describe it were recast accordingly. Del Villano quotes a passage from George Colman’s *Man of Business* (1774) that unravels the image of weaving authors. Of a more successful colleague, the character of the Author complains that [p. 132]

> His play to-night, like all he ever wrote,  
> Is pie-ball’d, piec’d, and patch’d, like Joseph’s coat;  
> Made up of shreds from Plautus and Corneille,  
> Terence, Moliere [sic], Voltaire, and Marmontel;  
> With rags of fifty others I might mention,  
> Which proves him dull and barren of invention.  
> (quoted in Del Villano 2012: 180)

Once a point of pride, engagement with the threads of tradition is here made an object of scorn, and lack of “invention” means lack of originality. The modern ideal of authors thus did not come into being as an entirely new vision of authorship but was constructed through the reversal and transformation of an ancient metaphorical frame. As it was constituted by the negation of older terms and tropes, the new ideal remained within their conceptual range. Recognition of the historical breadth and persistence of the medial frame thus serves as a counterpoint to the narrative of teleological emergence described above. The modern ideal of authors should be taken not as the “true” vision of authorship finally emerging from a premodern mess in the eighteenth century but as one modification among many (if a particularly radical one) in the terms of authorial mediation. Placed within this much larger history, rather than treated as an exception, the modern ideal can more clearly be seen as the result of an evolution of its constitutive terms.

Colman’s reference to Plautus and Terence is revealing, if somewhat ironic. In the prologue to *The Woman of Andros*, Terence in fact defends himself against an accusation very similar to that leveled by Colman’s Author: that he did not compose an original
play but adapted it from Menander. Terence (2001) points out that he is not alone in doing so: the same may be said of Naevius, Ennius, and Plautus, “whom our [Terence] takes as his models,” or literally, “as his authors” (quos hic noster auctores habet) (l. 19). The tension between adaptation and original composition goes back all the way to antiquity, and a figure like Plautus may be summoned both as an author whose original plot has been shamelessly adapted and as himself a model adapter, the author’s author, whose practice of emulation Terence sets out to emulate. The Romantic emphasis on authorial originality thus arose from within a matrix of reinterpretations: much older tensions were rearranged into new configurations. The frame of mediality is therefore a good starting point for studying the modern emergence of authorial originality, but, as shown above, a focus on originality is conversely a poor starting point for understanding premodern mediality.

The tension between originality and mediation did not end with the establishment of the Romantic ideal of authorship. As Bennett (2005a: 55) notes, the Romantics “both inaugurated a certain sense of authorship and, at the same time, in the very same breath, announced the author’s imminent demise.” Exalted to superhuman status, a genius in touch with creative forces beyond the common ken, the Romantic author was also strangely impersonal. Geniuses create original works, yet that originality springs not from their own conscious selves but from something inside them that they themselves cannot access (Bennett 2005b). The force of original genius thus elevated idealized authors but also left them without a full understanding of their own works. In an 1803 letter William Blake (1982: 728–29) asserted that he wrote Milton “from Immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation & even against my Will.” Once again, the claim of inspiration can lead just as easily to self-effacement as to elevation, and even Romantic originality can be framed as a form of mediation.

3 I thank the reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.
The inherent tension meant that by the end of the nineteenth century the status of the author could be reversed again, in what Robert Macfarlane (2007) describes as a resurgence of the older sense of *inventio*, as rediscovery and rearrangement. Whereas Edward Young in *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) had advocated that authors cut themselves off from tradition, so their minds might become unobstructed conduits of the originality residing within them, T. S. Eliot (1919) in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” employed the image of authors as conduits to reach the opposite conclusion. Authors should fully immerse themselves in literary tradition so their minds can catalyze the fusion of tradition with emotion. The good poet, according to Eliot, differs from others not by “having ‘more to say,’ but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations” (72). Both Young and Eliot portray authors as crucibles and not sources of literary creation: their minds are the loci where inhuman forces meet to become poetry. But [p. 134] within the frame of medial agency, tradition can be figured as both the essence and the opposite of originality.

In short, the medial role most often attributed to premodern authors is not categorically separate from that of the Romantic ideal. The view of authorship as involving the middle ranges of agency pervades literary history, encompassing and permeating even the radical shifts of the eighteenth century. Historical tensions and transformations unfold within the agential frame and prove easier to track with a focus on the metaphorics of mediality than with an eye always turned, teleologically, to a specifically modern configuration of authorship.

**Conclusion**

I would like to end by highlighting one advantage and one challenge that follow from a focus on the partial agency of premodern authors. The advantage is that the focus disturbs the masculinist bias of the history of authorship. Whereas the ideal of
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originality has persistently been associated with notions of maleness and fatherhood, the matter is less straightforward with medial authors. For example, the medieval French author Jean de Meun, who portrays authorship as an act of literal castration (Nichols 2016: 92–93), metaphorically cuts off and gains control of the genitals of a god, representing divine inspiration. This rather extreme instance of authorial mediation retains the association between maleness and creativity but also severs creativity from the actual male body.

Another example is a trope common to fin de siècle English literature, in which authors, typically women, are portrayed as mediums in the literal sense: communicating with otherworldly spirits and relaying their words to the mortal realm. The image is often combined with that of the “typewriter,” a female secretary whose expert fingers have become the perfect vehicle for a male employer—alive or dead. It is a vision of female authors that at first seems to present them as mere passive vessels. But as several scholars have shown, the image was repeatedly used to articulate female literary agency. The secretary transmitting the words of a dead employer could take control of a voice whose power and authority had otherwise been denied her (London 2005; Scherzinger 2010; White 2016). The metaphorics of mediation can thus derail expected constellations of gendered creativity. The trope of weaving likewise lends itself to the feminization of authorship, as textual labor has been associated with women in many (though not all) historical periods (see, e.g., Hyer 2016: 137–38; Karanika 2014: 4–5, 25–28).

Further, the broader geographic and temporal reach of the medial frame leads to the inclusion of more female authors, making neglected figures like Enheduana—the very first author, after all!—far more central to the history of authorship. Another revealing example is the twelfth-century Breton poet Marie de France. In her lay Guigemar she proposes to take a story that was commonly recounted among the Bretons and make of it a new version more suitable for its quality, since “whoever has good material for a story is grieved if the tale is not well told” (ki de bone matire traite, / mult li peise, se bien n’est faite) (Guigemar 1, in France 2003: 43). But because she frames her agency as
the reworking of older material rather than original composition, she is often denied the title of author, presented instead as a translator or versifier.

This leads me to the second point, the challenge of differentiating between “authors” and other agents of literary production—adapters, translators, editors, compilers, copyists, and so on. A view of authors as intermediaries complicates the easy separation of authors from others, which is often made on the basis of a dichotomy between the “true originator” and the various other participants in literary production. For instance, Wai-Yee Li (2017: 361-63) states that in the ancient Chinese context “the line between author and editor can . . . be nebulous,” citing the example of Confucius, who writes that “I transmit and do not create; I trust and love the ancient” (述而不作, 信而好古) (Analects 7.1, translation by Beecroft 2010: 44). As Beecroft points out, the word “transmit” (shu, 述) does not refer to a passive transfer of knowledge but has a deeper resonance. It refers to a sense of reenactment and reinstatement through performance, securing the continuity of tradition and so inviting repetition. In short, Confucius is saying that his work brings old texts into new existence, rather than creating them for the first time. But are we to take that kind of transmission as authorship or editorship?

Both Plato’s metaphor of the iron rings and Bonaventure’s list of roles explicitly juxtapose authors with other kinds of textual transmitters. The line between the various roles therefore cannot be taken for granted [p. 136] across periods: it was negotiated differently in different contexts. But as modern scholars, we should be aware of the values and assumptions we impose on our sources by assigning the title of author to some figures and not to others. Konrad Hirschler (2006: 43), for example, insists on using the term author to refer to medieval Arabic historians, noting that “the modern image of many medieval religious scholars as non-creative compilers of already existent information, which they merely rearranged without much originality, is closely linked to the more general idea of stagnation in the Islamic lands in this period.”

I certainly have no intention of determining how the line between authors and others should be drawn in contexts as disparate as those of medieval Brittany and ancient China. The decision must be made on a case-by-case basis so as best to reflect
the conceptual structure of the sources in question. But I do insist that we cannot deny the title of author to premodern figures simply because they are portrayed as textual mediators and not original creators. A broader view of literary history reveals that the idea of authors as intermediaries is the rule rather than the exception; accordingly, it is a much better point of departure for understanding the history of authorship in all its complexity.
The previous chapter sought (among other things) to counter an allegation that is often levied against cuneiform authors: that they are not really authors at all, because they are depicted as mediators rather than as original creators. For example, Kabti-ili-Marduk’s composition of *Erra* is among the best-established instances of authorship in cuneiform literature, because the authorial claim is written directly into the text itself. But is it an authorial claim? Kabti-ili-Marduk states that Erra “let him see it (the epic) at nighttime, and when he (Kabti-ili-Marduk) recited it upon waking, he neglected nothing, nor did he add a single line to it” (no. 1.2, V 43–44). The formulation has led some scholars to deny that Kabti-ili-Marduk should be an author in the true sense of the word. Hallo, for example, argues that “the reference to divine inspiration is simply a way of denying Kabti’s authorship of the epic and implying that he received it from an earlier authority.” Likewise, Karel van der Toorn claims that Kabti-ili-Marduk is “a

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1 Hallo, “New Viewpoints,” 15.
channel rather than an author. (...) The author, in other words, is not the real author.”

On the basis of such arguments, Alan Lenzi concludes that “claims of authorship in the modern sense did not exist in Mesopotamia. (...) It is usually more appropriate therefore to speak of scribes as editors rather than authors.” If this statement is correct, it would invalidate the foundation of the present thesis. But I do not think it is.

The previous chapter showed that, rather than weakening Kabti-ili-Marduk’s claim to authorship, his self-portrait as a “channel” is perfectly in line with how authorship is understood across the majority of literary cultures, up to and including the modern period. The fact that Kabti-ili-Marduk is depicted as a mediator does not invalidate his claim to authorship; on the contrary, it is fully representative of authorship in general. Rather than viewing cuneiform authors as the flawed precursors of a modern ideal, we should treat them as exemplary case studies of how authorship is understood across the premodern world. With that in mind, this chapter turns from the general considerations presented in the previous chapter to cuneiform cultures specifically. I explore how the notion of authors as mediators affects our understanding of cuneiform literature by analyzing a series of Sumerian and Akkadian accounts of how texts come into being.

Despite my disagreement with the conclusion he reaches, Lenzi is right in saying that “claims of authorship in the modern sense did not exist in Mesopotamia” (emphasis added). But what of authorship in a Babylonian sense? What sense would that be? The present chapter explores two tropes that are often used to depict authors in cuneiform culture, which I have floridly termed “weavers” and “dreamers.” Kabti-ili-Marduk belongs to the latter category, the dreamers, meaning authors who compose their text in direct conversation with a god during the night and pass it on to a human audience during the day. The other category, the weavers, are said to take existing threads of text and arrange them into a new pattern, thereby reworking age-old material into a new version fit for circulation. Crucially, both roles practice a form of mediation: from gods

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2 van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 41.

3 Lenzi, “Mesopotamian Scholarship,” 151–53.
to humans in the first case, from the ancient past to a present audience in the second. The authors thus appear as *temporal hinges* in an often symmetrical transfer of text, leading from the past to the author and from the author on to future circulation.

Once again, it is worth emphasizing that these tropes do not necessarily reflect the historical reality of literary composition. What is interesting about them is rather their narrative structure, and the fact that these structures may reflect underlying notions of how literature works, as outlined in chap. 3. It should also be noted that, while weavers and dreamers are the most common tropes of cuneiform authorship, they are not the only ones. In chap. 7, where I examine the connection between authors, kings, and gods, I present two other such tropes: “petitioning authors” like Bullussa-rabi, whose authorship is depicted as an appeal to the gods; and “tragic royals” like Naram-Sin, whose authorship is depicted as a royal declaration addressed to posterity. The tropes do not exclude one another; in fact they often overlap. Enheduana shares features of them all: she is a royal princess who call herself a “weaver of texts” and who prays to a goddess during the night. The four tropes should therefore be seen, not as a typology, but as overlapping metaphors of literary activity.

Having analyzed recurrent patterns in cuneiform stories about how texts come into being, I end the chapter by asking what these patterns might mean for how texts were conceptualized. To see authorship as a form of mediation affects not only one’s notion of “the author,” but also one’s notion of “the text.” After all, it is impossible to define what authors are without reference to the texts they compose, and equally impossible to describe what texts are without reference to their composer. The two concepts are inherently entangled, so that a shift in one will inevitably lead to a shift in the other. In this case, a notion of authors as mediators leads to a notion of texts as composite entities, that is, new arrangements of existing material—and not the monolithic brand-new outpourings of an individual genius.
The dead of night

“She is the one who intervened. Eminent in the assembly, magnificent in the counsel chamber, attendant of the Anunnaki-gods: exalted is her power. Let me praise the heavenly Igigi-gods—let me sing!”

In the time of Tiglathpileser, king of Assyria, she let Ahassu-Sherua see a vision during the night, and [he recited (?)] these lines about it [in the morning (?)].

[Month ..., day ...]4, the limmu of Ashur-da’in[anni], governor of Mazamua. (no. 3.2)

This tiny hymn is a tiny landmark in the history of authorship, as it is the first time in world literature that an author’s composition can be dated precisely. There are much older instances of authorship—Enheduana lived about a millennium and a half before Ahassu-Sherua—but these are impossible to date to anything but the nearest century. Cuneiform authors mostly appear in our sources as free-floating names, if not fictional then always cut off from their original context, but Ahassu-Sherua is the earliest known exception to that rule. The Assyrians did not number their years, instead naming them after a high-ranking official known as the limmu, and Ashur-da’inanni held that office in 733 BC. Had it not been for the break in the text, we might even have dated Ahassu-Sherua’s authorship to a specific day.

The hymn does not name the goddess to whom it is addressed. One possibility is Sherua, the goddess of dawn, because she was the consort of the god Ashur and one of the major deities in the Assyrian pantheon. Further, there is at least one other case in cuneiform literature where the name (or perhaps pen name) of the author mirrors that of the deity to whom the hymn is addressed: Bullussa-rabi, whose name means “her healing is great,” composed The Great Gula Hymn to the goddess of healing (no. 1.3). It is possible that Ahassu-Sherua, literally “His support is Sherua,” likewise composed a hymn to his divine namesake. The opening statement suggests that Ahassu-Sherua composed the hymn to thank the goddess for some reversal of fortune he attributed to
her intervention, but even if it is just a short expression of gratitude, it is still unmistakably a literary text. The “counsel chamber” (bit milki) mentioned in the second line is a rare Akkadian expression that alludes to Enuma Elish, where Marduk is called “he who is revered in the counsel chamber” (ša ina bit milki kabtu, VII 3). The intertextual reference draws our brief hymn into a broader poetic tradition.

It is a topos of cuneiform literature that poems end by describing the moment of their composition, and even this tiny text is no exception. Its last word is lazmur, translated here as “Let me sing”: with this word, the narrator proclaims his intention to recite the hymn we have just finished reading. But the colophon goes on to inform us that Ahassu-Sherua did not compose the text himself: he saw it in a dream revealed to him by the goddess to whom it is addressed. The juxtaposition of the two statements produces a circular bond between goddess and author, as the deity ventriloquizes her self-praise through a grateful follower. He speaks to her; she speaks through him. The goddess is both source and destination of the text, and the author the vehicle through which her words flow back to herself.

The text is fragmentary and its restoration uncertain, but the suggestion that Ahassu-Sherua recited the hymn “in the morning” is based on a parallel to other cuneiform narratives of authorship: texts are elsewhere said to have been composed during the night and performed the following day. The sequence would be particularly fitting if the addressee was indeed Sherua, the goddess of dawn—what better deity to preside over the transition from night to day? Ahassu-Sherua’s claim to authorship may thus abide by the temporal logic of his addressee, as his authorship takes place, not at a specific moment in time, but during the transition from one time to another. I argued in chap. 3 that the “author” always signifies both a single figure and a sequence of events, meaning that authors condense the process of literary production into one body. As shown in this chapter, the cuneiform model of authorship repeatedly emphasizes a key

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4 Lambert, Creation Myths, 125–26.

5 Foster, “On Authorship.”
temporal threshold in that process, placing authors midway between night and day, composition and performance, gods and humans.

Ahassu-Sherua is an example of a trope that is widespread in literary history: the author receiving the text in a dream, often from a god, and later relaying it to a human public. Some examples were presented above (p. 87), but still more could be added. To take just two examples from far-flung contexts, the Old French historian Gregory of Tours claims that his dead mother urged him to write *De virtutibus Sancti Martini* in a dream,⁶ and in 16th century India, king Krishna Deva Raya was ordered in a dream to write a book in his vernacular tongue, Telugu.⁷ Freud even postulates that authors are natural dreamers, since he claims that literary authorship grows out of the common impulse of daydreaming.⁸

The association between dreams and authorship is also established in cuneiform literature. I already mentioned Kabti-ilili-Marduk’s claim that *Erra* was narrated to him in a dream, and as discussed on p. 65–66, there is a remarkable overlap between his and Ahassu-Sherua’s authorial claims. The full passage from *Erra* reads as follows:

> The weaver of its tablets (i.e. of the epic) was Kabti-ilili-Marduk, son of Dabibi: He (Erra) let him (Kabti-ilili-Marduk) see it at nighttime, and when he (Kabti-ilili-Marduk) recited it upon waking, he neglected nothing, nor did he add a single line to it. Erra heard it and approved, rejoicing over that which concerned his vanguard Ishum. All the gods praised his sign!" (no. 1.2, V 42–47)

As is clear from this passage, the two tropes discussed in this chapter are not mutually exclusive: Kabti-ilili-Marduk refers to himself as both weaver and dreamer within the

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⁷ Pollock, “Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture,” 82.
⁸ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming.”
same couplet. This is not surprising if one takes the metaphors as referring to the same kind of activity, namely the final reworking of a poetic text received from elsewhere. According to both images, Kabti-ili-Marduk was responsible for taking “raw” literary material (a dream and a tangle of threads) and shaping it into a definite form.

The text highlights the author’s meticulous precision in this process, as he neither omitted nor added even a single line. Note the strange structure of the couplet: an overlong line of 26 syllables is followed by one of just 12 syllables. Since the normal line of Akkadian poetry consists of two half-lines separated by a caesura, the distribution of what would seem to be three half-lines in l. V 43 and a single half-line in l. V 44 is remarkable. A possible explanation is that the prosody of the couplet reinforces the authorial claim made in it, namely that Kabti-ili-Marduk resisted all temptations to add, remove, or transpose any lines at all, even if it would have yielded a more conventional arrangement of the text.

What is most significant about the passage is the way it depicts the transition from night to day, establishing a temporal symmetry and placing the author at the heart of it. The description of Kabti-ili-Marduk’s authorship is structured by a parallelismus membrorum, meaning that it follows the sequence AB/AB: “In the nighttime he let him see it; / when in waking he recited it...” (ina šat mūši ušabrīšu-ma ša ina munatti idbubu: temporal phrase—verb / temporal phrase—verb). This parallelism establishes a series of symmetrical relations between the two halves of the line: night / day, receiving / reciting, sight / sound. Authorship is depicted as a movement across these binaries, making literary compositions a two-part process. Within this mirroring structure, Kabti-ili-Marduk places himself in a rather curious position, seeing as he occupies different grammatical states in the two phrases that together describe his authorship. In the first

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9 Foster, “Authorship in Cuneiform Literature,” 21, draws a parallel to a modern poet, Julia Ward Howe, who in an account of her authorship likewise interweaves the two tropes.
11 On this grammatical ambiguity, see also Foster, “Authorship in Cuneiform Literature,” 14–15.
part of the line, he is the object, receiving the text from somebody else; in the second part, he is the subject, reciting it himself. The epic moves into his mind and out of his mouth; and the text stresses the correctness of that transfer and the author’s skill as a flawless conduit. As a result, the author is depicted as a Janus-faced character, both object and subject, recipient and speaker of his own text.

The authorial symmetry depicted in *Erra* is found also in the climactic passage of Enheduana’s *Exaltation*:

> Queen, beloved of Heaven! I will recount your wrath.
> I have piled up the coals, I have prepared the purifying ritual.
> The Temple of the Holy Inn awaits you. Will you heart not have pity on me?
> (My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
> what I have told you in the dead of night,
> a gala singer shall repeat for you at midday. (no. 1.1, l. 135–40)

In this passage, Enheduana gives birth to the poem in a nighttime communion with Inana and a ritual singer performs it on the following day. Again, it is remarkable how clearly this narrative of authorship is structured by binary transitions. There is a movement from night to day and composition to performance, as well as a spatial movement from private to public: Enheduana and Inana meet in a chapel known as the “Holy Inn,” while the singer later performs the song for all to hear. This transfer also leads to yet another symmetry, namely that between self and other, as Enheduana’s words literally “exceed her” and are taken over by somebody else.

Though the narrative of authorship found in the *Exaltation* and in *Erra* share some crucial features—most notably their temporal structure—there is also an important difference. Kabti-ili-Marduk receives his epic from a god, while Enheduana composes her hymn to a goddess. In both cases, authorship is depicted as a direct nighttime communication with a deity, but the modern emphasis on authorial originality would differentiate sharply between the two: Enheduana is the source of her poem, Kabti-ili-
Marduk the channel of his. But according to the ancient notion of authorship, originality is not a defining criterion, since the two figures can be described in remarkably similar terms. What matters is not the presence or absence of originality, but rather the narrative sequence of events leading from divine contact, through nighttime conversation, to a public presentation of the text.

Significantly, Erra and the Exaltation are alike in describing their own composition through a parallelismus membrorum coupled with a grammatical shift in the author’s position. Translated literally, the last lines of the passage from the Exaltation reads: “what—in the dead of night—I spoke to you / a singer—at midday—will repeat to you” (niĝ, ĝi-u₃-na ma-ra-an-du₃,ga-am₁₁ / gala-e an-bar,-ka šu ḫu-mu-ra-ab-gi₁₋g₁₄). The grammatical structure is the same (noun—temporal phrase—verbal phrase / noun—temporal phrase—verbal phrase), once again depicting authorship as a symmetrical two-part process. And while Kabti-ili-Marduk was transformed from object to subject, Enheduana undergoes a different but no less significant grammatical shift. After her words have been repeated by a singer, she is transformed from first-person narrator into a third-person character: the authorial “I” disappears from her own poem and becomes instead a “she.” I will have much more to say about this shift in the next chapter; for now, it is enough to note that the syntactical shift again casts the author as a split character whose agential relation to her own text is left ambiguous.

The sequence of night and day explored above is echoed in other cuneiform literary texts that do not deal with authorship directly. In Gilgamesh, the eponymous hero wakes up each night of his journey to the Cedar Forest, horrified by a nightmare. Each night, his friend Enkidu interprets the dreams to signify certain victory in their coming battle against Humbaba. After this interpretation, Enkidu adds a reassuring remark: “In the morning, we will see a good message from the sun god Shamash” (u ina šēri amat Šamaš damiṭa nimmar, IV 33 and passim). Since dreams were seen as direct messages sent by the gods, the logic of this sequence is the same as for the dreaming authors: a private communication from the god during the night is followed by a public display...
during the day. Gilgamesh's dreams are thus to be reinforced by a daytime declaration visible to all. Indeed, it is possible that the association between authorship and the transition from night to day stems from the fact that, in cuneiform cultures, extispicy omens were often taken at sunrise. Since the omens were seen as communications from the gods, it is plausible that dawn came to be seen more generally as a time that was particularly propitious for receiving divine messages.

Likewise, in *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*, the protagonist Shubshi-meshre-Shakkan endures seemingly endless hardships at the hands of Marduk. When Marduk finally takes mercy on the sufferer, he announces his decision in a dream:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ina šutti (mašš-geš)} & \text{ 1'ur-[šin-tin-uq₅] ga bābulāya ([t]in-[t][i₂]) [a-na-at-ta]} \\
\text{et-šu ūr-ru a-pi̇r a-ga-šu} & \\
\text{maššaššum-ma (mašš-šaš-um-ma) na-š[i]} & \text{le-[š]} \\
\text{Marduk-ma (š/a-mar-etu-ma) iš-pi̇r-a-an-[ni]} & \\
\text{a-na Šubši-meš-re-e₂ Šakkan₂ u₁-bil-la ši-[m-da]} & \\
\text{ina gātēšu (šu₂-šu₂) ellēti (ku₂₂[m²]) u₁-bil-la ši-[m-da]} & \\
\text{a-na mu₃-tab-bi-li-i₃a, qa-tùš-šu₂, ip-q[i₂-id]} & \\
\text{ina mu₃-na-at-ti iš-pi̇r-a ši-p[i₂-ta]} & \\
\text{it-tùš dam₃-q₃a-tu niši₃ya (un₂₂[mi₂₂]-i₃a₂₂) uk-[t]ul₃im] & \\
\end{align*}
\]

In the dream, [I saw] Ur-Nintinugga, a Babylonian (?), a bearded young man crowned with a diadem, an exorcist carrying a tablet.

He said: “Marduk has sent me.

I have brought Shubshi-meshre-Shakkan a healing [bandage].

From his holy hands, I have brought a healing [bandage]!”

He consigned me to the hands of my helper,

\[\text{Koch, “Concepts and Perception of Time.”}\]

\[\text{For the specific trope of the sun god sending positive messages in the morning, see Janowski,} Rettungsgewissheit und Epiphanie.\]
and in the morning, he sent me a message, revealing his favorable sign to my people. (III 40–48)\textsuperscript{14}

As in *Gilgamesh*, a nighttime communication from a god is followed by a public demonstration of that god’s decision on the following day. Note the use of the word “reveal” (*uktallim*): what was at first visible only to the dreamer is then revealed to the entire population in the morning.

It is the same temporal logic as the one found in the narratives of authorship, and the same dichotomy between nighttime privacy and daytime publicity. But there is also a crucial difference. In *Gilgamesh* and *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*, the god speaks twice: first to the dreamer, then publicly to everyone. In the narratives of authorship, the god speaks to the dreamer at night and the dreamer speaks to the human audience during the day. The trope of dreaming authors is therefore structurally similar to other narratives of twofold divine communication in cuneiform cultures, but with the twist that the author come to occupy a doubled syntactical position, making them Janus-faced characters.

Finally, the trope of the dreaming author receives a sardonic twist in *The Netherworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince*. Here, the main character sees a vision of the afterlife in a dream, observing and speaking with the gods of the Netherworld. He wakes up overwhelmed by this experience and runs through the street of his city like a madman—farting, burping, and eating dirt. He shouts out his dream to the population of Assur, praising the Netherworld gods. Then, at the end of the story, the narrator of the text introduces himself: he is a scribe reporting the madman’s words to the palace. “With the wise intellect that Ea had bestowed upon him, he took these words of praise to his heart (...) He went and repeated it to the palace” (*ina uzni nikilti ša Ea ušatlimušu egirrê dilîli išdud-ma ... ilik-ma ana ekallî ušanni*, rev. 33–35).\textsuperscript{15} The conclusion of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 76.
\end{flushright}
*Netherworld Vision* is interesting because it reads like a parody of the dreaming authors. Many of the trope’s key elements are retained: a nighttime vision followed by a public proclamation, the dreamer having a direct conversation with the gods, and the composition depicted as a transfer across binaries—in this case from the afterlife to the land of the living. As with Kabti-ili-Marduk, there is also an emphasis on the scribe’s ability to correctly memorize and repeat the words of others.

However, the text also questions the dreamer’s reliability as a conduit of the story, since the dream plunges him into madness. Further, the text introduces a second layer of mediation, namely the scribe who hears the dreamer’s words and repeats them to the palace. Rather than stressing the divine origin of the story and the author’s privileged position as its conduit, here the trope is used to highlight the dubious character of the narrative, confounding the readers’ expectation that they may gain access to divine revelation through the retelling of a dream. One might thus suggest that the *Netherworld Vision* ends with a subtle critique of the trope by which figures like Kabti-ili-Marduk and Ahassu-Sherua justified their authorship, calling into question the veracity of dreams and the sanity of those who relay them.

**Tangled threads**

The second trope to be discussed—authors as weavers—is no less widespread than the first. As noted above, the association between authorship and weaving is ubiquitous in literary history, and again, more examples could easily be adduced: Saint Augustine admits that despite his aversion to Greek poetry he finds Homer “skilled in weaving such fables” (*peritus texere tales fabellas*, 1.14.23), while Petrarch invites the world to admire Boccaccio as a “good weaver of loving words” (*buon testor degli amorosi detti*,

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*Saint Augustine, Confessions, 40–41.*
Likewise, the foundational classic of Chinese poetry, Shi Jing, is literally called The Warp of Songs, the word jīng (經) meaning both “warp” and “classical text.”

Note, however, that the term “weaver” should be taken with a grain of salt: the trope of authorship as textile labor includes not only metaphors of weaving, but also of knotting, tying, sewing, and the like. What they all have in common is that they portray authorship as the reworking of pre-existing threads, with each thread corresponding to either individual words, phrases and formulas, or entire compositions. As shown in my analysis of Dante’s Divina Commedia, examining the metaphor within the frame of mediation can reveal a complex and sophisticated understanding of what is at stake in literary production. But whereas Dante’s metaphor of weaving emphasizes the structures embedded in language, the cuneiform metaphors of weaving more often emphasize the temporality of textual production.

Just as in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, weaving is a key part of the terminology of authorship in both Sumerian and Akkadian. As noted above, Kabti-il Marduk refers to himself as “the weaver of its tablets” (kāṣir kammišu), that is, the composer of Erra. The expression is not limited to the composition of poetry but is also applied to scholarly texts. In a Late Babylonian propagandistic text known as The Verse Account of Nabonius, king Nabonidus is said to have made a fool of himself by misspeaking the name of the astrological series Enuma Anu Enlil and misattributing it to Adapa (for the full extent of Nabonidus’s faux pas, see the commentary on p. 379–80 below). He claims to be an expert in “the series Uskar Anu Enlil, which Adapa composed” (no. 5.7, l. v 12’). While Nabonidus is wrong about who composed the series, what is interesting in this context is how that attribution is described: with the verb kašāru, “to weave.” Even in his apparent lunacy, Nabonidus preserves the traditional cuneiform notion of authorship as weaving.

The same metaphor is also found in Sumerian sources. The Temple Hymns ends with the following postscript: “The weaver of tablets was Enheduana. My king! Something

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\(^{17}\) Petrarca, Canzoniere, 31.
has been born which had not been born before” (no. 3.1, l. 543–44). Since Enheduana is the earliest known author, it is revealing that this text—in establishing for the very first time a discourse of literary authorship—seizes on the metaphor of weaving. In fact, the same metaphor also crops up in other Sumerian compositions, though there it is used to describe not human but divine authorship. In another hymn to a temple, The Kesh Temple Hymn, the text is attributed to the joint authorship of Enlil and Nidaba, the goddess of writing.\(^\text{18}\) “When Kesh lifted its head among the lands, Enlil spoke the hymn of Kesh. Nidaba was its arbiter (?): with its words as threads, she wove it, and held it in her hand, written on a tablet” (no. 1.7, l. 8–12). Here the logic of the metaphor is made particularly clear. Nidaba takes Enlil’s words as if they were threads, arranges them into a textile, and finally puts that “text” into writing. It is telling that, though Nidaba is the goddess of writing and so presumably the ultimate authority in literary matters, her authorship is still depicted as a form of mediation, seeing as she rearranges words that Enlil created.

The most elaborate cuneiform instance of the trope of weaving is the account of Esagil-kin-apli’s authorship of the medical series \textit{Sagi}g and \textit{Alamdimmû}, found midway through a catalogue of the tablets contained in those series. In a passage that John Z. Wee has termed “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto,”\(^\text{19}\) the author lays out the rationale of his compositions:

> Regarding (the medical entries) that had not been bound in a new edition since days of old, but were tangled like threads, and for which there was no duplicate: During the reign of Adad-apla-iddina, king of Babylon, [in order to shape them (?)] anew, Esagil-kin-apli (...), with the ingenious intellect that Ea and Gula (?) had granted him, contemplated (it) in his mind, and so bound \textit{Sagi}g from skull to feet in a new edition, establishing (it for the

\(^{18}\) The goddess is also called “Nisaba”; see Civil, “Enlil and Ninlil,” 43.

\(^{19}\) Wee, “Phenomena in Writing,” 253.
advancement of) knowledge. Regarding both series, their arrangement (lit. binding) is the same. (no. 2.2, l. 51–68)

Esagil-kin-apli explains that his composition of \textit{Sagig} and \textit{Alamdimmû} was based on the “threads” of older medical texts, which at the time were “tangled” in confusion and had no duplicate, meaning that each medical text was arranged differently. The author reshaped these “threads” to produce a new and authoritative version, with a fixed sequence that would serve as a new standard.\footnote{The translation of the word \textit{zarû} as “a new edition” will be discussed below.}

Cuneiform medical series comprise long lists of entries, all with the same format. An entry consists of a protasis (“if a man...”) describing the symptoms of the disease, and a protasis (“then...”) describing the consequences of that disease: whether the patient will live or die and how he is to be treated. Each entry is thus an individual unit, and the quoted passage seems to present each entry as a “thread” that had existed individually since the days of yore, but whose sequence had been fluid and confused up to Esagil-kin-apli’s intervention. His authorship thus consisted not in composing new entries but in arranging them into a definite order. As the text notes, the arrangement (literally, the “tying together,” \textit{riksu}) of the two series is the same: both proceed “from skull to feet” (\textit{ultu muḫḫi adi šēpēti}). The subseries of \textit{Sagig} and \textit{Alamdimmû} are indeed structured according to the same sequence, progressing downwards through the body—a principle also found in Classical medicine, where it is known as \textit{a capite ad calcem}. In other words, the manifesto states that Esagil-kin-apli devised a new, conceptually clearer format by which to organize medical material.

This account is not a bad fit for what we actually know about the development of medical literature in Akkadian. The Isin II period (1157–1026 BCE) witnessed a process that Heeßel has termed the “serialization” of Akkadian scholarship, where older
material was arranged into a more-or-less fixed sequence of tablets. Though a measure of textual variation persisted into the first millennium BCE, it was during the late second millennium that scholarly texts like *Sagig* and literary texts like *Gilgamesh* were put into a relatively standardized format. It is tempting to identify Esagil-kin-apli as an actual historical individual who lived during that time and who was responsible for the serialization of the medical compendia. However, the evidence for the historicity of this claim is scant, and either way, I would again stress that the narrative of authorship is revealing in itself, regardless of its accuracy. Notably, the quoted passage ties the trope of weaving to the temporal dimension explored above. The description of Esagil-kin-apli’s authorship highlights the transition from past to present: the threads of medical material had existed “since the days of old” (ša ultu ulla), but Esagil-kin-apli shaped them “anew” (ēššiš). As with the dreamers, the trope of weaving positions the author as a temporal hinge in the transfer of texts. Whereas the dreaming authors presided over a transition from night to day, the weaving author oversees a transition from the ancient past where the threads have their origin, to a future where the text will circulate for the advancement of education (*ana iḫzi*). In short, the trope of weaving denotes a literary transmutation of old content into a new form, making the temporal dimension of authorship central to the metaphor.

As noted above (p. 81–82), the descriptions of both Enheduana’s and Esagil-kin-apli’s authorship emphasize their innovative achievements despite the fact that they are also said to have worked with existing material. Esagil-kin-apli’s arrangement of the medical entries in the sequence “skull to feet” is presented as a truly remarkable achievement, a feat that required nothing less than an ingenious intellect bestowed upon the author by Ea. Likewise, the postscript to *The Temple Hymns* states that Enheduana “created

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21 Heeßel, “Sieben Tafeln.” Heeßel’s term “serialization” was devised as an alternative to the traditional but misleading name given to this process, canonization. The cuneiform texts never reached a canonical fixity comparable to that of the Biblical books, but were rather established in a fixed sequence of tablets arranged into series—hence the term “serialization.”
something that had never been created before," even though the literary history of the hymns shows that their composer drew on an existing tradition of hymns. If authorship is understood as originality, the claims appear self-contradictory: how can Esagil-kin-apli and Enheduana be described as innovative if their authorship relied so extensively on existing material? But if authorship is understood as mediation, the claims make much more sense. The imagery of weaving suggests that the “newness” of the composition is not to be found in the individual passages—the threads of the text—but in the way these passages are arranged into new patterns. Esagil-kin-apli’s manifesto emphasizes both the ancient origin of the text and his innovative contribution, simply because the two are not seen as contradictory. Enheduana’s and Esagil-kin-apli’s authorship are thus neither fully derivative nor fully original; rather, they occupy a medial position between the past and the present. Cuneiform authors are defined by this symmetry; they are Janus-faced characters.

**Authorial symmetry**

To summarize, the tropes of weavers and dreamers depict authorship as a movement across binaries—from night to day, receiving to reciting, past to present, private to public, self to other, inside to outside, divine to human, confusion to order, source to circulation, ancient origins to innovative forms. In each case, the author acts as the pivot of the narrative, bringing the text to its current form and allowing the audience to access it.

No other figure from the cuneiform world embodies this symmetry quite as well as Enmeduranki, who was credited with establishing the practice of extispicy (the reading of omens in the entrails of sacrificed animals, particularly the livers of sheep). Though no ancient text securely establishes that Enmeduranki was seen as the author of *Barutu*, the series of liver omens, he does share many key features with other cuneiform authors,
being depicted as a mediator who connected the divine origin and the human circulation of the text. *The Legend of Enmeduranki* begins as follows:

Enmeduranki, king of Sippar,
beloved of Anu, Enlil, and Ea:
Shamash [ ] from the Ebabbar.

Shamash and Adad [led him into] their assembly,
Shamash and Adad [honoured him],
Shamash and Adad [seated him before] them on a throne of gold,
revealed to him how to examine oil in water—a secret of Anu, Enlil, and Ea—
gave him the liver—tablet of the gods, mystery of heaven and earth—
and had him carry cedar tree, a wood beloved of the great gods.

And he, according to their command (?), led the citizens of Nippur,
Sippar, and Babylon into his presence,
honoured them and seated them before him on thrones,
revealed to them how to examine oil in water—a secret of Anu, Enlil, and Ea—
gave them the liver—tablet of the gods, mystery of heaven and earth—
and had them carry cedar tree, a wood beloved of the great gods. (no. 1.9, l. 1–15)

The story establishes a point-by-point correspondence between what the gods do to the human mediator and what he does to the general population. Like Kabti-ili-Marduk, the mediator’s position is syntactically split: he is the object of the first passage and the subject of the second. Through its studiously doubled structure, the text makes evident a general pattern that runs across cuneiform narratives of authorship—a pattern that consists of symmetry, repetition, transfer, and shifts in the subject position.

Even if Enmeduranki is never depicted as an author in the strict sense of the word, his story perfectly encapsulates a wider cuneiform notion of how texts come into being. Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensonner describe this process as a sequence of operations leading from *Offenbarung* (“revelation,” transferring the text from a god to a
human), through Abschrift ("transcript," transferring the text from an oral communication to a written document), to Sukzession ("succession," transferring the text from copy to copy throughout time). This sequence constituted a standardized narrative that lent authority to a given cuneiform text, tracing that authority step by step from the text’s divine origin to its present incarnation.22

In short, a cuneiform text had to have both a distant source, in order for it to be authoritative, and a present circulation, in order for it to be readable. The author was the crucial link that reconciled this double requirement of distance and presence, transferring the text from its authoritative origin to its actual audience. As a result, the cuneiform narratives of authorship came to be structured as a two-part process, with each part satisfying one of these requirements. The Legend of Enmeduranki demonstrates just how symmetrical the relation between those two parts could be: here we find precisely the same process, repeated verbatim. The exactness of the transfer guaranteed that the authority bestowed on the text by its divine origins is fully preserved as it circulates in the human realm.

The two-part structure can have surprising consequences for the narrative of authorship, of which I would like to highlight two: a text can end up with two sets of authors or with no author at all. The first example is a manuscript of the third tablet of the medical series UGU, which deals with diseases of the head. The contents of the tablet are summarized as follows:

Salves and bandages—tried, checked, and presented for use—by the old sages from before the Flood, which, in Shuruppak, in the second year of Enlil-bani, king of Isin, Enlil-muballit, the sage of Nippur, left (for posterity). (no. 3.12, l. iv 21–24)

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22 Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensonner, “Abschrift, Offenbarung, Sukzession.”
The two-part structure is the same as usual: the text is attributed to an ancient origin that guarantees its authority, in this case the antediluvian sages, and is then said to have gone through a human mediator that ensured its circulation into the future. Enlilmuballit is thus turned towards both past and posterity, yielding the now familiar Janus-faced structured. As Steinert puts it, even though Enlilmuballit is not depicted as the original creator of the text, “this scholar was regarded as a central person in the textual transmission of these recipes.” However, unlike the other narratives explored so far, here both halves of the two-part process are depicted as a form of human authorship. The text is said to derive “from the mouth of” (ša pī) the sages, and the precise same phrase is used to denote authorship in the Catalogue. The medical recipes were thus composed by the sages and then mediated by Enlilmuballit, but confusingly, both parts of that process have close parallels to other authorial claims. This, then, is one possible complication of the cuneiform account of authorship: because it consists of two parts, a single text can be said to have been authored twice.

Just as strikingly, the same structure can lead to a text having no authors. Enuma Elish describes its own composition as follows: “A revelation that the first one (maḫrû) recited before him (Marduk): He wrote it down and set it up for the future to hear” (no. 1.8, VII 157–58). A composer, referred to as “the first one,” is said to have presented the text for Marduk’s approval, before setting it down in writing and then transmitting it to posterity. This account shares a number of key features with the other narratives explored so far. Like Enheduana’s Exaltation, Enuma Elish refers to itself as having been composed in a direct conversation with the god to whom it is addressed, and then circulated for all to hear (though the temporal specification of night and day is absent from Enuma Elish). The two-part structure is thus intact: the narrative progresses from an initial contact with a deity to a subsequent public reception, and the author is once again the hinge that links the two parts. However, even as the general structure of cuneiform authorship is preserved, the actual author is removed from it. The name of

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23 Steinert, “Tested’ Remedies,” 130.
The author is replaced by the anonymous designation *mahrū*, “the first one,” and we have no way of ascertaining who it refers to. Because authorship is constructed first and foremost as a concatenation of events—a narrative structure from which an individual emerges, rather than the other way around—it can retain its form regardless of whether an author is included in it.

The preceding sections have analysed cuneiform accounts of how texts come into being. But if this is how texts are said to be created, what does that mean for how texts were conceptualized? In the following, I argue that the notion of authorship as mediation leads to a notion of texts as composite entities, made up of strands that are not original to the text in question but which derive from a multitude of sources. The text thus comes to be seen as a meeting point for a number of disparate parts, which are brought together to form a new whole.

**What is a text?**

The question of how to define authorship cannot be disentangled from the question of how to define a text. To take just one example, *The Catalogue of Texts and Authors* is often treated as a remarkable document specifically because of its authorial attributions,²⁴ but as its name indicates, it is a document about texts just as much as it about authors, and its treatment of compositions like *Gilgamesh* and *Etana* is no less informative than its treatment of Sin-leqi-unnenni and Lu-Nanna.

The *Catalogue* presents the texts as self-standing entities: each is attributed to a single author in its entirety and must therefore have been perceived as an at least somewhat bounded, coherent unity. However, it is not always apparent that this should be the case. When first editing the *Catalogue*, Lambert speculated that *The Series of Sidu*...
mentioned in section 5+6, l. 13', might be *Atra-hasis*, which is clearly a coherent and unified narrative. But in 1980, Finkel discovered a text that gave an overview of *The Series of Sidu*, listing its 35 tablets (no. 2.4). At the time, many of those tablets were already known as independent compositions, including *The Farmer’s Instructions*, *The Song of the Plowing Oxen*, *The Ballad of Early Rulers*, and various proverb collections, but previously there had been no indication that the ancient scribes regarded these compositions as part of the same series. Even today, their coherence as a series is far from clear. They are all bilingual compositions related to sagacious advice about life and work, but they belong to what seem to us very different genres: proverbs, a ballad, a work song, an agricultural handbook. But in the *Catalogue*, they are all subsumed under one label: *The Series of Sidu*.

This raises the question of what exactly the *Catalogue* takes to be a “text.” Is *The Series of Sidu* a “text,” and if so, how? Each of the 35 compositions included in the series are called “tablets” (ṭuḫī, no. 2.4, l. 36), referring to the clay manuscripts that together made up the collection—just as *Gilgamesh* consisted of twelve tablets. But what would the ancient scholars have called the entire group of tablets as a whole? That is, did they have a notion of “text” as an abstract entity separable from the physical objects comprised by it, just as we differentiate between a single book and “the text” more broadly? And how would the relation between that broader notion and its constitutive parts have been conceptualized? Here I examine three Akkadian words—zarû, rîksu, and īškāru—that, while not exactly equivalent to our word “text,” nonetheless indicate a specifically cuneiform model of textuality.

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25 Lambert, 72.
27 For the relation between the individual tablets and the entire series in *Gilgamesh*, see Helle, “Tablets as Episodes.”
The few preserved mentions of the word zarû (or, perhaps, ṣarû) have proven highly intriguing, and the secondary literature on the term is extensive. The word is written with the signs SUR-GIBIL, which by themselves mean “to ply, spin, or twist” (SUR) and “new” (GIBIL), respectively. The etymology of the word is uncertain, but based on the meaning of SUR, it is now generally assumed to be an irregularly nominalization of the Akkadian verb zâru, “to twist, to braid.” Once again, the terminology of texts and authorship depends heavily on metaphors of textile labour.

There are two particularly interesting attestations of the word. The first is the passage noted above, which describes the authorship of Esagil-kin-apli as a reworking of medical material “that had not been bound in a SUR-GIBIL since days of old, but were tangled like threads” (no. 2.2, l. 51–52). The other is Uruana, a list of plant names whose Neo-Assyrian version was supposedly edited by Ashurbanipal himself. According to the colophon, he rearranged the lexical material “which since the days of old had not been bound in a zarû” (ša ultu ulla zarû lá šabtu, no. 3.15, l. 3). Both texts thus depict their composer’s activity in contrast to the lack of zarû that went before: the previous absence of zarû was remedied by the authorial intervention of Esagil-kin-apli and Ashurbanipal.

Based on the parallel to the etymology of the English word “text” as “woven,” Frahm argues that what Esagil-kin-apli carried out was essentially a “textualization” of the medical material. However, if “textualization” refers to the making of texts, it does not simply imply composition. As Frahm puts it, “the treatise does not state that there had been no earlier texts. SUR.GIBIL, literally ’a new plying/spinning/weaving,’ suggests that Esagil-kin-apli, instead of starting from scratch, rather created new texts from old ones.” Accordingly, Frahm goes on to translate zarû as “an (authoritative) new edition,” and likewise, Heeßel renders the word as “Neuedition.” The term seems to...

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30 Frahm, 34.
31 Frahm, 25 and 39; Heeßel, Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik, 104.
refer to a specific kind of written composition, one created by the rearrangement of older material.

Eric Schmidtchen further argues that “if zarû is the Akkadian equivalent of the logogram SUR.GIBIL, it seems to disregard the element GIBIL, which would have corresponded to eššu ‘new’ in Akkadian.” In other words, if zarû refers to an arrangement of old threads, it might seem strange to have the sign “new” be part of its spelling. But as I have argued, there is no dichotomy between the idea of the text as woven and as new. As noted with regard to Enheduana, who emphasizes the innovative character of The Temple Hymns while also describing herself as a “weaver of tablets,” the newness at stake here is not original creation but rather the arrangement of threads into new patterns. In fact, the logograph SUR-GIBIL neatly brings these two aspects together, with its double focus on the pre-existing threads and the new text created from them.

Another key Akkadian term for textuality is iškāru, “series.” This refers to literary or scholarly compositions that consisted of more than one tablet. Gilgamesh, for example, consisted of twelve tablets, while the divinatory series Shumma Alu ran to an impressive 120 tablets. The term iškāru could also denote a more abstract collection of texts, as in the phrase “the series of the lamentation priest” (iškār kalūti), where it refers to the entire corpus of texts employed by lamentation priests. But as shown by the example of the Series of Sidu (iškār Sidu), the tablets of a series can contain a surprising variety of material. The word therefore carries many of the same connotations as zarû, since it also refers to “texts” as entities that are constituted by individual parts—in this case, by a number of tablets that together form a whole. Cuneiform texts were thus “compositions” in the true meaning of the word, since they were made of material that was “put together” (cum-, “together,” pōnō, “put”) to form a text.

The same is true of the last Akkadian word that corresponds, however imperfectly, to the modern notion of “texts,” namely rîksu. This word literally means “bundle” or

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33 See for example Gabbay, Pacifying the Hearts, 195.
“package," deriving from the verb rakāsu, “to tie together.” It is used in the metaphorical sense for texts that consisted of a number of clearly distinct subsections, and it can therefore be translated as “compilation” or “compendium.” As noted by Ulrike Steinert, “riksu can refer to a ‘bundle’ of texts perceived as an edited collection of associated material.”34 Even more strongly than iškāru, the term riksu thus emphasizes that the textual entity in question is a composite one, since it is made of several strands that have been tied together.

This notion of texts as composite objects may be cleverly reflected in an often-discussed colophon to a hemerological tablet, that is, a list of auspicious and inauspicious days:

Favourable days, according to seven tablets: the copies are from Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, Larsa, Ur, Uruk, and Eridu. The scholars excerpted and chose (the passages of the text), and gave (it) to Nazimaruttash, king of the world. It is good for checking losses, sowing furrows, gathering heaps, and whatever one wishes. (no. 3.13)

The colophon has gathered Assyriological fame for its description of how the text was copied: not from a single Vorlage, as one assumes was generally the case, but from seven exemplars from different cities that were collected, compared, and edited into one text.35 The rest of the colophon is generally thought to describe the agricultural activities that the hemerology was meant to assist, but Geller has argued that this passage in fact also refers to the composition of texts, since the actual contents of the hemerology seem to be unrelated to farming.36 “Checking losses” could refer to the collation of fragmentary sections of a tablet, and the word used for “sowing,” zarū, recalls the word zarū discussed above. Taking the furrows of a field (šerū) as the rows of a text, the phrase would thus mean something like “weaving verses.” Further, Geller argues that

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35 See the references collected in Heeßel, “Sieben Tafeln.”
“gathering heaps” could be a pun on the word “series”: šabāš karē for iš-kārū. If Geller is right, the pun presents the cuneiform notion of “series” as a heap of words, once again reflecting a notion of texts as composite entities made up of varied material. This, then, is the object of cuneiform authorship; this is what cuneiform authors are said to make. Not new words or original conceits, but new texts, meaning new weaves of old verses, new heaps of lines, new patterns of threads.

What is striking about this concept of textuality is how postmodern it is. In “The Death of the Author,” Barthes argues that texts cannot be understood as the coherent expressions of an author’s individual self, because texts are inevitably made up of multiple shreds of cultural precedence, which authors cannot help but draw on in their writing: “the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture (...) the writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original; his only power is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others.” Intertextuality, in other words, is a necessary and not contingent feature of texts, since authors are always and inevitably reworking prior texts into new configurations.

Even Ahassu-Sherua’s miniature hymn is replete with such constitutive citations: the “counsel chamber” that recalls Enuma Elish, the topos of the poem ending by referencing its own composition (“Let me sing!”), and the divine revelation that parallels Kabti-ili-Marduk’s authorial claim in Erra. No matter how short and simple a text may be, it always brims with reference and reuse. To take a different example, the title of the next chapter in this thesis, “The Birth of the Author,” is a patent reference to the title of Barthes’s essay, which in turn is an often-missed reference to the Medieval writer Thomas Malory (15th century CE): “La morte d’auteur” echoes La morte d’Arthur. In turn, Malory’s book is itself a tissue of citations, a compilation and reworking of older stories about the Round Table. And that is just one, deliberate reference: the word “thousand” in Barthes’s statement is to be taken seriously. The intertextual sources of any given

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37 Barthes, “Death of the Author.”
text, however simple, are countless. The consequence of Barthes’s statement is not only that intertextuality is unavoidable but also that it is unfathomable, that intertextuality is so pervasive that it can never be fully mapped and measured. It is impossible to track down every citation, because texts are nothing but citations, deliberate or otherwise.38

However, Barthes’s notion of textuality leads him to proclaim the unimportance of the author: if all writers do is “to combine the different kinds of writing” and “imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original,” they are not real authors. This leap of logic follows from the modern equation of authorship with original creation, which Barthes fully subscribes to. He makes clear that to him, authorship and mediation are irreconcilable, since authorship belongs to the modern West and mediation to a vaguely defined premodern world: “in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose ‘performance’ may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his ‘genius’. The author is a modern figure” (emphasis added).39 Several aspects of this statement are problematic, including the phrase “primitive societies”—a blanket term that in its racist imprecision might well include the sophisticated literary culture of the Assyrian court. But the actual writings of that court give the lie to Barthes’s assertions. As cuneiform sources demonstrate, the idea of the author is not at all antithetic to an understanding of textuality as an intricate web of citations. On the contrary, cuneiform authors were cast as producing exactly the kind of text Barthes has in mind: composite arrangements of recycled material.

Conclusion

Over the past two chapters, I have gradually narrowed the scope of my inquiry. The previous chapter examined how authorship is understood more generally, especially

38 For a general study of intertextuality in Babylonian literature, see Wisnom, Weapons of Words.
39 Barthes, “Death of the Author.”
but not only in the premodern world. The present chapter applied the results of that survey to cuneiform cultures specifically, finding that the notion of authorship as mediation can help us better understand the tropes that characterize Sumerian and Akkadian accounts of how texts come into being. Both weavers and dreamers abide by a logic of temporal symmetry, acting as key hinges in a larger process of textual production. In turn, this model affects how texts themselves were understood, given that they are repeatedly depicted as new arrangements of older material rather than monolithic one-off productions.

In the following chapter, I then narrow my scope even further, focusing on a single cuneiform narrative of authorship: Enheduana’s *Exaltation*. While these two chapters argued that the author is commonly depicted as just one link in a larger process of textual creation, the next chapter shows that the author herself can also be depicted as created by that process. It is not only the text, but also the authorial figure itself that is brought into being when poetry is composed. But because the process of textual composition involves a number of different people—including the author, but also other mediators of textual production, such as the god who inspires the text or the singer who performs it—then the figure of the author is also the product of a broader collaboration. In other words, authorship itself can be co-authored.\footnote{The study by Puksar, “Institutions: Writing and Reading,” which makes a similar argument, unfortunately appeared after it could be incorporated in my article. As Puksar notes, “[o]ne great irony of authorship is that people may scribble away as long as they like, but they remain writers, not authors, until institutions like publishers and book stores legitimize their work, and in the process, transform the nature of their own authority” (430).}

For example, Kabti-ili-Marduk’s authorship is dependent on both Erra’s revelation of the epic and on the scribes and singers who circulate the text and thereby allow it to become a literary work in the proper sense of the word: a text known by an audience wider than just the author and his immediate entourage. After Kabti-ili-Marduk describes how the epic was revealed to him, the god Erra proclaims his blessing on the text, declaring that whoever reads, reveres, and recirculates it will be spared an
untimely death. “The singer who wails (this song) will not die in disaster, his words will be pleasing to king and prince. The scribe who memorizes it will escape the enemy country and will become famous in his own country” (no. 1.2, V 53–55).¹⁴

Kabti-ili-Marduk’s claim to authorship thus references two sets of collaborators who make that authorship possible in the first place: the god who reveals the text to him and the singers and scribes who circulate it. Crucially, Kabti-ili-Marduk would not even be an author without those collaborators. It is the revelation and circulation of the epic that make him an author, but he cannot achieve either of those things alone. Because the cuneiform narrative of authorship positions the author as a link in a chain of production, becoming an author will always require the cooperation of other parts of that chain: gods, singers, and copyists.

The figure of the mediating author is thus created and sustained by a number of individuals, including but not limited to the authors themselves. In the next chapter, I ask what this model of authorship as collaboration means for the authorial self. In the Exaltation, the “I” of Enheduana is thoroughly shaped by its conversation with the goddess Inana and the singer who performs the poem. Indeed, it is that conversation which brings both the poem and the author’s sense of self into existence. As a result, the authorial “I” that one finds in the Exaltation is a fluid, dialectic affair, fully enmeshed in a poetic community.

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Chapter Six

The birth of the author: Co-creating authorship in Enheduana’s *Exaltation*

The birth of the author
Co-creating authorship in Enheduana’s Exaltation

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The Sumerian hymn known as the The Exaltation of Inana, which was attributed to the Old Akkadian priestess Enheduana, is the earliest known depiction of literary authorship. Through a close reading of the text, the essay argues that the figure of the author is created by a number of individuals acting together, including the addressee, performers, and copyists of the poem. Their involvement is necessary for authors to become authors, and authorship can therefore be seen as a collaborative creation even when a text is attributed to a single person. This notion of co-authorship, not as a collaboration between delimited individuals, but as the collective creation of an authorial persona, makes the author an inherently fluid entity—waxing, waning, dispersed, and regrouped over the course of the text. Having identified this form of co-authorship in the Exaltation, the essay then traces its dynamics across a wider selection of poems.¹

KEYWORDS
authorship, collaboration, Enheduana, literary historiography, Sumerian literature

1 | INTRODUCTION

More than four millennia before Roland Barthes declared “The death of the author” (1967),² the connection between authorship and metaphorical death had already been eloquently established in a Sumerian hymn known as The Exaltation of Inana. The Exaltation is attributed to Enheduana, a high priestess who lived in the twenty-third century BC in what is now southern Iraq—an attribution that makes her the first known author in the history of world literature. If the reader is surprised to learn that the first known author was a woman, that is due to half a
century of neglect on behalf of literary history. Enheduana’s authorship has been known at least since the first edition of the *Exaltation* appeared in 1968 (ironically, a year after Barthes’s essay), but the historiography of authorship still consistently begins with Homer, a Western man writing a millennium and a half later (see e.g. Bennett, 2005a, 29). This is inexcusable. Not only does the *Exaltation* constitute a much earlier instance of authorship, the poem even ends by describing its own composition: a striking moment of Sumerian meta-fiction that makes authorship central to the narrative itself, interweaving the death of the author that would later be celebrated by Barthes with the metaphorical birth of the text.

It is interesting to consider what the history of authorship would look like if it began with Enheduana and not with Homer, but in order to answer that question, one must first know what Enheduana’s authorship is like. In this essay, I argue that authorship in the *Exaltation* is depicted as a form of collaboration. It is not merely that the poem is created through collaboration: the figure of the author itself, the very image of Enheduana as the creator of the text, is depicted as the product of various voices working together. Enheduana does not become an author alone; her authorship relies on a dialogue with the goddess she addresses and the community of singers and scribes who circulate her text. To become an author, Enheduana must thus enlist a broader poetic community, and it is their collaboration that makes her an author in the true sense of the word. Enheduana’s authorial self, the “I” who appears as the composer of the poem, is first shaped and then sustained by a dialogue between poet, subject, performer, and copyist. In short, it is not just texts but also authors who can be co-authored.

Over the past five decades, the notion of co-authorship has become increasingly important to the historiography of authorship, as part of a general scholarly demurral against the Romantic idea of authors as lonely geniuses, socially isolated creators whose texts are the product of nothing but their own originality. Against this idea of authors as exceptional individuals, a host of scholars have emphasized that literary production always involves multiple people working together. In *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, Jack Stillinger tracks how poems moved from draft to print in eighteenth-century England, finding that the poets’ editors and correspondents often made changes to the text significant enough for them to merit the title of co-authors. Stillinger concludes that “[t]he frequency with which this kind of multiple authorship turns up, once one starts looking for it, is rather strikingly at odds with the interpretive and editorial theorists’ almost universal concern with author and authorship as single entities” (Stillinger, 1991, 22).

Co-authorship has now become a central issue in a wide array of scholarly contexts, though the exact nature of the co-authorship being studied varies considerably. The studies range from technical analyses of possible collaborations, such as the debate over whether “Homer” was one or many poets (Fowler, 2004) or the parsing of which lines in Shakespeare’s plays were written by the Bard himself and which by his associates (see e.g. Jackson, 2011; Vickers, 2007); through Harold Bloom’s claim that good poetry always involves an agonistic reaction against a canonical predecessor, meaning that all literature of sufficient quality involves an interaction between more than one author (Bloom, 1997); to the post-structuralist notion that any text whatsoever constitutes a momentary rearrangement of a broader intertext, meaning that authors never fully speak for themselves but always repeat and reshuffle the words of others. One way or another, the main thrust of much work on authorship during the past five decades has been that a text cannot smoothly be traced back to a single person but always results from a number of individuals working with or against each other, consciously or otherwise.

The present essay makes a related, but somewhat different claim. I will not argue that the *Exaltation* is the product of a collaboration between multiple people, though such a claim could undoubtedly be made. Rather, I argue that, as depicted in the poem, Enheduana’s status as an author is the co-creation of Enheduana herself, the goddess she addresses, the singer who performs the poem, and the scribes who copy it. What I am interested in is not the person who actually composed the *Exaltation*, but rather the figure of the author, the cultural image of a human being as the creator of a text. And that cultural image, I argue, is depicted as a collective effort. Enheduana does not become an author in isolation, by just composing the poem, but is transformed into an author by the literary community she engages through her text. Becoming an author thus requires collaboration as an indispensable element.
Further, because Enheduana’s authorial self is constituted through a dialogue between a number of different people, that self in turn becomes a rather fluid affair. The authorial self is not contained within one person but is distributed across a number of voices that either speak it into existence or come to embody it. Enheduana’s personal presence in the text ebbs and flows; it is vigorously established only then to evaporate again. The author announces herself with startling force—proclaiming: “I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!” (l. 67, en-me-en en-he-2-du,-a-na-me-en)—but then goes on to stage her own disappearance from the poem. This marks a key difference from co-authorship as it is usually understood. Even if a text is attributed to more than one creator, those creators are still often thought of as isolated, stable individuals who merely join forces to create a given text. But if the authorial figure itself is the product of poetic collaboration, then the authorial “I” will necessarily be seen as a far more composite, dialectical affair: the shared creation of a literary community.

The history of authorship has got off to a false start by founding its narrative on the primordial myth of Western men, from Homer and Hesiod to Shakespeare and Milton. By revisiting the actual origin of literary authorship, I want to show that the story could be told differently. The paper does not present a full history of authorship from Enheduana to the present day, but it does suggest how its first chapter could be written. I begin by presenting the background and plot of the Exaltation before delving into how authorship is depicted in the text. I focus especially on two key aspects of the poem: the dialogue between Enheduana and the goddess Inana, which is described through metaphors of communion and childbirth; and the relation between Enheduana, the performer, and the copyist of the poem, which is described through metaphors of death and rebirth. What emerges from this argument is that the “I” of the author is constructed, undone, and reshaped through a dialogue with the poetic community that is engaged by the text. Throughout the essay, I show that this notion of authorship is not unique to Enheduana’s hymn, since similar depictions of authorial activity can be found throughout Western literary history, from Sappho through Horace to Keats, as well as in more obscure figures like Martin le Franc and Mechthild von Magdeburg.

THE FIRST AUTHOR

In the twenty-third century BC, King Sargon of Akkad united the previously independent city states of Sumer to create the world’s first empire. The Old Akkadian dynasty, as it is known today, was a magnificent bubble of a state: brief but all-engulfing. The rule of Sargon and his successors was a highly turbulent time, marked by unprecedented military conquests, ambitious reforms, and constant revolts (Foster, 2016). Sargon installed his daughter Enheduana as high priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur, effectively making her a cultural ambassador of the new empire in its southernmost corner. Babylonian scribes would later attribute to Enheduana a series of Sumerian hymns, but the earliest preserved manuscripts of those works date to the Old Babylonian period (19th–16th cent. BC), some five centuries after Enheduana’s death. By that time, Sumerian had died out as a spoken language, becoming instead a written language of scholarship and religious ritual, much like Latin in the Middle Ages. Old Babylonian students were made to learn how to read and write the dead Sumerian language, and it is because of that curriculum that Enheduana’s poetry survives today: the Exaltation is preserved as hundreds of clay tablets copied out by Old Babylonian students grappling with its complex Sumerian language (see Helle, 2019).

Five poems were attributed to Enheduana: the Exaltation of Inana, an anthology of hymns to Sumerian temples, another hymn to Inana, and two highly fragmentary hymns to the moon god Nanna.4 The Exaltation is generally considered to be her masterpiece, and with 77 preserved manuscripts, it is among the best-attested works of Sumerian literature. Its most recent editor, Annette Zgoll (1997, 40), even refers to it as “der erste Bestseller der Weltliteratur.” But despite the serendipitous survival of her texts, our knowledge of the historical person Enheduana is practically nil. We know that she existed, which is more than can be said for most authors of ancient Iraq (for authorship in cuneiform cultures more generally, see Foster, 1991; 2019; Helle, 2018; Lambert, 1962). We know that the office of the high priestess entailed an exceptionally high social status, wide-ranging administrative duties, and a key role in
religious rituals (Weadock, 1975; Westenholz, 1989; 2006). Further, in some inscriptions Enheduana is referred to as the symbolic embodiment of the goddess Ningal, the wife of the moon god she served, suggesting that she acted as the god’s consort in some ceremonies (Westenholz, 1989). What we cannot know for certain is that Enheduana actually composed the poems attributed to her by the Old Babylonian scribes. The question is not Homeric, exactly, as no one doubts the existence of a historical person named Enheduana. However, because no manuscript of her works has survived from before the Old Babylonian period, some Sumerologists have speculated that the poems attributed to her, including the seemingly autobiographical Exaltation, were written later in her name. The debate has carried on for close to 40 years but remains unresolved (see e.g. Bahrani, 2001, 116; Civil, 1980, 229; Foster, 2016, 207; Lambert, 2001; Lion, 2011, 96–97; Michalowski, 1996, 184–185; Westenholz, 1999, 76).

In this essay, I leave that question aside to focus instead on how authorship is actually portrayed in the Exaltation. As argued by Barbara Graziosi (2002) and Alexander Beecroft (2010; 2011), purportedly biographical anecdotes about ancient authors may reveal little or nothing about the actual lives of those authors, but that does not make those anecdotes any less important, because they can still illuminate broader notions that were prevalent in the ancient world about literary composition, performance, reception, and circulation. Ancient narratives of authorship are rich sources of information for what Beecroft calls the "implied poetics" of ancient readers, that is, their underlying assumptions about the nature and uses of literature (Beecroft, 2010, 2). Ancient debates about whether or not Homer was blind, for example, probably tell us nothing about Homer himself, but they do reveal differing notions among ancient writers about whether epic poetry was fundamentally oral or written, since a blind man could not have composed his poetry in writing (Beecroft, 2011). As Graziosi puts it, "the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer’s life does not warrant our ‘disregard’"—on the contrary, the possible fictionality of ancient accounts of authorship can reveal all the more clearly how literature was perceived (Graziosi, 2002, 3). Likewise, whether or not the Exaltation was actually composed by the historical Enheduana is not the key question here. What matters is that, when the Exaltation was attributed to her, the notion of authorship came into being for the first time in world literature, and in so doing, it took on a distinctive form—one that I set out to investigate below. The attribution is thus a key event in literary history regardless of its historical accuracy.

3 | A NARRATIVE OUROBOROS

The Exaltation is framed by a hymn to the Sumerian goddess Inana, patron deity of the Old Akkadian empire. Inana is a strikingly complex figure: the goddess of sex, war, transformation, paradox, and otherness (Bahrani, 2001, chap. 7; Harris, 1991). The poem begins by describing Inana’s overwhelming might and the fury with which she destroys all who dare rebel against her rule (ll. 1–65). After the initial hymn, the narrator Enheduana introduces herself and her reason for beseeching the goddess (ll. 66–108). She is the high priestess of Inana’s father, the moon god Nanna, but though she has served Nanna without fault, she now finds herself in lethal trouble:

Though I sang aloud the hymns of joy, holding high the offering basket, funeral gifts have been laid out (for me): do I no longer live here? (ll. 68–69)

The poem then tells the story of a revolt in Ur that has expelled Enheduana from her office as high priestess and cast her into exile. Enheduana prays desperately to Nanna for help, but the god remains unresponsive. He does not answer her prayers or resolve the crisis one way or the other, leaving the priestess suspended in uncertainty—a situation that is described in the text as an open court case (Zgoll, 1997). Enheduana therefore turns to Inana, begging her to intervene in Nanna’s stead:
I will let my tears flow free, as if they were fine beer,
in the presence of holy Inana! I will say to you: "The decision is yours!"
I cannot make the moon god care (for my case). (ll. 82–84)

(er₂-ğa₂ kaš du₁₀-ga-gin₇
ku₂-išanna-ra šu ga-mu-ni-re-bar di-zu ga-mu-ra-ab-du₁₁
d-aš-im₂-babbar na-an-kuš₂-u₃-de₅-en)

In short, Enheduana invites Inana to replace Nanna as a divine arbiter. In order to remedy her own desperate situation, Enheduana must convince Inana not only to rule in her favor, but also to rule in the first place, thereby replacing her father as a ruler among gods. This is why the text combines a hymnic section with an autobiographical one: the Exaltation seeks to exalt Inana precisely so that the goddess will then be in a position to judge Enheduana’s case. Enheduana argues that Inana fully deserves this position as cosmic queen, even though her might had not previously been recognized:

You were born to be just a second-rate ruler,
but now! How far you have surpassed the Anuna, the greatest of the gods. (ll. 114–115)

(u₂-du₂-da-ta nin ban₃-da-me-en
d-a-nun-na diģir gal-gal-e-ne-e a-gin₇ ba-e-ne-diɾi-ga)

However, the question is whether Enheduana will succeed in her attempt to exalt the goddess and to sway her heart. As she is cast into exile, Enheduana discovers that she has also lost her eloquence:

My once honeyed mouth has now become froth,
my power to please hearts is turned to dust. (ll. 72–73)

(kalal₂-ğu₁₀ šu uh₂-a ba-ab-du₁₁
niği₂ ur₅ ša₂-sa₂-ğu₁₁ saḥar-ta ba-da-ab-gi₉)

A central tension in the Exaltation is therefore whether Enheduana will recover her “honeyed mouth,” regaining her ability to exalt Inana, to convince the goddess to help her, and thus to save herself from exile. The crisis of the text is explicitly self-referential, as the outcome of the poem depends on whether its narrator will recover her poetic skills.

The crisis of eloquence is resolved in the climax of the narrative, which is the moment when Enheduana composes the text and thereby becomes an author:

Queen, beloved of Heaven! I will recount your wrath.
I have piled up the coals, I have prepared the purifying ritual.
The Holy Inn awaits you. Will your heart not have pity on me?
(My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
what I told you in the dead of night,
a singer shall repeat for you at midday. (ll. 135–140)

(nin ki-ağa₂ an-na-ğu₁₀ mir-mir-za ga-am₅-du₁₁
ne-mur mu-dub šu-lu₅ si bi₂-in-sa₂
e₂-eš₂-dam-ku₃ ma-ra-an-ğal₂ ša₂-zu na-ma-še₂-de₅)
In this passage, Enheduana describes herself composing the Exaltation during a night-time conversation with Inana in the temple of the Holy Inn, promising that the text will then be performed by a singer on the following day. This scene effectively resolves the tension of the narrative: by composing the text, Enheduana regains her eloquence, exalts Inana, and sways her heart. In the ensuing epilogue, we are told that Inana has accepted Enheduana’s prayer and that Nanna has expressed his approval of Inana’s elevation. In short, the composition of the poem resolves the tension of that poem.

This kind of self-referential climax places the emergence of the author at the narrative center of the story itself (this kind of self-referential climax is in fact a common trope in cuneiform literature; see Foster, 1991). The poem’s climax (ll. 137–140) is structured by a series of binary transitions: “dead of night” turns into “midday,” the privacy of the Holy Inn turns into a public performance, the poem is transferred from author to singer, and the crisis of Enheduana’s eloquence is resolved into poetry. The moment when Enheduana becomes an author is thus represented as a key threshold in time, space, voice, and plot. Further, the transition is also realized in the grammar of the text. Up to that point, Enheduana’s story has been told in the first person, but after the singer repeats her poem, taking over the telling of the tale, Enheduana is instead referred to in the third person, as in the line: “Inana’s holy heart has been reconciled with her” (l. 145, ša₂₃ ku₃₂ ḫanna ki-ba-an-na-ab-gi₄). In short, the description of Enheduana’s authorship is not merely an appended postscript, but an integral part of the narrative itself, a key moment of transition that resolves the plot and transforms its characters.

The entire Exaltation thus revolves around its own composition and the coming into being of its authorial figure. The rest of the essay will unpack how that figure is depicted, and the main point I wish to make is that the author is constituted by a number of people acting together. In order to become an author, it is not sufficient for Enheduana to compose the text; she becomes an author only through a conversation with Inana, the performer, and the copyists of the poem, all of whom participate in the creation and the transmission of the author’s identity. The next two sections explore Enheduana’s conversation with Inana, stressing the metaphors of communion and childbirth; and the following two sections then turn to her interaction with the singers and copyists of the poem, stressing the metaphors of death and rebirth.

4 | THE PRINCESS AND I

Judith Butler (2005) argues that when we give an account of ourselves, our past, and our person, we in fact end up creating the self we set out to describe: the words we apply to ourselves call that self into social existence, fixing our identity within the logic of discourse. But crucially, this self-construction is shaped by the fact that our account will always be directed at someone else. The implicit presence of an addressee invariably affects the story we tell about ourselves. Our attempts at self-description thus end up making us entangled beings, our “I” shaped by its address to a “you.”

Much the same dynamic is found in the Exaltation, where the individuality of the author is gradually constructed through her invocation of the goddess. In the introductory hymn to Inana—as in many other Sumerian hymns—the only mention of the first-person pronoun is in the refrain “My lady!”, which refers to the “I” exclusively through its relation of devotion to the addressee (ll. 6, 20, 27, and 34). Tellingly, the first appearance of the “I” as a grammatical subject of a sentence comes in the exclamation, “I will sing your holy song” (l. 63, šir₃₃ ku₃₂ ga-am₃-du₄₄), where the “I” is again defined by a relation of address. Only after it has been constructed through its address to another person can the “I” step forward in her own right and begin to tell her story: “I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!” (l. 67, en-me-en en-ḫe₂₂-du₇-a-na-me-en).
The figure of Enheduana is thus constituted by her speaking to Inana, and the "I" of the poem is entirely given over to the goddess she invokes. Enheduana portrays herself as fully dependent on the whim of the goddess, as she begs her to spare her life: if Inana does not have mercy on her, Enheduana will perish in exile. But the logic of exaltation implies that the dependency is at least somewhat mutual. Enheduana seeks to convince Inana to step into her father’s role as divine arbiter, thereby becoming the queen of the gods, and Enheduana’s exaltation of the goddess is aimed at bolstering this claim to power. Through her hymnic description of Inana—as a magnificent warrior goddess who flattens foreign lands, crushes skulls, devour corpses, and punishes all who oppose her—Enheduana effectively shapes the reader’s perception of the “you” she addresses. In short, Inana will essentially become whatever Enheduana is able to make her.

Enheduana and Inana are thus bound together in a dialogical relation, shaping each other’s being with their words. This relation is further complicated in the epilogue, where, after Enheduana’s shift from "I" to “her,” both goddess and priestess are referred to with the same third-person pronoun. As William Hallo puts it, “the exaltation of Inanna implies at the same time the restoration of Enheduanna, their two fates being so closely linked that in lines 146 f. it is hard to decide whether the narrator […] is speaking of the one or the other” (Hallo & van Dyijk, 1968, 62). This confusion of identity becomes particularly clear at the end of the poem, in line 151, which may be translated literally as “her speaking to the holy woman was overwhelming” (nu-gig-ra du 11 -ga 7-3-maḥ-am₃). This can be read in two irreconcilable ways. One is to take the “holy woman” as Enheduana, and the “speaking” as Inana’s order that she be restored as high priestess. Benjamin Foster (2016, 336), for example, translates: “What she commanded for her consecrated woman prevailed.” Alternatively, one may take the “speaking” as Enheduana’s composition of the hymn, and the “holy woman” as Inana. Accordingly, Hallo translates: “her (Enheduanna’s) speaking to the Hierodule was exalted” (Hallo & van Dyijk, 1968, 35). Both readings make grammatical sense, and the reader can move back and forth between them in a poetic version of a gestalt shift, so that depending on how one looks at the line, now one, now the other figure steps forward as its subject. Tellingly, the verb that folds the two women together is the act of speaking, by which they make each other who they are: the goddess proclaims the restoration of her priestess, the priestess proclaims the might of her goddess.

When Enheduana becomes an author and composes the hymn to Inana, Inana is simultaneously speaking back, so that their two voices become virtually indistinguishable. It is as if the two women merge into something akin to a mystical union, almost folded into one person by their exchange of words.

However, the dialogical relation is never quite resolved into pure identity. It would be tempting to assert that in line 151 the two women have indeed fused into one, but in fact, it is precisely because a measure of difference between them persists that they are able to determine each other’s status. This is the kind of relation that Mikhail Bakhtin describes as “double-voiced discourse,” that is, speech “incorporating a relationship to someone else’s utterance as an indispensable element” (Bakhtin, 1984, 186). Such discourse is never entirely directed at the object it appears to describe, but always repeats, reshuffles, refutes, or responds to the words of others. Similarly, speech in the Exaltation is never pure description, but is constantly shaped by its relation to others and the expectation of what effects it will have on others: invocation, persuasion, exaltation, judgment, performance. Throughout the poem, discourse is always oriented towards discourse, as Enheduana speaks on Inana’s behalf in order for Inana then to speak on her behalf. In this dynamic of speech and speech, even silence can acquire a dialogical character. Enheduana tells Inana that “Nanna has said nothing, and so he has said: ‘It is up to you!’” (l. 133, ₃-Nanna li-bi₂-in-du₁₁ -ga za-a-kam bi₂-in-du₁₁ -ga). Here Enheduana’s speech to Inana incorporates Nanna’s lack of speaking, but then reinterprets it as a kind of speech to Inana, and specifically as an invitation for Inana to speak.

As a result, authorship in the Exaltation becomes an inherently dialogical construct. Bakhtin notes that dialogical discourse yields dialogical characters, that is, characters whose sense of self is shaped by a constant awareness of other characters’ awareness of them. That also applies to Enheduana: since the authorial figure that is created in the Exaltation is entirely given over to the speech, silence, and listening of others, the author herself comes into being as a dialogical being.
In fact, the dialectical relation between the author and a divine addressee finds surprisingly precise parallels elsewhere in literary history. Take for instance the Medieval mystic writer Mechthild von Magdeburg, who in *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* writes: "Ah, Lord God, who has made this book? I have made it in my weakness, for I could not hold back my gift" (quoted in Damrosch, 2003, 74). But who is speaking the second sentence? Is it God’s reply or Mechthild herself? David Damrosch (p. 174) notes that, "[a]s writers of Mechthild’s era didn’t use quotation marks, this paragraph could either be meant to show Mechthild in dialogue with God or could be her own assertion of authorship. The passage hovers (perhaps deliberately) between both possibilities." In other words, the reference of the “I” is left ambiguous—and the authorship of the text becomes ambiguous with it. The book could thus be attributed to either God or Mechthild, but that distinction may not be so important after all, since the book could more precisely be said to emerge from a dialogue between Mechthild and God where the exact contours of their identity are left unclear. A more elaborate version of the same trope is found in Sappho’s “Ode to Aphrodite,” where Sappho invites the goddess Aphrodite to come to her aid, recalling previous instances where the goddess had done just that (Sappho 1; Campbell, 1982, 52–55). Sappho’s address to Aphrodite includes an account of how Aphrodite previously addressed Sappho, yielding what Jonathan Culler (2015, 12) calls a “fun-house mirror” of intertwined speakers. The relation between the goddess and the poet is further complicated by the same problem as that found in Mechthild: “The Greek does not use the quotation marks that are inserted in modern editions, so the transition is made by the play of pronouns, as Sappho passes from I to you and Aphrodite from you to I, and then back again at the end” (p. 13, emphasis in the original). Just as with Enheduana, the play of pronouns complicates the relation between the author of the poem and its divine subject and addressee.

Parallels may also be found within the cuneiform corpus. Kabti-ili-Marduk, author of the Babylonian *Epic of Erra*, describes how the god Erra inspired the creation of the epic: “He (Erra) let him (Kabti-ili-Marduk) see it at night-time, and when he (Kabti-ili-Marduk) recited it in the morning, he neglected nothing” (ša ina munatti idbubû ayyam-ma ul ithî, l. V 43; Cagni, 1969, 126–127). As shown by the parenthetical insertions needed to make sense of the text in translation, Kabti-ili-Marduk’s description of his own authorship oscillates back and forth between two “he’s,” god and poet, obscuring the distinction between them. As Foster notes, this “grammatically ambiguous statement about authorship” is part of a more general pattern in cuneiform cultures: “Authors in Mesopotamian civilization well knew and were wont to recall in their texts that composition was an ongoing, contributive enterprise, in which the author […] was present only at the beginning” (Foster, 2019, 14, 23). Although Kabti-ili-Marduk depicts himself as the mere vessel of a poem originating with the god, whereas Enheduana composes the hymn herself, both figures describe a commingling of identity with the deities they address.

5 | Sexting the Goddess

In each of these cases, the author and the divine subject of the text are folded together through the use of ambiguous pronouns, leading to an entwined, dialogical relation between the two—and in each case, the text itself is then created through that entangled conversation. In the *Exaltation*, this moment of creation is described as the delivery of a child. Consider again the scene of composition:

The Holy Inn awaits you. Will your heart not have pity on me?
(My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
what I have told you in the dead of night,
a singer shall repeat for you at midday.
Because of your captive spouse, because of your captive child,
let your fury be great, let your heart be unrelenting! (ll. 137–142)
The key phrase in this passage is “for you I gave birth to it” (ma-ra-du₂), by which the text describes its own creation. Crucially, however, the phrase is also highly ambiguous, since the syllable /du/ can mean a number of different things depending on which cuneiform sign is used to write it. One manuscript has “I gave birth to it” (du₃), but others have “I created it” (du₁), “I spoke it” (du₁₁), or “I released it” (du₈; see Delnero, 2006, 2101, and further Attinger, 1993). With four attestations, “I gave birth” (du₂) is the most frequently used variant, but not necessarily the original one. Zgoll (1997, 489–490), argues that “I gave birth” (du₂) was the original meaning, since it is the lectio difficilior and since this phrase is also used to describe the composition of poetry in another text attributed to Enheduana, The Temple Hymns (l. 544). Indeed, most translators opt for this meaning, not least because it is the most evocative (see e.g. Foster, 2016, 335; Hallo & van Dijk, 1968, 33). However, given the variance among the manuscripts and the often obscure language of the Exaltation, this ambiguity could very well be intentional. The difference of meaning that is realized in writing may have been even less apparent if the poem was recited orally (though we know very little about how Sumerian was pronounced). The sound /du/ thus cunningly connotes many different notions of how poetry comes into being: spoken, created, released, born. All four meanings make sense in this context, and a many-faceted vision of authorship is compressed into one syllable.

However, the full significance of the scene of composition can only be grasped by comparing it to a previous section of the poem, which also uses the word translated here as “dead of night” (gi₂₄-₄-na)—a relatively rare Sumerian expression which thus links the two passages clearly together. This earlier scene follows a description of how Inana obliterated a rebel city, leaving its citizens unable to repopulate:

The womb (of the city) is out of order, 
the woman there no longer speaks beautiful words to her spouse. 
In the dead of night (gi₂₄-₄-na), she will not have conversation with him, 
she does not reveal to him the pure things within her. (ll. 54–57)⁹

(ša₃-tur₃-bi-ta gi₃ he₂-eb-ta-an-ze₂-er 
munus-bi dam-a-ni-ta ša₆-ga na-an-da-ab-be₂ 
gi₄-₄-na ad na-an-da-ab-gi₄-gi₄ 
ni₅₂ ku₃ ša₃-ga-na nam-mu-da-an-bur₂-re)

Like the scene of composition, this passage links speech and childbirth, though the association is here somewhat surprising. Line 54 introduces the notion that in the rebel city, reproduction has gone awry, but the cessation of sex is then described through the metaphor of speech. It is specifically because the woman of the city does not speak beautiful words to her husband that childbirth is “out of order,” making intercourse and conversation functionally equivalent.

The two scenes in which the phrase “dead of night” appears thus form each other’s mirror image, as they employ the same simile but do so in opposite directions. In the scene of destruction, we expect a description of the reproduction that Inana has brought to an end but find instead a metaphor of eloquence. Conversely, in the scene of composition, we expect to find a description of the eloquence regained by the narrator but find instead a metaphor of childbirth. The echoes and reversals that link the two scenes thus fold speech and birth together, as either one can serve as a metaphor for the other.

Crucially, this metaphorical association makes cooperation a precondition for eloquence. The reason why the repopulation of the rebel city has become impossible is specifically that the couples of the city no longer engage in a night-time communion of eloquence and eroticism: the woman cuts herself off from her husband, refusing to reveal “the pure things within her.” It is because their partnership fails that their eloquence is lost—and with it, their sex and reproduction. This set of associations is the logical background for the scene of composition, where the successful communion between Inana and Enheduana does lead to an outpouring of eloquence and a
metaphorical birth. The phrase "dead of night" thus instills an association between the two passages in the mind of the reader, and with it, an association between night-time communion, eloquence, childbirth, and sex.

In fact, the communion between Inana and Enheduana may also carry an erotic connotation, though it is only hinted at in the text. First, it is worth noting that this communion takes place in a temple called “the Holy Inn,” since in cuneiform cultures inns were generally associated with sexuality and eros (see Abusch, 2015, 67–68, fn. 17, with references). Second, as high priestess of Ur, Enheduana would have acted in religious ceremonies as the symbolic spouse of Nanna, embodying her husband Ningal (Westenholz, 1989), so when Enheduana urges Inana to replace Nanna as ruler of the gods, it might follow that Enheduana would become Inana’s symbolic spouse instead. Third, the word I translate as “singer,” gala, in fact denotes a more specialized profession, often translated “lamentation priest.” But during the third millennium, these galas seem to have been associated with two specific rituals: marriages and funerals (Cooper, 2006; Michalowski, 2006). The mention of the gala could thus allude to a metaphorical marriage between goddess and priestess. In sum, while I am not arguing that the passage should be understood as a specific reference to the Sumerian rite of the “Sacred Marriage,” the allusions that cluster around the themes of marriage and sexuality could be read as a figurative, symbolic merger of Enheduana and Inana. The entanglement of the two and the parallel passage that equates sex with "beautiful words" further strengthen this interpretation. However, given the generally ambiguous and oblique style of the Exaltation, the suggestion must remain speculative.

Either way, the depiction of authorship as a kind of childbirth and the parallel to the scene of destruction serve to present literary composition as a form of co-creation. Just as one cannot have children alone or sex by oneself, so literary composition necessitates a dialogue with another person. Crucially, the rebel woman is presented as the foil to Enheduana’s successful authorship. In the rebel city, there is no night-time conversation, no eloquent intimacy, no communion between spouses, and therefore no childbirth. The wife and husband have become estranged from one another, and so their speech, sex, and procreation all fail—seeing as these activities are treated in the text as more or less equivalent. For Enheduana, however, the communion with the goddess is successful, enabling her to give birth to the text we are reading. The contrast with the rebel city illustrates that one cannot become an author alone, since authorship, according to the logic of the Exaltation, requires a close collaboration with an entangled recipient.

Of course, the metaphor of poetic composition as sexual intercourse has a long history in the Western canon as well. Jesper Svenbro (1993, chap. 10), for example, discusses the “pederastic paradigm of writing” in ancient Greek culture, where writing could be depicted as an anal penetration of the reader. Jacques Derrida famously identified a recurrent association between writing and the penis under the term “phallogocentrism,” a logic summarized by Gayatri Spivak in her translator’s preface as: “the hymen is the always folded (therefore never single or simple) space in which the pen writes its dissemination” (Derrida, 1976, lxvi). In a similar vein, Susan Gubar (1981, 245) argues that “[w]hen the metaphors of literary creativity are filtered through a sexual lens, female sexuality is often identified with textuality.” However, as these examples show, the Western version of the metaphor often takes the form of a male, penetrative sexuality—the pen identified with the penis, the book with the female body, and literary creativity with sexual procreation. The kind of sex we find in the Exaltation, by contrast, is of a non-penetrative sort, placing the emphasis on intimacy and entanglement instead. There is no dichotomy here between an active, inseminating author and a passive object of penetration. Rather, the metaphors of marriage and childbirth seem to denote a bodily closeness, a cooperative communion between author and addressee, and their mutual creation of the text.

The creation of poetry is thus imagined as a movement from a possibly eroticized conception in the intimacy of the “Holy Inn” to a public delivery—a delivery that, as we have seen, combines connotations of speech, creation, childbirth, and release into one syllable. But as the text is born and released into the world, it is also separated from the body of its parent. In the next section, I turn to what happens when the new-born poem leaves its author behind to enter a broader circulation. The trope of composition as childbirth marks the text’s detachment from its source, the moment that it becomes an independent entity separate from its author. Recall that, after the scene
of composition, Enheduana is also transformed from a first-person narrator into a third-person character. The creation of the text thus leads to a sidelining of its author: as the text begins to circulate on its own, the author is forced to step back and hand it over to others.

6 | DYING TO BE READ

The trope of the author stepping out the poem may not be merely an accidental feature of the Exaltation, but rather an inherent part of authorship itself. In fact, it may be necessary for the individuality of the author to be at least partly effaced from the text in order for that text to become literature. Andrew Bennett (2005a, 112–118) illustrates this necessity through a reading of Ted Hughes’s Birthday Letters. The publication of the poems was bound to cause controversy, as they responded to accusations against Hughes over the suicide of his estranged wife Sylvia Plath. Bennett shows that the reviews of the poems, whether positive or negative, all gauged their literary quality by assessing the extent to which they transcended their strictly autobiographical context. In short, the poems could become literature—and not merely apologetic arguments—only to the extent that they left the individual specificity of their author behind. But it was also that same specificity that had generated the readers’ intense interest in the first place. The figure of the author thus promises the reader that the text will be connected to reality, grounded in a definite and potentially intriguing context, but the text becomes literature only insofar as it then also leaves that context behind, transgressing it to gain a more general truth value or a broader emotional appeal. In short, the figure of the author provides the reader with the sense of an actual personal presence in the text, but if the text is to become literature, that presence must also be made general enough for a wider community of readers to relate to it and to appropriate it for themselves.

In the following, I am interested in how the movement sketched out by Bennett—the text transcending its author to enter a broader circulation and thereby become literature—also necessitates a collaboration between author and audience. In order for authors to become authors, they must recruit a community of performers, copyists, and readers who are willing to continue the circulation of the text and thereby carry it beyond its original context. This kind of cooperation both constitutes the authors, as it allows their text to circulate as a work of literature, and removes the authors from their own work, as the text is handed over to others. I would argue that in the Exaltation, this movement is represented through the figure of the gala. As noted above, galas may have been associated with marriages in the third millennium BCE, but they were much more commonly associated with funerals and lamentation. In the cuneiform world, the gala generally represented the ritualization of grief, destruction, and death. Strikingly, in the Exaltation it is this figure who is tasked with the performance of the text, effectively establishing a connection between death and literary circulation.

It is telling that the disappearance of Enheduana’s "I" takes place at the very moment that the gala is introduced. After the lines “what I have told you in the dead of night, / a gala shall repeat for you at midday,” the gala becomes the new speaker of the text, and so the "I" disappears. Given the gala’s associations with funerals, I would read that disappearance as a metaphorical death. The "I" of the author has to "die," or at least be removed from the narrative, in order for a wider community of readers and performers to engage with the poem, appropriate it for themselves, and turn it into literature. The disappearance of the author is thus connected with the repetition of the text. The "I" disappears specifically when the gala reenacts her words, ensuring the continuation of those words. The ritualistic framing of the scene invites us to imagine this reenactment as a kind of cultic practice, where the text is repeated not just on that one midday, but again and again, in the ongoing rhythm of ritual performance (Keetman, 2010; Zgoll, 2015).

In other words, if the author steps out of her text at the moment of its composition, she does so to enter instead another kind of textual existence, one that extends indeterminably into the future, both through a repeated oral performance and through the repeated copying of the text. Karen Radner (2005) has called attention to the “power of names” in cuneiform cultures, where naming was generally conceptualized as a form of extended
presence: a person was not only represented but also made physically present through the writing of their name (see also Bahrami, 2003, chaps. 4–5). As such, Enheduana’s text comes to function as something like a funereal inscription posthumously preserving her name (“I am the high priestess, I am Enheduana!”), an inscription that has to be carefully preserved and continuously restored to ensure the ongoing presence of the deceased. In the case of the Exaltation, this was achieved by the Old Babylonian school students who copied out the text of the poem, allowing it to survive to the present day. Even more palpably than in the modern print culture, in a manuscript culture such as the Old Babylonian one, the circulation of literature requires the active collaboration of copyists, whose labor allows texts to multiply and move.

Insofar as the metaphorical death of the author involves a transmutation of individual into text, it can therefore also become a form of symbolic survival. Through the repeated reenactment of the singer and the repeated copying of the scribes, Enheduana’s presence in the world is extended into the future, in the form of a text carrying her name—but that presence is also given over to others. As the text moves from composition to performance, it yields itself to any singer willing to take its “I” into their mouths. The survival of the self, in other words, requires a surrender of that self. If the figure of the author was first constructed through a collaboration between Enheduana and Inana, then its continuation requires a collaboration between Enheduana, the gala, and the scribes. Enheduana surrenders her self to others in order for those others to take on the burden and carry it through time, continuously constituting the figure of the author through a repeated re-creation of the text. Just as the figure of the author was first created in a communion between priestess and goddess, so must it be sustained and reborn through a collective effort, in the ongoing performance and appropriation of the text.

7 | THE HONEYED TONGUE

As noted in the introduction, the co-creation of authorship also makes the figure of the author a far more fluid and entangled affair than the model of a single individual creating a single text, or even of multiple individuals creating a text together. The fact that the authorial figure is actually co-authored by a number of different people makes that figure a composite construct. I have already pointed to the entanglement of Enheduana and Inana, which can make it difficult even to tell the two apart in the text. The same is true of Enheduana’s collaboration with the gala, for the simple reason that, when Enheduana turns from “I” to “her,” the gala takes over that newly vacant “I.”

Michel Foucault argues in “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” (1969) that the figure of the author seems at first to gather the many voices that appear in the text into one person. We imagine the author as a singular self, ventriloquizing her words through the various characters of the narrative. But Foucault argues that, because it is ultimately impossible to reconcile the multiplicity of voices coexisting in any work of literature, the figure of the author comes instead to be dispersed across multiple “I”s (narrator, characters, implicit author, etc.), yielding what Foucault (1969, 88) calls a “pluralité d’ego.” As such, the authorial “I” that survives through the circulation of literature is not a single, easily identifiable figure, but an individual constructed through the interlacing of many voices.

Take the couplet:

My once honeyed mouth has now become froth,
my power to please hearts is turned to dust. (ll. 72–73)

(ka lal₃-ḫu₁₀ šu ṣu₂-a ba-ab-du₁₁
ni₂ ur₃ ša₂-ša₂-ḫu₁₀ saḥar-ta ba-da-ab-ṣi₄)
With the complex nature of Enheduana’s authorship in mind, one might well ask: Who is actually speaking in these lines? Who do the first-person pronouns refer to? There is a curious self-contradiction here, since Enheduana describes her loss of eloquence with the eloquent metaphor of the honeyed mouth and the pleasant symmetry of the couplet. There is thus an Enheduana described in the text who has lost her poetic skill and an Enheduana composing the text who has clearly regained it, yielding a split between a narrated and a narrating “I.” But there are still more Enheduanas in the couplet: there is Enheduana the implicit author, Enheduana the historical person, Enheduana the cultural memory, and so on. To these one may then add the voice of the gala who, according to the text itself, sings this passage and so actually speaks that first-person pronoun, stepping into the “I” of both narrated and narrating Enheduana. Rather than simply referring to the single person who supposedly composed the poem, the “I” of the text thus ends up demonstrating just how many people are actually contained in the authorial figure.

In short, the communal creation of the authorial figure gives that figure a rather schizophrenic shape. The continued survival of the text requires a collective will to keep reenacting it, and in so doing step into the role of the “I” created in the text—making that “I” a capacious construct. In other words, the production of literature requires the creation of a literary self that others can appropriate. This means that in the Exaltation, the author is neither constructed through a binary opposition between composer and audience, nor through a one-way transmission from one to the other. Since the author dies and then survives through the repetition of the text, she is constituted by the community engaged through the poem, and her self comes to be distributed among them.

In the opening volley of “The death of the author” (1967), Barthes notes that “literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost.” Discourse, for Barthes, is fundamentally impersonal, and stepping into discourse therefore means surrendering one’s personality. As noted above, in order for literature to become literature, it must first transgress the body of its author, who is thereby reduced to a purely textual existence. Barthes summarizes the production of literature as follows: “the author enters his own death, writing begins” (Barthes, 1967). However, the Exaltation also illustrates the shortcomings of Barthes’s grandiloquence. The symbolic death of the author is just that: symbolic. It does not require the obliteration of the author’s self. On the contrary, the metaphorical death of the author may be central to the subsequent construction of that self. The individuality of the author is not undone by its transition into collective discourse, rather, it can be sustained by a process of continued repetition and re-creation. This may give the individuality in question a dialogical or even schizophrenic character, but that does not efface it. The death and life of the author are therefore not as easily counterpoised as Barthes’s comment suggests, insofar as the authorial figure is constructed through an alternation between individual assertion and collective appropriation. What is striking about the Exaltation is that it carries out both these movements at once, creating and erasing the authorial figure in the very same breath. The author comes into the world stillborn, but still born.

8 | HE WHO LIVES MORE LIVES THAN ONE...

Once again, it is noteworthy that the discourse of authorship established in the Exaltation is far from unique to this text, finding a number of parallels elsewhere. A striking example comes from Medieval French literature, where the author Martin le Franc meditates upon the reception of his book Le champion des dames (Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2016, 162–163). Knowing that he will not become famous within his own lifetime, le Franc addresses his book, saying:

Once I myself am put into the ground, the vers
and the leaves will flourish upon you.

(moy mis en terre, les vers
et les feulles te flouriront.) (quoted in Cerquiglini-Toulet, 2016, 163)
The word \textit{vers} can here mean both verses, worms, and green branches, and le Franc employs the ambiguity of this word to imagine his book flourishing by the force of his own demise, as the text feeds on the putrefaction of his body. The author’s literary fame is dependent on his death, or, as Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet (p. 163) puts it, "[t]he author begins to exist once he has disappeared." The author’s death and his continued existence are thus one and the same.

A better-known case is Horace’s ode 3.30, where the poet states that with his books, he has

- finished a monument more lasting than bronze,
- more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids.

(exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius) (ll. 1–2, Rudd, 2004, 216–217)

This literary fame guarantees that Horace himself will survive into the future:

- I shall not wholly die, and a large part of me
- will elude the Goddess of Death. I shall continue to grow,
- fresh with the praise of posterity.

(non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera
crescam laude recens) (ll. 6–8, Rudd, 2004, 216–217)

At first sight, the text seems to imply that Horace will simply live forever by the force of his own achievements, but a closer look suggests otherwise. The prospect of immortality is at least somewhat undercut by Horace’s comparison of his odes with the pyramids, a comparison that emphasizes their longevity but also recalls their funereal association: the pyramids may live on, but the pharaohs entombed in them passed away long ago. Further, Horace specifies that he will not \textit{wholly} die, implying that at least a part of him will indeed be claimed by the goddess of death.

But most importantly, his immortality is explicitly dependent on the praise of posterity, meaning that his symbolic survival, like Enheduana’s, relies on a community of readers who are willing to circulate his works. This dependence and surrender is reflected in a grammatical shift that leads from the active verbs of the first lines ("I have finished", \textit{exegi}), to the passive verbs by which Horace describes his fame at the end of the poem: "I \textit{shall} be spoken of where the violent river Aufidus thunders" (\textit{dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus}, l. 10). Despite his self-praise, Horace thus acknowledges that literary fame cannot be established by an author alone—it requires a posthumous circulation at the hands of others, making the author an essentially passive construct. As in the \textit{Exaltation}, the poet’s "I" must be removed from the poem—at least in its active, assertive form—in order for the author to become an author.

In sum, the authors’ death is depicted in these passages as a vehicle for their survival through poetry, provided that they can enlist a community of readers to circulate the text. This dependence on others leads to an often rather unstable authorial figure, as the authors are shown disappearing from their own poem, rotting away, or cast in a passive form. This set of tropes finds a particularly eerie culmination in John Keats’s "This living hand":

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood,
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd. See, here it is—
I hold it towards you. (Keats, 1978, 503)

The poem seeks to recruit the reader into an almost vampiric scenario, where we are asked to provide our own blood for the poet to live on. The final couplet brings the metaphor to life, as we cannot help but picture an outstretched hand in our minds, lending the blood of our imagination to the poet’s words and thereby fulfilling his request: the hand lives on (Culler, 1977, 68–69). The reader is thus recruited, almost against our will, to resurrect the poet, if only in our minds. Like the Exaltation, the poem relies on the success of its apostrophe, as the author invokes the reader and attempts to merge with us, drawing our imaginative blood. And like the gala of the Exaltation, our reading of the poem allows for the dead author to survive, as we momentarily step into the text and lend our voice to its re-creation. Once again, the figure of the author is created and sustained through a mixture of death, rebirth, fluctuating identities, and the collaboration of the audience.

9 | CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have examined the world’s earliest known instance of literary authorship to argue that the creation of the authorial figure is depicted there as a collective effort, requiring the collaboration of a number of individuals. Enheduana does not become an author by merely composing a poem, rather, she is turned into an author by the literary community engaged through her text. Literary authorship is not a one-way transmission of poetry from an active speaker to a passive audience, since Enheduana’s authorship is only made possible by a mutual dialogue that brings the text into existence, and by a repeated re-creation that allows it to circulate. The addressee, performer, and copyists thus have to be actively involved for Enheduana to become an author, and indeed for the cultural idea of “the author” to come into being.

This has significant consequences for the study of authorship. For example, rather than treating co-authorship as a specific kind of literary composition, we should acknowledge that authorship as such entails co-creation. When textual or historical analyses reveal that, for example, the Iliad was the product of an oral tradition and not a single genius, or that Titus Andronicus was co-written by George Peele, or that the Eve of St. Agnes was significantly modified by John Taylor (Stillinger, 1997; 1991, 22)—then it is important to recognize that these collaborations do not lessen the authorship of Homer, Shakespeare, or Keats, for the simple reason that authorship is collaboration. The authorial figure is inherently a composite entity, so the fact that a number of people participated in its creation does not undo the existence of that figure. Authorship is not a zero-sum game where one person’s contribution comes at the expense of another’s; it is more like a portrait that may depict a single person, but which was in fact painted by many different hands.

Further, the Exaltation lends some welcome nuance to the widespread trope of the author’s death and rebirth, which has been a mainstay of authorship studies for the past 50 years. While Barthes famously declared the author dead in 1967, Andrew Bennett (2005b) points out that, ironically, the exaltation of authors in the eighteenth century had already anticipated their later effacement, as poets were depicted as the passive mediators of greater forces. As such, the Romantics “both inaugurated a certain sense of authorship and, at the same time, in the very same breath, announced the author’s imminent demise” (Bennett, 2005a, 55). Conversely, Seán Burke (2008) has argued that Barthes’s attempt to exclude authors from the study of literature paradoxically led to the renewed importance of authors for the definition of the literary field. In short, the author seems doomed to die and be reborn in an endless cycle. However, I hope to have shown that this historical oscillation between the death and rebirth of the author has far deeper roots, and that it has characterized the authorial figure from its earliest beginnings. The death and rebirth
of the author is therefore not so much a historical development as it is an intrinsic feature of literary authorship. It springs from the necessity of moving texts beyond their point of origin, a transfer that requires both the authors’ disappearance from and survival through the texts—and, crucially, the willing collaboration of a literary community.

This co-creation of authorship can be expressed through a number of tropes. In this essay, I have attended to two in particular, noting that they are found not only in the *Exaltation* but throughout Western literary history as well. The first is an entanglement of the author and addressee, where the border between their respective identities is blurred and the text is created through that (possibly eroticized) encounter. The other trope is the disappearance of the author and their re-creation through a posthumous reception, ensuring the transmission of the text, and with it, the continuous survival of the authorial figure. In the *Exaltation*, the author’s death and the circulation of her text are simultaneous events, as Enheduana’s “I” is removed from the poem at the very moment that a singer repeats her words. Finally, both tropes show that the communal creation of the authorial figure also make that figure a fluid, dialogical, and composite affair: the author’s “I” can wax and wane, its reference can be left ambiguous, and it can be taken over by other voices. By tracing the concept of the author back to its earliest instance, a new history of authorship thus comes into view, one less focused on the individual contribution of stable subjects, and more interested in how authors engage, address, merge with, and are sustained by the literary community around them.

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**ENDNOTES**

1. I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Aya Labanieh, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Svend Erik Larsen, and the anonymous reviewers, all of whom made invaluable improvements to this article.

2. In this essay I refer to the English version of Barthes’s essay, since this is the one that appeared first, a year before the French version.


4. Some modern scholars also attribute to Enheduana a composition known as *Inana and Ebih*, but this is a more speculative claim.

5. Note that “Enheduanna” and “Inanna,” with a double n, are older spellings of their names; Inana is now also sometimes spelled “Innana.” The various spellings reflect differing understandings of Sumerian phonemics and orthography, but in either case refer to the same characters.

6. See the inconclusive discussion in Attinger (2011, 11, fn. 113).

7. Cf. Zgoll’s schematic model of the interaction between supplicant and deity in cuneiform cultures, as presented in Zgoll (2003).

8. Likewise, a common feature in Akkadian incantations is a closing formula where the priest reciting the incantation states that he is not its author: “the incantation is not mine, it is the incantation of the god” (see the references collected in Lenzi, 2010). By denying that he has made the words he speaks, the priest summons instead the force of a god, presenting himself as the mere vessel of a divine proclamation.

9. For this translation, see Attinger (2011, 6, fn. 44).

10. The historical existence of a Sumerian “Sacred Marriage” is debated. Some Sumerian literary sources, such as *Iddin-Dagan A*, do seem to depict ceremonies where the king symbolically married a goddess, especially Inana, but whether such rituals were ever practiced, and if so, how, are questions that remain unresolved (see e.g. Nissinen & Uro, 2008; Renger & Cooper, 1972). A connection between the Sacred Marriage and the *Exaltation* is proposed by Roberta A. Binkley (2004, 50), who sees in the scene of composition a specific allusion to the “Sacred Marriage,” but I would be cautious in assuming that the reference is that specific. Rather, I read the poem as drawing on a more loosely defined imagery of marriage.

11. Note that the last mention of the first-person pronoun is in the phrase “what I have told you”—the “I” remains defined by the relation of address to the very end.

12. That the Romans knew that the pyramids were built as tombs for the Egyptian kings is shown by, among other instances, Strabo’s *Geography* XVII.33.
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<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cerquiglini-Toulet, J.</td>
<td>Portraits of authors at the end of the Middle Ages: Tombs in majesty and carnivalesque epitaphs.</td>
<td>Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.</td>
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<td>Harris, R.</td>
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Chapter Seven

Tropes of authorship II:
Gods and kings

The previous four chapters have unpacked the consequences of approaching ancient authorship as a form of narrative. In chap. 3, I explained what I mean by this approach. In chap. 4, I analyzed a set of tropes that frequently recur in authorial narratives from around the world—presenting the author as a medial transmitter of texts. In chap. 5, I applied the results of that analysis to cuneiform cultures, delving into the narrative structures that position cuneiform authors midway between the origin and the final form of a text. In chap. 6, I turned to another common feature of authorial narratives, namely that they are co-created by a number of individuals, including but not limited to the authors themselves. Throughout these chapters, my aim has been to understand what kind of stories were told about authors in the ancient world, and how those stories might shape our understanding of literature and textuality.

A key consequence of the reading presented in chap. 6 is that ancient authors can only truly become authors by recruiting a literary community of readers, performers, and copyists. The turning point of most narratives of authorship is the moment when
the text moves from its author into a broader social world: without that movement, I argued, the author is hardly an author at all. In order to understand authorship in ancient cultures, one must therefore attend not only to authors themselves, but also to the various persons with whom they are connected. Authors must be approached as part of a larger network of individuals, who are linked by, and together create, the narratives of authorship. In this chapter, I therefore turn my attention from authors to the figures with whom they are most commonly juxtaposed, namely kings and gods.

The connection between authors, kings, and gods is ubiquitous in cuneiform literature. Take *The Babylonian Theodicy* (no. 4.1). The text is a dialogue between two friends, one who believes the world to be utterly devoid of justice, ruled only by human greed and impropriety, and one who tries to persuade him otherwise, gesturing towards an inscrutable cosmic plan. In eloquent speeches of eleven lines each, the two friends take turns stating their case. The eleven lines of each speech all begin with the same cuneiform sign, and by taking all the speeches together, and reading the repeated signs as an acrostic, one arrives at the name of the author: “I, Saggil-kin-ubbib, the incantation priest, venerate god and king.” Foucault writes about the name of the author “qu’il court, en quelque sorte, à la limite des textes,” and few texts illustrate this point quite as well as the *Theodicy*, where the name of the author literally runs along the text’s left-hand edge, and where it relates the fictional world of the two friends to the external world of priests, gods, and kings. Saggil-kin-ubbib’s statement thus adds a third perspective to their dialogue, as the author’s name straddles their speeches and relates them to the dominant social authorities of his day.

It is telling that, even within the extremely demanding constraints of the acrostic, Saggil-kin-ubbib finds room to link his authorship with precisely these two figures—kings and gods. That is indicative of how common this set of associations is in the cuneiform world, and the present chapter traces the many forms it can take, showing

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1 Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?,” 83.
that the relation between authors, gods, and kings is anything but straightforward: the links between them are pervasive, heterogeneous, and surprisingly complex.

That the connection between authors, gods, and kings should be so widespread in cuneiform sources is hardly surprising given that the real-life scholars who created and circulated the narratives of authorship were professionally engaged either as priests in the temples of the gods or as scholars at the courts of the kings. Both roles carried a hefty ideological weight. The priests were tasked with deducing the will of the gods through the interpretation of omens, and with swaying that will to the advantage of their human patrons through the performance of various rituals, prayers, and incantations. Meanwhile, the scholars at the king’s court sought to associate themselves as closely as possible with royal authority. As noted by Frahm, two aspects of the scholars’ self-perception stand out: “first, that the scribes of first-millennium Mesopotamia regarded their role as largely defined by their close relationship with the king, and second, that they believed that their advice was of unique importance to the ruler.” Further, the scholars’ attempt to emplace themselves at the very heart of royal power is reflected in the texts they produced. As Beate Pongratz-Leisten puts it: “Numerous examples in literature and epistolary literature prove that the political and scholarly elites constantly strove to position themselves in the direct entourage of the king.”

The scholars’ engagement in these pursuits shaped their perception of authorship as well, as the scholars molded the figure of the author in their own image. Authors are most often depicted as the chief scholars of a king (ummânu’s), incantation priests (āšîpu’s), or lamentation priests (kalû’s). Granted, the translation of the latter two roles as “priest” is a modern convention that is at least somewhat debatable, but a number

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3 Pongratz-Leisten, “All the King’s Men,” 287.
4 See e.g. Geller, Ancient Babylonian Medicine, 50–51; Waerzeggers, “Babylonian Priesthood,” 63–62, with references.
of cuneiform authors are also presented as priests in a more straightforward sense of
the word: officials engaged in the administration and ritual practice of the temples. Of
course, Enheduana served as the high priestess of Nanna’s temple in Ur, and likewise
both Esagil-kin-apli and Papsukkal-sha-iqbü-ul-inni are depicted as a “chamberlain”
(zaabardabbu) and an “anointed priest” (pašišu) of the Ezida, Nabû’s temple in Borsippa.

In short, the connection between authors, kings, and gods has a basis in the social
reality of scribes and scholars, but in this chapter, I am more interested in how that
connection was depicted and not least fictionalized in the narratives of authorship. Just
as in chap. 5, I am interested in tropes of authorship, but instead of weavers and
dreamers, here I examine the figures of the petitioning author, who appeals to a deity
for help; the semi-divine author, who occupies a blurry space between gods and men;
authors who address their composition to a king; and authors who are kings themselves,
appearing either as cultural founders or as tragic figures who seek to commemorate
their misfortune. The chapter thus explores various ways in which cuneiform narratives
of authorship connect literary works with royal power, divine authority, or both. The
wider significance of these connections will become apparent in the second part of the
thesis. Briefly told, linking literature with gods and kings is also a way of elevating its
position, associating it with figures of the greatest possible repute. In the second part of
the thesis, I delve into the cultural crises of the Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and
Seleucid period, which, I argue, made the social elevation of literature an urgent
necessity. But for now, my focus is not on the historical context but the narrative
structure of these tropes, as I examine how stories told about authors associated
literature with royal power and the divine realm.

Authors and gods

The frequency of the association between authors and gods will already be evident from
previous chapters. The trope of dreaming authors examined in chap. 5 positions human
authors as vessels of a divine message, so their authorship is fully dependent on a relation to a deity. Further, this relation often involves a reciprocal conversation, and the previous chapter showed that in the *Exaltation*, the conversation leads to a confusion of identities between goddess and priestess. That is perhaps an extreme case, but it is quite common for the conversation between authors and deities to be mutual. Take the circular bond of Ahassu-Sherua, who speaks to his goddess as she speaks through him (p. 100), or the grammatical confusion of Kabti-ili-Marduk’s authorship, where different third-person pronouns follow each other in such rapid succession that it becomes difficult to tell which refers to the god and which to the author (p. 101–103). Even with the weaving authors, the trope can reference the human author’s association with the divine: Esagil-kin-apli, for example, was said to have accomplished his textual rearrangement through the intellect Ea and Gula bestowed on him.

A particularly interesting case is *The Legend of Enmeduranki*, where the gods Shamash and Adad reveal the secret of divination to Enmeduranki, who in turn reveals it to the human population (p. 112–14). As pointed out to me by Ann Guinan (personal communication), the kind of divination revealed there is specifically provoked divination, as opposed to the “spontaneous” omens of *Enuma Anu Enlil* or the like. That is, the liver and oil divinations relayed by Enmeduranki require that the human diviner pose a question, in the form of an offering, to the gods, who then answer it through that same offering: in the entrails of the sacrificed sheep or the movement of the libated oil. In short, the *Legend* depicts the exchange of messages from gods to humans, humans to gods, and gods to humans.

The relation between gods and humans can also take another form, where the poem is presented not as a communication with or from a god, but to a god. In this trope, which I term “petitioning authors,” the text is depicted as the author’s prayer. For example, a pair of prayers to Marduk and Nabû contains a double acrostic, meaning that both the first and last signs of each line can also be read vertically (no. 4.2). The first signs in both prayers spell out the name of the author: “By Nabû-ushebshi, the incantation priest.” The last signs in the prayer to Marduk spell out “the servant who
makes your lordship apparent,” while in the prayer to Nabû they spell out “the worshipful servant who reveres you.” The two poems are thus framed—literally—by the identity of their author and his relation to the gods.

Another key example is *The Great Gula Hymn* of Bullussa-rabi. The hymn alternates between stanzas that glorify Gula and stanzas that glorify her spouse Ninurta. In the last line of each stanza, Gula and Ninurta are given a new name: Gula is called Nintinugga, Nanshe, Ninkarrak, Ningizibara, Baba, Ungal-Nibru, Ninsun, and Ninlil; while Ninurta is called Ningirsu, Ninazu, Zababa, Utulu, and Lugalbanda.⁵ Since these names belong to originally independent deities, the hymnic list is effectively a form of syncretism, as various divine identities are conflated into Gula and Ningirsu—a common practice in the theology of the late second millennium.⁶ However, in the last lines of the final stanza, one finds the name, not of a deity but the hymn’s author, Bullussa-rabi.

The servant who has bowed his neck:

By the unshakeable order of your great divinity—let his life be long!

Gula, great lady, whose helper is Ninurta:

Plead his case with your mighty splendid spouse!

Let him summon life for Bullussa-rabi,

so that he may bow down before you every day. (no 1.3, l. 195–200)

There is an implicit juxtaposition of humans and gods embedded in this authorial claim, since Bullussa-rabi’s name is placed in the couplet that would otherwise be reserved for the names of Gula and Ningirsu. Likewise, just as the gods receive a series of aliases and alternative names, the name “Bullussa-rabi” might also be a pseudonym. It literally means “her healing is great,” and while it is possible that an individual so named felt called to compose a hymn about the greatness of the healing goddess, it does have the ring of a *nom de plume*—or, as the case may be, *de style.*

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⁶ See e.g. Lambert, "Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon."
I am not arguing that Bullussa-rabi is slyly presenting himself as a god by naming himself in the same way that he names Gula and Ninurta. I am merely arguing that the narrative structure of cuneiform authorship repeatedly places authors and gods next to one another. In fact, one also sees in the final lines of the hymn the same kind of grammatical oscillation between gods and humans I noted in the *Exaltation* and *Erra* (see p. 131–33 above). In l. 198, the third-person pronoun refers to Bullussa-rabi (“plead *his* case,” *abūsu šabi*), in l. 199, to Ninurta (“let *him* summon,” *lišēši*), and in l. 200, to Bullussa-rabi again (“that *he* may bow down,” *lū kitmus*). So even if the trope of the petitioner places the author at a further remove from the gods than that of the dreamer, since the gods do not speak to him directly, it still relies on the feasibility of an exchange between gods and humans. Bullussa-rabi appeals to Gula, asking her to appeal to Ninurta on his behalf. If the gods listen to his words, their reward will be more words, as Bullussa-rabi promises to pray to Gula daily. In short, the logic of the authorial claim is predicated on the possibility of a mutual communication between gods and humans.

This communication can be thought of as an exchange of favors. The author praises the god and expects assistance from the god in return, as with Bullussa-rabi; or the god helps the author, who composes a hymn to express his gratefulness, as with Ahassu-Sherua, whose text begins, “she is the one who intervened” (no. 3.2, l. 1); presumably, it was written to thank the goddess for that intervention, whatever it was. In his forthcoming publication of a bilingual prayer to Nergal by Bel-remanni (no. 1.4), Jon Beltz notes the parallel between the authorship of hymns and votive offerings. Just like the statues deposited in temples bearing the name of a patron, which were meant to dispose the deity of that temple to look kindly upon the patron, so hymns that include their author’s name can be thought of as a votive offering in the form of a text.7 Zgoll refers to the *Exaltation* as “eine Opfergabe an Inana,”8 aimed at pleasing the goddess and soliciting her aid. In a later article, Zgoll presents a schematic model for analyzing

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7 Beltz, personal communication.
8 Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana*, 429.
prayers (specifically shu‘ila-prayers) based on audiences with kings. The supplicant presents himself, offers gifts in the form of sacrifice as well as praise in the form of a hymn, and states the conundrum he would like remedied in return. As Zgoll notes, this “Audienzmodell” is based on the principle of reciprocity as a basic feature of social interaction, including the interaction between gods and humans.  

Finally, there are two more instances where a literary text is explicitly presented as an offering to a god. One is The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sîn, which the narrator Naram-Sîn deposits in the temple of the god Nergal in Cutha (no. 1.5, l. 152–53); the other is The Lament of Nabû-shuma-ukîn, where Nabû-shuma-ukîn states that he recited his prayer to Marduk in the hope that the god would help him out of his predicament: “May he be released through (ina) the prayer to Marduk” (no. 3.3, l. 80). However, both instances also involve an author who is either a king or the son of a king, so they will be discussed in the following sections.

There are also cases where the relation between authors and gods is much more direct, when the gods themselves appear as authors. Since the thesis is focused on human authors, divine authorship falls outside its purview, but it is important to note that a number of gods were in fact identified as authors. We have already encountered Ea as the first author listed in the Catalogue, and he is also identified as the source of several other compositions, such as the myth of the “Twenty-one Poultices.” Further, there are gods who, like Shamash, Adad, Erra, and possibly Sherua, transmit their messages through a human author, and may therefore be seen as the “source” of the text—

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9 Zgoll, “Audienz.”
10 Zgoll, 197–99.
12 Lambert, “The Twenty-One ‘Poultices.’"
whether or not that implies authorship in any meaningful sense (would anyone credit “the Muse” as the author of the *Iliad*?). However, as noted above (p. 109), in *The Kesh Temple Hymn* Nidaba is placed in a position that directly parallels that of the human authors, as she arranges the textual threads created by Enlil.

Indeed, what is most striking about divine authorship is how often it is juxtaposed with human authorship. Ea may take pride of place in the *Catalogue*—he is the first author listed in the text, and he is attributed by far the largest number of compositions—but though greater in degree, Ea’s authorship is not different in kind from that of the humans.13 In the *Catalogue*, the authorship of gods and humans is placed on the same discursive plane and described with the same terminology. *Lugal-e* is said to be “from the mouth of Ea” just as *The Great Gula Hymn* is said to be “from the mouth of Bullussa-rabi” or *Erra* is said to have been recited by Kabti-ili-Marduk (no. 2.1, section 1, l. 4; section 5+6, l. 5’; and section 3, l. 2’, respectively). These three instances of authorship could hardly be more different. Bullussa-rabi’s text is a prayer to Gula, while Kabti-ili-Marduk relays the words of Erra. Ea, as the god of wisdom and creativity, was obviously the original creator and not the mediator of his poem. Despite those difference, Ea, Bullussa-rabi, and Kabti-ili-Marduk can all be listed as authors next to one another. And crucially, all three forms of authorship involve some kind of relation between gods and humans: a god creating a text read by humans (Ea), a human addressing his text to a god (Bullussa-rabi), and a human relaying a text originally spoken by a god (Kabti-ili-Marduk).

**Monstrous admixtures**

The link between authors and gods is far from unique to the cuneiform world. The notion of authors as either deceptively divine or somehow subtly non-human is found

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13 See Wilcke, “Göttliche und menschliche Weisheit,” 268, who speaks of “ein gradueller Übergang” from gods through sages to humans in the *Catalogue*. 
Throughout literary history, from Socrates’s statement that “the poet is a weightless thing, winged and holy” (κούφων γὰρ χρήμα ποιητῆς ἔστιν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερὸν)\(^4\) to Young’s assertion in *Conjectures on Original Composition* that “genius has ever been supposed to partake of something divine.”\(^5\) In fact, in his survey of the history and theory of authorship, Bennett reaches a dramatic conclusion: that many of the theoretical disagreements about authorship involve an underlying disagreement “about what it means to be human,”\(^6\) since the notion of the author stands at the crossroads of countless facets that define our understanding of humanity, from agency, individuality, and ethical accountability to our relation with non-human entities, very much including gods.

This is certainly the case in cuneiform cultures, where narratives of authorship repeatedly explore the conceptual threshold between gods and men. In the preceding section, I discussed a number of cases where authorship takes the form of a communication between gods and humans, but sometimes the narratives of authorship entirely conflates the distinction between them. Quite apart from the subtle confusion of identities described above, there also cases where the divine and the human speakers just merge into one. A notable example are those incantations where the human priest speaks with the voice of a god, channeling the exorcistic power of deities like Asalluhi. The priest then proclaims: “the incantation is not mine, it is the incantation of [name of a god]” (šiptu ul yuttun šiptu DN).\(^7\) This phrase, a common closing formula in Akkadian incantations, is an example of what one might term “efficacious non-authorship”: the human speaker denies any creative connection with the words he speaks in order for those words to gain the full force of divine presence.


\(^5\) Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 13.

\(^6\) Bennett, *The Author*, 8.

\(^7\) See the references collected in Lenzi, “Šiptu ul yuttun.”
The threshold between humans and gods finds a literal realization in the semi-divine sages, who often appear as authors in the cuneiform record. These are the *apkallu’s*, antediluvian creatures who were said to have laid the foundations of culture, teaching humans how to farm the land, make laws, read and write, and so on. The tradition about them is not fully consistent, but they are generally depicted as having risen from the ocean and are sometimes identified as half human and half *purādu* (a kind of carp that has, incidentally, become the national dish of modern Iraq: *masgūf*). Not only are the sages semi-divine themselves, they are also portrayed as interacting directly with the gods. For example, Nungal-pirigal (also known as Nunpirigaldim) appears in the *Uruk List* as the founder of *kalūtu*, the lore of the lamentation priests. He is said to have invented this art in order to appease the wrath of Anu after he had brought Ishtar down from the heavens and installed her in Anu’s temple in Uruk (no. 5.1, l. 8–11). The *apkallu’s* are thus a prime example of authors straddling the line between the divine and the human realm, interacting with gods without being fully gods themselves—and creating texts in the process.

The best-known *apkallu*, and also the best example of the complicated relationship between gods and humans in cuneiform narratives of authorship, is Oannes-Adapa. Oannes is a supremely important author in cuneiform culture, second only to Ea in the *Catalogue*. The question of what precisely Oannes is said to have authored is unfortunately difficult to answer, and I hope to deal more fully with it in a future article (in the meantime, see the note to section 1, l. 5 of the *Catalogue* on p. 308–309 below). However, what is important here is that this prime exemplar of cuneiform authorship occupies a complex position midway between all sorts of different categories. Berossus, a Babylonian priest writing in Greek shortly after Alexander’s conquest of Babylonia, presents an extended account of the sage Oannes (I return to Berossus on p. 249–52). The passage is worth quoting in full.

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*For the connection between *apkallu’s* and authorship, see Beaulieu, “Social and Intellectual Setting,” 15–16; Beaulieu, “Mesopotamian Antiquarianism,” 122.*
In Babylonia there was a large number of people of different ethnic origins who had settled in Chaldea. They lived without discipline and order, just like animals. In the very first year [after the creation of the universe] there appeared from the Red Sea in an area bordering on Babylonia a frightening monster, named Oannes, just as Apollodoros says in his history. It had the whole body of a fish, but underneath and attached to the head of the fish was another head, human, and joined to the tail of the fish, feet, like those of a man, and it had a human voice. Its form has been preserved in sculpture to this day. Berossos says that this monster spent its days with men, never eating anything, but teaching men the skills necessary for writing and for doing mathematics and for all sorts of knowledge: how to build cities, found temples, and make laws. It taught men how to determine borders and divide lands, also how to plant seeds and then to harvest their fruits and vegetables. In short, it taught men all those things conductive to a settled and civilized life. Since that time nothing further has been discovered. At the end of the day, this monster Oannes went back to the sea and spent the night. It was amphibious, able to live both on land and in the sea.19

This is a fascinating passage for any number of reasons, but I would like to focus on the sheer number of conceptual thresholds straddled by Oannes. He is literally “amphibious,” that is, “of two lives,” spending his days on land and his nights in the sea. He has two sets of limbs, human-like and fish-like (see fig. 3). He eats no food during the time he spends in the human realm, marking his distance from that realm: though he is able to live there, he does not belong to it. He spends his days among humans, and his presence is fundamental to human culture—before his arrival, the people of Babylonia lived “like animals”—but he is not human himself. Further, Oannes’s intervention in human culture is also structured by a string of thresholds. There is a temporal threshold: he arrives “in the very first year” after the creation of the world.20 There is a spatial

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19 Verbrugghe and Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho*, 44.
20 As noted by de Breucker, Berossus is at pains to point out that Babylonian culture was older than Greek and even Egyptian culture: “For Berossos it was clear that his sources proved that Babylonia surpassed all other cultures in its antiquity and was thus due the most respect” (De Breucker, “Berossos between Tradition and Innovation,” 650). It is therefore hardly surprising that Berossus highlights the
threshold: he arrives not in Babylonia but “an area bordering on Babylonia.” Further, the skills he teaches to the humans involve the marking of thresholds: “how to determine borders and divide lands.” Interestingly, there is also a cultural threshold: Berossus depicts the aboriginal humans as having “different ethnic origins,” retrojecting the cultural and linguistic variety of his own time to the origins of the world.\(^{21}\)

In short, Oannes crosses the threshold between human and divine, human and animal, night and day, land and sea, inside and outside, before and after, between different ethnicities and between civilization and its Others. One could summon a horde of critical concepts to describe this kind of situation: hybridity, liminality, monstrosity, “Mischwesen,”\(^{22}\) and Donna Haraway’s boundary-crossing human/animal

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\(^{21}\) De Breucker, 643.

\(^{22}\) Wilcke, “Göttliche und menschliche Weisheit,” 262.
trickster all come to mind. More plainly, one could say that Oannes is fishy: he does not fit into any category, he slips through the fingers of any definition. He is monstrous yet foundational; he is a messy mixture of categories that nonetheless teaches the humans how to structure their society and organize their world. Finally, as one of the most important authors of Babylonian culture, Oannes vividly embodies the human-divine sliding scale on which cuneiform authorship so often unfolds. A creature of the gods and a teacher of humans, Oannes cannot be placed in either group, but constitutes a strange blend of beings. As the mythical paragon of a Babylonian author, Oannes fully demonstrates that the creation of literature ideally belongs to the fishy space between gods and men.

**Authors and kings**

I now turn to the second set of figures with whom cuneiform authors are most commonly juxtaposed: kings and other members of the royal family. This connection can take the form of a simple subservience, where authors dedicate their work to a ruler. But kings can also arrogate the role of authors for themselves, as either authoritative or tragic figures. The most vexed aspect of the relation between authors and kings is the question of who wields cultural authority: kings or scholars? The role of culture bearer oscillates back and forth between two groups, and the narrative of authorship plays a key role in framing that tension.

A number of cuneiform sources connect authors and kings by placing them next to each other, as if they were on equal footing. This is the case in the *Uruk List*, which, as discussed in chap. 11, lists eight pairs of kings and authors, making Sin-leqi-unnenni the chief scholar of Gilgamesh, Kabti-ilı-Marduk the chief scholar of Naram-Sîn, Sidu the

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chief scholar of Ishbi-Era, and so on (no. 5.1). Likewise, the Neo-Assyrian exemplar of the Name Book, known as V R 44, is a bilingual list of famous figures from cuneiform history, and it includes both kings and authors, affording them equal significance (no. 5.3). Finally, a text that Lambert dubbed “a piece of esoteric Babylonian learning”, contains a list of names running through the text, which again include both the kings Burnaburiash and Nazimaruttash and the authors Taqisha-Gula and Sidu (no. 5.6). In all three cases, authors and kings are placed on par with one another; they are given equal standing in the structure of the text. Often, the juxtapositions are incorrect—Kabti-ili-Marduk belongs to the first millennium and Naram-Sin to the third—but, as Glassner remarks, “qu’importent les erreurs et les traits légendaires, une tradition veut que la production littéraire soit associée au pouvoir royal.”24

The most frequent link between authorship and royal power are those authorial claims that address the composition to a king, presenting the text as a kind of tribute (much as the hymns discussed above could be presented as a kind of votive offering). This form of royal dedication is found already in The Temple Hymns, where the postscript states: “The weaver of tablets was Enheduana. My king! Something has been born which had not been born before” (no. 3.1, l. 543-44). Whether the king in question is Enheduana’s father Sargon or one of his successors (Rimush, Manishtushu, or Naram-Sin) depends on when the text was composed and on whether its attribution to Enheduana is genuine, but either way, the postscript shows that the link between authors and kings is as old as authorship itself.

The link carried over into Akkadian literature. The Agushaya Poem, a narrative poem from the Old Babylonian period that glorifies Ishtar’s martial prowess, ends by dedicating the composition to king Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE): “the king who heard from me this song, the sign of your (Ishtar’s) heroic might: Hammurabi, in whose reign

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24 Glassner, “Être auteur avant Homère,” 118.
this hymn of praise for you was made—may he be given life forever!”

A key aspect of this passage is the way in which it combines a subservience to the king with an elevation of the text. The poem is turned into a prayer on the king’s behalf, but it thereby also depicts the king as having heard the song, meaning that the anonymous author places himself in direct contact with the sovereign. The blessing thus allows the author to depict the king as his audience and his song as worthy of royal attention.

This pattern is found throughout later Akkadian narratives of authorship, even in compositions that have little or no relation to the king. The end of “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto” reads: “[The incantation priest] who makes decision and observes the lives of the people, who fully knows Sagig and Alamdimmu, he will observe, inspect, [and consider,] and present the results to the king.” (no. 2.2, l. 69–71). According to the content of the series themselves, Sagig and Alamdimmu can be used to cure any client, not just the king, but the “Manifesto” states that their purpose is to train incantation priests so that they may be fit for service at the king’s court, specifically. The authorial claim thus links the medical compositions to royal power, an association that would be far from obvious were one to read only the series themselves.

One of the most striking examples of this form of royal address comes from the epilogue of Erra. Immediately after the description of Kabti-ilı-Marduk’s authorship, there follows a passage where Erra blesses his epic, promising that all who circulate it will be kept safe from destruction. The passage allows Kabti-ilı-Marduk to depict his poem as being read and appreciated at the very highest levels of power:

Let wealth pile up in the shrine of the god who reveres this song,
while (the god) who scorns it shall smell no incense.
The king who magnifies my name shall rule (all) corners (of the earth)
and the lord who declaims the praise of my heroic might shall have no rival.

25 ša-an-ri-a-um za-ma-ra-a[m] / i-da-at qu-ur-di-ki / ta-ni-it-ta-ki iš-mu-ni / Ĥa-am-mu-ra-
bi ša an-ni-a-am za-ma-[ra-am] / i-na pa-liššu ta-ni-it-ki iš-ne-ep-šu / lu šu-ul-um-šu ad-da-ar ba-
la-[t][u], II v 23–29, Groneberg, Lob der Ištar, 87.
The singer who recites it shall not die in disaster:
his words will be sweet to the king and to the lord. (no. 1.2, V 49–54)

Erra’s blessing links the two figures discussed in this chapter, as the epic is depicted as a communication from a god, passing through a human author, and being heard and appreciated by other gods as well as by kings and lords. As with the other cases discussed so far, the effect of this passage is to associate the circulation of the text with a specific social setting, one centered around the person of the king. The text makes the king a central part of its audience; it is addressed to him and presents the poem as a form of service to him. Crucially, this form of address is both submissive and self-elevating. The authors can depict themselves as the humble servants of a king, but also depict that king as actively listening to them. The authorial claim thus aggrandizes the significance of the text by letting the author present it to the king and thereby implicitly assume that the king would be interested in receiving it.

Another kind of relation between authors and kings are those instances where the kings themselves or other members of the royal family appear as the authors of literary works. As noted in the introduction, I do not include royal inscriptions in this category (though their authorship is also an interesting issue26), but I do include in royal figures who are listed as the authors of epics, hymns, lexical lists, or the like.

Chief among royal authors are two kings who were regarded as cultural founders—figures of the far-off past who established an important tradition. I already discussed the case of Enmeduranki, the king who relayed the practice of divination to the people of Sippar, Babylon, and Nippur. A similar case is Enmekar, the king who was said to have invented writing in a Sumerian composition known as Enmekar and the Lord of Aratta.27 Enmekar also appears in the Catalogue, though unfortunately the compositions

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26 See the references collected in Frahm, “Keeping Company with Men of Learning,” 521–22.
27 Vanstiphout, Epics of Sumerian Kings, 49–96.
attributed to him have not been identified (no. 2.1, section 3, l. 3’–4’). However, his inclusion in the Catalogue is significant in itself, as he is the only king listed there. Further, a fragmentary Seleucid text tells of Enmekar’s interaction with Oannes-Adapa. What exactly the two do together is unclear, though it seems to involve the uncovering and re-sealing of a tomb, but the very fact that they are shown conversing and cooperating shows that Enmekar was thought of as belonging to the same sphere as Oannes: an ancient foundational figure. In short, Enmeduranki and Enmekar represent one genre of royal authors, those who belong to the distant past, are credited with the invention of an important strand of cuneiform tradition, interact with gods or semi-divine sages, and unlike the kings examined in the next section, are largely successful in their endeavors.

A speculative but intriguing theory put forth by Beaulieu suggests that these figures represent an older layer of cuneiform ideology, where the king was still regarded as the ultimate source of wisdom and authority. According to Beaulieu, this model was later supplanted by another view, where wisdom resided not with the king but with the king’s scholars, and more specifically with the incantation priests (āšipu’s). The result was what Beaulieu calls the “appropriation by scribes and scholars of an antediluvian wisdom formerly the privilege of kings,” meaning that the scholars reshaped the history of cuneiform cultures to afford themselves a more central position in it. Enmekar and Enmeduranki might seem to defy this pattern, as ancient kings associated with foundational authority, but the exceptions actually confirm the rule, since first-millennium scholars use these kings to highlight their own importance. Enmeduranki passes his knowledge of divination on to the scholars, and the text states that all true diviners are in fact descendants of that king: as Beaulieu puts it, the “implication of this text is that now not only the king could lay a claim to antediluvian knowledge, but learned men as well.”

Likewise, Enmekar is said in the Uruk List to have been king of

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28 Beaulieu, “Social and Intellectual Setting.”

29 Beaulieu, 15.
Uruk when his scholar Nungal-pirigal invented the practice of singing lamentation (no. 5.1, l. 8–11). Though the stories of Enmeduranki and Enmekar preserve the prestige of ancient author-kings, they also work to transplant that prestige onto their non-royal scholars.

According to Beaulieu, this shift in authority is fundamental to the Neo-Assyrian narratives of authorship. In most cases, the first-millennium authors are scholars or sages—as noted above, Enmekar is the only king included in the Catalogue, a text otherwise populated by sages, scholars, incantation priests, and lamentation priests. What Beaulieu argues is that the authorial claim of the scholars often came at the expense of kings. Attributing Gilgamesh to the incantation priest Sîn-leqi-unnenni was also a way of taking the hard-won wisdom that the epic assigns to a king and present it as the creation of a scholar. The wisdom of Gilgamesh—the king who, according to the epic’s opening line, “knew the ways and learned all things”—now belonged to an incantation priest instead.31

Beaulieu’s suggestion would help explain why king Ashurbanipal styled himself as an expert scholar of cuneiform texts. As I return to in chap. 10, Ashurbanipal depicted himself not only as literate, which he may well have been, but also a consummate scholar and an accomplished author, which he was certainly not.32 An acrostic in a hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu identifies Ashurbanipal as its author (no. 4.3), just like the Theodicy and Nabû-ushebshi’s prayers, but as Glassner acerbically comments: “la mauvaise qualité de l’œuvre ne permet pas de classer le roi parmi les auteurs mésopotamiens. Elle ressemble davantage à l’exercice d’un apprenti scribe présentant une vocation incertaine.”33 However, as elsewhere with the narrative of authorship, its veracity and aesthetic quality is not its most important aspect: it is significant that

37 As restored from the version from Ugarit, see George, “Gilgamesh Epic at Ugarit,” 239.
39 See the references collected on p. 216 below.
Ashurbanipal would want to lay claim to being an author, whether or not that claim was correct and successful.

Ashurbanipal’s self-presentation as a scholar and author might thus seem to reverse the trend in cuneiform culture, by which wisdom increasingly came to reside with scholars rather than kings. But once again, the apparent exception confirms the rule. It was precisely by presenting himself as a scholar that the king could claim intellectual prominence. The role of the king was no longer intrinsically associated with wisdom, so Ashurbanipal needed to claim that he was also competent in scholarly matters if he was to be regarded as wise. In other words, Ashurbanipal’s self-presentation as an author actually confirms the assumption among first-millennium sources that cultural authority resided with scholars, not kings.

To summarize, the relation between kings and authors recurs frequently in cuneiform sources and can take on a number of different forms, from the juxtaposition of kings and authors, through authors offering their text as a form of royal tribute, to kings acting as authors themselves. The next section turns to a final link between the two figures, where the king is again depicted as an author, but of a wholly different kind: not an authoritative bearer of culture but a tragic figure whose power has come undone.

The pain of kings

The last trope of authorship to be discussed in this thesis is “the tragic royal,” a member of the royal family who has suffered a loss of power and narrates that loss in an attempt to remedy it. The most notable figure in this category is again Enheduana, who was royal by virtue of being the daughter of Sargon. As explored in the previous chapter, the Exaltation is a distinctly self-referential poem whose plot revolves around Enheduana’s exile and loss of eloquence, and her attempt to regain power by narrating her plight.

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Curiously, while Enheduana stresses her position as priestess, she never mentions her status as princess, even though her troubles in the *Exaltation* are directly predicated by her association with her father’s empire: one assumes that it is because she was a representative of the Old Akkadian dynasty that the rebellion would want to oust her from Ur. Likewise, her love of Inana has clear political undertones, since Inana was the patron deity of the Old Akkadian kings. Based on the implicit equation between goddess and dynasty, Claus Wilcke interprets the *Exaltation* as a veiled political treatise, expounding the state program in coded form.\(^{35}\) While this interpretation may rely on an overly simplistic equation between literary narrative and political reality,\(^{36}\) it is an important reminder that Enheduana’s position, both in her own time and in subsequent memory, was closely tied to that of the Old Akkadian kings.\(^{37}\)

The trope of Enheduana as a tragic royal finds an interesting parallel in Neo-Babylonian literature, where Nabû-shuma-ukîn, son of Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BCE), composed a hymn to Marduk to lament his undeserved imprisonment at the hands of an unnamed “evildoer.” The poem concludes with the following postscript:

> A prayer by a weary captive, who was bound by an evildoer. He recites it to Marduk: May he be released through the prayer to Marduk, so that the people and the land may witness his greatness.
> The work of the weary, exhausted Nabû-shuma-ukîn, son of Nebuchadnezzar.
> [ ] Let them witness every one of these afflictions! (no. 3.3, l. 80–81)

Though the poem itself is a much less impressive literary achievement than the *Exaltation*, their authorial claims share a number of features. Both are written by the child of a king seeking to remedy their removal from power through an appeal to a god. Both are written in the first-person singular until the final lines, where the authorial claim is presented in the third person. Both are distinctly self-referential, as they

\(^{35}\) Wilcke, “Politische Opposition nach sumerischen Quellen”; Wilcke, “Politik im Spiegel der Literatur.”


\(^{37}\) See e.g. McHale-Moore, “Mystery of Enheduanna’s Disk.”
explicitly describe the real-world effect they would like to achieve through their hymnic supplication: respectively, Enheduana’s restoration to power and Nabû-shuma-ukîn’s release from prison. I am not claiming that the Exaltation directly influenced Nabû-shuma-ukîn’s poem (it is unlikely that any memory of Enheduana survived after the Old Babylonian period). Rather, I would argue that cuneiform literature retained a specific trope of authorship across more than a millennium: the trope of the royal author who undergoes a series of tragic events and attempts to both describe and resolve that tragedy through the composition of poetry.

This same trope is also found in the genre known as “narû literature,” which may have served as the link between the two poems. But while Enheduana and Nabû-shuma-ukîn frame their autobiography as a hymn, in narû literature the story is framed as a royal inscription, narû being the Akkadian word for “stele.” I noted above that the thesis does not examine “normal” royal inscriptions, like those carved on the walls of royal palaces, but I make an exception for literary texts that present themselves as a stylized inscription attributed to kings of the distant past. The two main exemplars of this genre are The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sîn and Gilgamesh, so it is telling that both Naram-Sîn and Gilgamesh are included in the Uruk List and that they are placed right next to each other (no. 5.1, l. 12–13). 38

Both texts are royal autobiographies where the king narrates his hardships and troubles in commemorative form, imparting knowledge to future generations (though in Gilgamesh’s case this autobiographical account is told in the third person39). The Cuthean Legend begins with an invitation to read the text itself:

Open the tablet box, read aloud the stele,
which I, Naram-Sîn, son of Sargon,
wrote and left for future days. (no. 1.5, l. 1–3)

38 On the restoration of Naram-Sîn’s name in the Uruk List, see the note to l. 13 in the appendix, no. 5.1.
39 George, Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 32.
The passage is echoed in *Gilgamesh*, which refers to itself as follows:

(Gilgamesh) came back from distant roads, exhausted but at peace
as he sat down all (his) trials on a stele.

(...)

[Look?] for the cedarwood box,
undo its lock of bronze,
open the door to its secrets,
take up the tablet of lapis lazuli, and read out
what Gilgamesh went through, all the suffering.  (no. 1.6, I 24–28)

The two texts depict themselves as a stele (*narû*) written by the king, inviting the reader to find them buried in a tablet box. The *Cuthean Legend* tells the story of how Naram-Sîn acted against the will of the gods and was punished by an enemy horde that laid waste to his country. *Gilgamesh* tells of the eponymous hero, his tragic love for the wild man Enkidu, who dies midway through the epic, and his search for eternal life.

What is striking about the poems in this context is their strong similarities with the other two texts attributed to members of the royal family, the *Exaltation* and Nabû-shuma-ukîn’s lament. Though they belong to different genres, periods, and languages, all four texts display the same set of associations. In each case, the royal narrator suffers a tragic loss of power that leads them to compose literature. In the *Cuthean Legend*, Naram-Sîn writes down his story to warn future kings not to repeat his mistakes, bemoaning the fact that a previous king to whom something similar had happened (perhaps Enmekar?) did not write down his story, for if he had, Naram-Sîn would have been able to learn from it and thereby avoid his tragic fate. The *Cuthean Legend* ends with an address to future rulers and their scribes, asking them to read the text carefully and learn its lessons of restraint, piety, and stoic self-control. Like *Erra*, the *Cuthean Legend* thus positions future kings as a central part of its audience, and like Enheduana and Nabû-shuma-ukîn, Naram-Sîn presents his poem as an effective intervention that has the power to change the course of history.
Gilgamesh is no less self-referential in its presentation; it also reflects on the nature of its own textuality and its effects on reality. This is a pervasive feature of the epic, and I cannot here deal with the full range of its meta-poetic strategies, so I will only highlight those aspects that find parallels in the other texts examined so far. It is significant that, like Naram-Sin, Gilgamesh is a fundamentally tragic figure. He fails in his attempt to gain eternal life and regain his lost youth. Many modern readers have expressed a distaste for the epic’s ending, which seems grim and foreshortened, but it cannot be denied that this abrupt end powerfully highlights the weight of the hero’s misfortune. After all, what the prologue invites us to read is specifically “all the hardships” Gilgamesh went through, presenting the king’s pain as the main theme of the epic. It is noteworthy that Nabû-shuma-ukîn likewise invites the reader to consider “all of these hardships,” using the exact same phrase as Gilgamesh (kâl maršāṭi), and thereby aligning himself with the legendary hero. The quotation seems intentional (Nabû-shuma-ukîn’s lament also quotes Gilgamesh elsewhere), and it bespeaks an ancient view of Gilgamesh as a specifically tragic figure. But crucially, like the other three texts examined here, Gilgamesh seems to remedy that tragedy through the composition of literature. We are told in the prologue that he “found peace” (šupšuḫ) as he wrote down his story on a stele. Gilgamesh’s broken, restless heart finds a measure of solace in the composition of literature.

40 For metatextuality in Gilgamesh, see, among others, Michalowski, “Sailing to Babylon,” 187–90; Michalowski, “Commemoration, Writing, and Genre”; George, “Thoughts on Genre and Meaning”; and Dickson, “Wall of Uruk.”

41 Jacobsen, for example, writes: “The Epic of Gilgamesh does not come to a harmonious end; the emotions which rage in it are not assuaged; nor is there, as in tragedy, any sense of catharsis, any fundamental acceptance of the inevitable. It is a jeering, unhappy, unsatisfying ending. An inner turmoil is left to rage on, a vital question finds no answer” (Jacobsen, “Mesopotamia,” 212).

42 Line 18 of the lament reads mimmû šēri ina namāri, a line that recurs in the second half of Gilgamesh. See Finkel, “Lament of Nabû-šuma-ukîn,” 325.

43 On the exact nature of that peace, see George, “Mayfly on the River.”
To be clear, I am not arguing that Gilgamesh would have been perceived as an author by Babylonian readers. As noted above, Beaulieu argues that the attribution of the text to Sin-leqi-unnenni was part of a general shift in the attribution of authoritative wisdom, from kings to scholars. But even if Gilgamesh was not regarded as an author stricto sensu, the prologue’s presentation of the text is still important for understanding how literary production was thought to take place, and specifically how it was associated with royal power. In *Gilgamesh*, as in the *Cuthean Legend*, the *Exaltation*, and Nabû-shuma-ukîn’s lament, a royal tragedy is transmuted into poetry. Despite the differences between theses texts—one is in Sumerian and three are in Akkadian, two present themselves as hymns and two as royal inscriptions, some have an actual historical background and some do not—they all employ the same authorial trope. A royal personage is depicted as creating literature through a reflection on their hardships—and that literature is in turn depicted as having an effect on reality, resolving, avoiding, or at least allaying the hardship in question.

**Conclusion**

Saggil-kin-ubbib’s claim to authorship in the acrostic of the *Theodicy* is a paratext par excellence: it is positioned on the physical threshold between the text of the tablet and the world that surrounds it. Foucault argues that this liminal state also applies to the name of authors more generally, not only when those names are literally placed on the edge of the text: the author assigns a specific status and “mode of existence” to the authored work. More generally still, I noted in chap. 3 that according to Bennett, the figure of the author oscillates between fiction and reality, between “an empty gesture of

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44 Further, George emphasizes that the epic does not claim that Gilgamesh writes the epic himself. The verb that describes the composition of the epic, *šakin*, is in the intransitive stative form: the text of the epic is “set down” on a stele, without a specification of who does so (George, 230). It might be Gilgamesh, but it may just as well be the scholars of his court.
“reference” and a collection of historical data. Authors, in short, are both myth and fact, and by the force of that double nature, they can link the world described in literature to the world in which that literature circulates. The author is the discursive bridge that connects, say, Middle Earth and interwar Oxford, while also marking the distance between them. Tolkien is both integral to and exiled from the universe of *The Hobbit*.

As a result, the figure of the author is instrumental in embedding texts into a specific, extratextual circuit—the social world in which they are read. The narrative of authorship can be thus understood as a miniature account of how texts and contexts relate to one author. In the example of Saggil-kin-ubbib, the dialogue between the skeptic and the pious friend are mediated by the author’s dedication of that dialogue to gods and kings. In this chapter, I argued that this specific set of connections recurs again and again in cuneiform sources. I suggested that these recurring associations have an important consequence: the cuneiform narrative of authorship embeds literature into the two most prestigious discursive realms of the ancient world, the royal and the divine. Not coincidentally, these were the two realms in which many of the scribes and scholars who created, copied, and circulated the narratives of authorship worked, as priests of the temples and officials at court. In other words, the association between authors, gods, and kings also entails an association between literary texts and the people who worked for those gods and kings: a cluster of literate professionals and highly educated experts.

Over the next four chapters, I turn from the tropes, structures, and recurrent patterns of the narratives of authorship to analyze instead the historical context in which the narratives were told. As I will show, the fluctuating status of this particular social class—the scribes, scholars, and priests—and of the institutions to which they belonged—the schools, temples, and courts—can be said to determine when, where, and how authorship became important. In the cuneiform world, narratives of authorship become especially prominent during three specific periods—the 1733’s BCE, the late Neo-Assyrian period, and the end of the Seleucid dynasty—all of which witnessed
cultural crises, demographic shifts, political upheavals, and linguistic transformations that severely threatened the status of the scholars. I will therefore examine the cuneiform narratives of authorship as a response to those moments of cultural crisis, circulated by a small network of professional experts: people who saw themselves as the privileged servants of gods and kings.
Part II

The invention of authors
Chapter Eight

Authors and crises

The following chapters turn from the question of how narratives of authorship were told in ancient Iraq to why they were told at all. This is a central motive behind any study of the first known instance of a given phenomenon. We want to know why an entity like authorship first came into being, what made its emergence necessary. It is not enough to observe that, at a given time and in a given place, authorship made its first appearance in the historical record, for a string of questions quickly impose themselves: Why there and not elsewhere? Why then and not earlier, or later? Why at all, if literature had been authorless before? As noted in the introduction, tracing the historical genealogy of a cultural norm denaturalizes that norm, confronting us with the fact that society could have been, and indeed has been, organized differently. That insight inevitably leads us to ask why things came to be as they are now, but this question is far more difficult to answer than the one treated in the first half of the thesis. As a number of theorists have pointed out, “why” is historiographically much more troublesome than
“how,” and causality is methodologically vexing to account for.¹ We may present a number of pertinent circumstances and explore a relevant historical context, but ultimately, it is an arduous task for historians to establish definitively why things happened one way and not another.

What I intend to do, therefore, is not to prove once and for all why authorship was invented, but rather to show that the invention of authorship in ancient Iraq can plausibly be connected with the interaction between cultural crises and the professional identity of cuneiform scholars. In a nutshell, I argue that authorship was part of the scholars’ response to cultural crises that threatened to undo their social status. One reason I believe this connection to be relevant is that in ancient Iraq it is found not once, but three times. As I noted above, cuneiform cultures were for the most time entirely anonymous, and the exceptions cluster around three specific periods, each of which witnessed a demographic, linguistic, and political upheaval that threatened the standing of cuneiform scholars.

In the 1730's BCE, the works of Enheduana were copied with great frequency in the Old Babylonian schools, particularly in Nippur. In the Neo-Assyrian period, a wide range of documents relating to authorship were produced, especially the Catalogue. In the 2nd century BCE, under the Greek-speaking Seleucid kings, a final burst of sources relating to authorship appear. What the periods have in common is that in each of them, the ground seemed to crumble under the scholars’ feet. In Nippur, a failed rebellion against Babylonian hegemony left the city in tatters, and in an attempt to reestablish its importance, the scholars turned to an intensified study of the Sumerian past, cultivating the literary tradition of a dead language. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the standing of

¹ Debates about the role of causality in historiography have generally fallen into disfavor and dispersion, so it is difficult to give an overview of the present state of the discussion, though note the recent study by Mark Hewitson, History and Causality. My wariness of historiographical causality derives from a somewhat eclectic group of texts: Foucault’s foreword to the English edition of The Order of Things; chap. 12 in Renfrew and Bahn, Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice; and Danto, Narration and Knowledge.
Akkadian-speaking scholars was threatened by the influx of Aramaic-speaking people, which led to the demise of Akkadian and the social contraction of its literary tradition. Only high-status scholars could access cuneiform literature; Aramaic culture had replaced it among the general populace and was making inroads even at the highest levels of power. Finally, in the Seleucid period, the cuneiform tradition was about to evaporate completely, and was kept alive only by a handful of families in Babylon and Uruk, whose economic control was then finally undercut by the Seleucid kings.

In short, in all three periods, a series of political and demographic shifts placed cuneiform scholars in an isolated and endangered but still elevated social position. Their languages died out, the cultural heritage they guarded became obsolete, and the social fabric that guaranteed their elite status began to unravel. It is at those times that cuneiform sources relating to authorship appear, and the following three chapters pursue the hypothesis that this is not a coincidence, arguing that there is a link between the two developments.

Now, it may well be a coincidence. The three periods are generally overrepresented in the cuneiform corpus, which skews our image of ancient Iraq. Due to the vagaries of archaeological preservation and excavation, some periods have yielded far more texts than others: we know much about Babylonia in the 18th century, but almost nothing about it in the 15th century. It is thus possible that the connection between authorship and cultural crises is nothing more than a mirage produced by the uneven distribution of sources. Further, not every instance of cuneiform authorship can be dated with certainty to just these periods. The Great Gula Hymn, for example, makes a clear authorial claim, but we do not know when exactly it was composed. It is often dated to the late second millennium BCE, but its manuscripts are all Neo-Assyrian or later. As Lambert very cautiously states, “we can hardly be wrong in giving 1400–700 B.C. as the extreme limits within which it was written.”

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It is therefore not enough to note a recurrent link between authors and crises and move on. The picture is far too uncertain for that. Instead, the next three chapters carry out a detailed study of the sources and their context, arguing that the nature of the authorial claims indicates that they were indeed a response to a social disruption. In each case, the narratives of authorship seem to register the influence of a crisis that, according to my hypothesis, brought them into being: their form and content tie them to questions of professional identity, cultural contact, and language death. So even if the Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Seleucid period may not have been the only time when authorial claims were made in ancient Iraq, they were at least key moments in the earliest development of literary authorship.

The songs and the scholars

How, then, can authorship be a response to a cultural crisis? In the following chapters, I argue that the figure of the author condenses and compresses a broad and abstract cultural complex into a tangible human form. A tradition that was once well-known, heterogeneous, and abstract, and whose importance was generally taken for granted, was shaken by the kinds of crises noted above: language death, intense cultural contact, political upheavals. As a result, the cultural tradition had to be protected, but in order to be protected it also had to simplified and made more tangible, more concrete, easier to grasp and to master. This is where the figure of the author comes in: authors can stand in for the texts attributed to them and eventually for the literary tradition as a whole. If we were asked to explain why English literature is important, we would likely give not a detailed account of its development and genres but a list of its most important authors: Shakespeare, Austen, Woolf... (I return to this point in chap. 11). The authors are taken to metonymically represent the broader tradition in a compressed form. But most of the time, we would not even ponder such a question, because under the current political and linguistic conditions we naturally take the significance of English literature
for granted. Likewise, cuneiform authors came to *embody* their literary heritage precisely when the status and importance of that heritage was cast into doubt.

Though the next chapters deal with different historical situations, each of which had its own peculiar social and cultural dynamics, there are two threads that tie the argument together: a connection between authorship and literary heritage, and a connection between authorship and professional identity. But these are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. The figure of the author embodied a literary heritage, but it did so in a specific way that allowed professional scribes and scholars to claim special access to that heritage. At the heart of this argument is a circular bond between scholars and literature: the scholars sought to keep the literary and scholarly tradition alive, and in turn, their standing in society depended on their detailed knowledge of that tradition.³ They kept literature important and literature kept them important. However, when the status of the literary tradition was endangered by political and demographic shifts, this circuit was interrupted. In order to protect their elite status, the scholars had to reaffirm both the importance of the tradition and their own standing as its guardians. In the following, I argue that authorship emerged as a way of achieving these two goals. Authors would embody and emblazon the importance of cuneiform literature, and at the same time they would tie literature firmly to the scribal profession.

Though it cannot be shown decisively, it is generally assumed that Sumerian and Akkadian literature had its roots in an oral tradition.⁴ The stories about Gilgamesh and Etana, for example, likely originated as popular accounts that circulated among both the learned and the illiterate and were only later set down in writing. George, for example, states that “[a]n oral origin for the poem of Gilgamesh is to be expected,

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⁴ See especially the essays collected in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout, *Mesopotamian Epic Literature*; and the references collected in Foster, *Before the Muses*, 45.
though it cannot be proved.” This is the modern etic view of the origins of cuneiform literature, but the narratives of authorship that circulated among scholars offer a different version of events. As noted in chap. 3, authors are essentially a compressed etiology of literature, providing a person-shaped account of how texts come into being. And according to that etiology, cuneiform literature had always been created and circulated not by an oral community, but by a small circle of learned experts. All authors who appear in the cuneiform record are, in one sense or another, elite literate professionals (see chap. 10). There are chief scholars, incantation priests, lamentation priests, divination priests, and the royal high priestess Enheduana: all high-status experts who would have been trained to read and write cuneiform. Crucially, there are no blind bards or rustic singers. Stories that may have begun as popular songs thus became the exclusive domain of professional scholars. The figure of the author cemented this association, ruling out any other possible origin for cuneiform literature than the world of writing.

In the Old Babylonian period, the scribes and scholars appropriated not only the Sumerian literary tradition, but the Sumerian language as well. By that time, Sumerian had died out as a spoken idiom, and the scribes set about converting it into a medium of scholarship and literature. They kept the heritage of Sumerian alive, including the all-important worship of the gods, whose main language remained Sumerian. But in so doing they also turned Sumerian into a class marker, so that people who had passed through the school system and learned Sumerian would carry a special distinction: only the pupils of the edubba’a could read this venerable language. In what will become a familiar pattern, the scribes kept Sumerian alive and Sumerian kept them important.  

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5 George, “Gilgamesh and the Literary Traditions,” 449.

6 This process is described in detail in the next chapter, including references to previous research. An interesting new study of this phenomenon is Szilvia Jáka-Sövegjártó, “Safeguarding by Enhancing,” which proposes that we understand the Sumerian language in the Old Babylonian period as an “intangible cultural heritage” that the scholars set out to manage and protect.

7 See e.g. Michalowski, “Literacy, Schooling and the Transmission of Knowledge.”
Eventually, this dynamic obscured the fact that Sumerian had ever been an actual vernacular language. As George puts it, “[t]he projection of scholarship’s exclusive control of Sumerian back into the remote, mythical past ignores the historical fact that it was once a vernacular language [...] the Babylonians’ own statements concerning Sumerian nowhere acknowledge that it was anything other than a special language used by the initiated.”

In sum, when the cuneiform tradition was threatened, narratives of authorship served as a way for the scholars to demonstrate its significance, while also cementing their proprietary claims to this heritage. In turn, the status of the scholars was closely bound up with the status of the institutions to which they belonged, which, as noted in chap. 2, can be thought of as the four “houses” of ancient Iraq: the family, the school, the palace, and the temple. The varying fortunes of these institutions will figure prominently in the next three chapters. As such, the story of how authorship came into being is as much as a story of how power is created and maintained by institutions that invest certain individuals with cultural capital, and in turn receive loyalty and authority from those individuals and the narratives they circulate.

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**To preserve is to transform**

It has often been remarked that authorial attributions in cuneiform cultures served to lend authority to a given text: by attributing it to a famous author, some of his or her significance was passed on to the text. Paul Delnero notes that the attribution of the *Exaltation* and other works to Enheduana “almost certainly served to invest these compositions with an even greater authority and importance than they would have had

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9 For the relation between authorship, institutions, and cultural power in the modern world, see Puksar, “Institutions: Writing and Reading.”
otherwise;\textsuperscript{10} and according to Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensoner, the trope of divine revelation is to be understood as an “Autorisierungsstrategie” that guaranteed the contents of the text.\textsuperscript{11} This is certainly the case, but I would like to add a slightly different point. I argue that authorial attributions lent authority not only to an individual text, but also to the textual corpus as a whole.

The attribution of The Temple Hymns to Enheduana undeniably enhanced the status of that one text, but in the Old Babylonian schools, the figure of Enheduana also served to embody, embellish, and exalt Sumerian literature in general. The Temple Hymns is an anthology of 42 hymns dedicated to the major temples of the Sumerian-speaking world, effectively gathering Sumerian cities into an ordered whole and providing the reader with a hymnic cosmography of Sumerian culture. As I argue in chap. 9, the fact that all the hymns could be attributed to the same author made Enheduana a mouthpiece of the unity of Sumerian culture. Likewise, the story of how Erra was revealed to Kabti-ili-Marduk certainly served to legitimate the epic, showing that despite its subversive and troubling contents it was still divinely approved. But when Kabti-ili-Marduk was included in the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, he also became part of a condensed canon of cuneiform authors. As I argue in chap. 11, this canon effectively depicted the achievements and the antiquity of the cuneiform tradition in miniature form, at a moment in time when that tradition was about to disappear entirely. In short, authorial attributions were used to legitimize both single texts and entire traditions.

But why would this kind of legitimization be necessary? In both cases, we are dealing with a literary tradition that circulated in a world where its language had died out and was being kept alive by a small circle of scribes. Sumerian literature continued to be read in a world that no longer spoke Sumerian; indeed, the majority of our sources for Sumerian literary texts date to the Old Babylonian period, when the main spoken language was Akkadian. Likewise, the cuneiform scholars of the Seleucid period learned

\textsuperscript{10} Delnero, “Scholarship and Inquiry in Early Mesopotamia,” 112.

\textsuperscript{11} Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensoner, “Abschrift, Offenbarung, Sukzession,” 43–45.
Sumerian and Akkadian during their studies, but they spoke Aramaic in their everyday lives and Greek when interacting with the state, while their neighbors might have spoken Hebrew, Middle Persian, or Old Arabic.12 In other words, the literary traditions persevered while the world around them changed, meaning that they were eventually cut off from their original context even as they stayed in the same place.

Beecroft argues that in ancient Greece and China, the appearance of authorship resulted from the loss of a living tradition. When poems moved out of the local, oral, performative context in which they had been composed and in which they made sense, the figure of the author supplied a new frame that explained and contextualized them. Local references that were meaningful in one city were lost when the poems were recited in the neighboring one, but the story of how and by whom the poems had been composed made up for that loss, accounting for how they had come into being and what their original significance had been—even if those stories were often far from accurate.13 I argue that something similar took place in the cuneiform world: when the language of a literary tradition died out, the narratives of authorship served to organize, condense, and exalt that tradition, making it easier to circulate in a world where its importance was no longer obvious.

This gets us to the central paradox of cuneiform authorship. I argue that narratives of authorship in ancient Iraq were part of the scholars' attempt to preserve and protect their literary tradition in times of crisis. But ironically, they also transformed that tradition in fundamental ways: originally anonymous texts were attributed to named authors, and a collective tradition was condensed into a single person. This is a pattern that Lauren Ristvet terms “the paradox of tradition” in Late Babylonian culture.14 The

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12 Clancier, “Cuneiform Culture’s Last Guardians,” 769; Beaulieu, “Official and Vernacular Languages”
van der Spek, “Multi-Ethnicity and Ethnic Segregation.”
13 Beecroft, Authorship and Cultural Identity.
14 Ristvet, Ritual, Performance, and Politics, 185.
paradox is simply that, in order to preserve their tradition, the Babylonian scholars were forced to change it. They continued working in fields that had existed for millennia, but also made dynamic innovations in astronomy, medicine, theology, and so on. They fondly cultivated their history, but in so doing misrepresented it. As Beaulieu writes, “the preservation of the threatened, but once dominant, culture is achieved through its artificial and overstated reassertion.” Such artificiality cannot be avoided when the cultural context has changed. Michalowski makes a similar point, arguing that the Late Babylonian scholars’ attempt to keep their tradition alive should not be understood as stale antiquarianism. By stubbornly sticking to their practices in a now much more multiethnic world, they transformed what had once been the dominant cultural hegemony into a dynamic “fundamentalist-like” heterodox identity, “a self-conscious collective subculture.”

In chap. 9, I refer to this dynamic as the “cruelty of conservation”: to preserve a tradition one must transform it. I don’t mean that conservation is in itself a cruel endeavor, merely that cultural conservation often occurs in circumstances that impose a cruel logic of necessity. For an obsolete tradition to be preserved, it has to be adapted to contemporary needs in sometimes radical ways, meaning that the line between cultural conservation and cultural destruction can be surprisingly flimsy. As the following chapters show, preserving an outdated tradition often involves simplifying, reducing, and reifying it, condensing its complexity into something singular and tangible, and exaggerating some of its feature while eliminating others.

The analyses below highlight two ways in which the preservation of the Sumerian and Akkadian literary heritage transformed that heritage. First, as noted above, literature was professionalized: the scholars who preserved the tradition molded it to suit their own interests, asserting an exclusive control over it. Second, the tradition was localized: it was reshaped so that it could be tied more firmly to one city. Consider again

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15 Beaulieu, “Antiquarian Theology,” 68.
16 Michalowski, “Mesopotamian Vistas,” 177.
the examples mentioned above, *The Temple Hymns* and the *Uruk List*. As the name indicates, the *Uruk List of Kings and Sages* was found in Uruk, and this is reflected in the structure of the text. Though it gives a miniature overview of all cuneiform culture, from the beginning of time to the death of Akkadian, the overview is also focused on Uruk: kings, sages, and authors associated with Uruk are repeatedly placed in a prominent position. Likewise, *The Temple Hymns* may have collected hymns from all major Sumerian cities, but the anthology is clearly centered on Nippur: the temples of Nippur are placed at the beginning of the collection and receive more hymns than any other city. Unsurprisingly, far most of its manuscripts come from Nippur (see p. 198). Old Babylonian school texts often depict an idea of a coherent Sumerian culture, but that idea was always filtered through the context where it circulated, and thus skewed by local preference and pride.17

**Final remarks**

In this chapter I have sketched out the historical drama that will play out again and again over the next three chapters. Each chapter will of course present significant variations in the historical circumstances, and I am not suggesting that there is some kind of isomorphism between the Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Seleucid period. However, my analyses will return to the same set of topics: political crises and demographic shifts, cultural contact and language death, the professionalization of literature, local and professional identities, the institutional role of the scribal elite, and the paradoxes of cultural preservation and transformation.

But the differences between the three periods are no less relevant. In the Old Babylonian period, only one author is known, Enheduana; in the Neo-Assyrian period, one sees a large and systematic interest in authorship; in the Seleucid period, the range

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17 Delnero, “Literature and Identity.”
of authors is again compressed into a small selection of the most important figures. Further, while I would maintain that in all three periods the emergence of authorship is connected with language death in one way or another, the linguistic situations are far from identical. In the 1730’s BCE, Sumerian had been a dead language for perhaps two centuries; in the Neo-Assyrian empire, Akkadian had been replaced by Aramaic as the most commonly spoken language but was only just beginning to die out; in the Seleucid period, both languages had died out completely, and there it was the written tradition of cuneiform that came under threat.

Perhaps the most important difference between the three periods is that in the 1730’s and the 160’s BCE, the scribes had suffered a major loss of power, and as a result, the narratives of authorship produced in those periods are nostalgically directed at a bygone time of political dominance. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the crisis of the scholars resulted not from a loss of power but from an overabundance of it: the enormous extent of the Assyrian empire led to major demographic shifts that made the Akkadian-speaking scholars a linguistic minority in Assyria itself. As a result, the narratives of authorship circulating there do not reflect a nostalgia for times long past, but an attempt to protect an increasingly brittle status quo. A related point is that during the Neo-Assyrian period the scholars were primarily employed by the sprawling state apparatus; after the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, they were only employed by the temples. Also, in the Old Babylonian and Seleucid period, the local ties of the narrative of authorship, to Nippur and Uruk respectively, are particularly strong; in the Neo-Assyrian period they are much looser.

A significant difference that I would have liked to explore, but was unable to for reasons of space, concerns gender. Enheduana was a woman, while all authors who appear in Neo-Assyrian and Seleucid sources are male. Tellingly, in the Old Babylonian

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period the deity who presided over writing and literature was the goddess Nidaba, but in the latter second millennium she was replaced by a male god, Nabû. Nicole Brisch has shown the existence of a “female paradigm” in the royal praise poetry of the Ur III period, and as shown by Eleanor Robson, in Sumerian poetry goddesses are more often depicted as literate than their male counterparts, which is not the case in Akkadian poetry. Likewise, more female scribes are known from the early second millennium than from later periods. This difference is connected with another major shift: in the first millennium, authors were often depicted as the mythical ancestors of scribal families. Scholars of Uruk claimed that they were the descendants of Sin-leqi-unninni, but no one claimed Enheduana as their ancestor—in Babylonian culture, ancestry was strongly patrilineal.

Finally, I would like to clarify one points that may cause confusion, namely my use of the word “canon.” The thesis is an interdisciplinary project that attempts to straddle the fields of Assyriology and literary history, but the two fields use the word “canon” differently. In Assyriology, the term was imported from Biblical studies, where it refers to a closed and well-defined group of texts: no additions to the canon can be made, and the texts of the canon cannot be amended in any way. There has been much discussion in Assyriology of whether the cuneiform tradition ever achieved a canonical closure in that sense of the word, but this is irrelevant to my argument. I use the term canon in

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20 The most famous—and polemic—study of this development is Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 71.

21 Brisch, “The Priestess and the King.”

22 Robson, “Gendered Literacy and Numeracy.”

23 Lion and Robson, “Quelques textes scolaires”; Lion, “Literacy and Gender.”

24 Other than symbolically, as a predecessor: McHale.

the literary sense: a group of texts that holds special distinction in a given cultural context and are generally assumed to be of the highest possible quality. The group is usually loosely defined and prone to change, and each of its texts can be redacted without thereby losing its canonical status (think of the philological changes commonly made to the works of Joyce or Shakespeare). This use of the term “canon” is relatively rare in Assyriology, though there are some notable exceptions, especially the studies by Francesca Rochberg and Niek Veldhuis. An important aspect of this notion of canonicity, as highlighted by John Guillory, is that it is closely tied to institutions that produce and are sustained by cultural capital, such as the Medieval trivium or modern universities: it is often centers of education and scholarship that define the canon. Likewise, Francesca Rochberg and Veldhuis highlight the association between the cuneiform canon and the institutions of cultural capital in ancient Iraq, including the edubba’a schools of the Old Babylonian period and the scribal families of the Neo-Assyrian period. As noted above, the emergence of authorship in ancient Iraq cannot be separated from questions of cultural capital, professional identity, and institutional control over the literary tradition.

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Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries, chap. 9; Robson, “Production and Dissemination”; van der Toorn, Scribal Culture, 44, and passim.

26 On canonicity in literary studies, see e.g. Guillory, Cultural Capital; Kermode, History and Value, chap. 6; Thomsen, Kanoniske konstellationer.


28 Guillory, Cultural Capital.


30 For Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital” and its relation to institutional power, see Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”; as well as the introduction to Bourdieu’s thinking in Swartz, Culture and Power.
Chapter Nine

Enheduana and the invention of authorship

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Enheduana and the Invention of Authorship

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Abstract: The first known author, Enheduana, gained a central place in the literary culture of ancient Iraq long after the death of Sumerian, the language in which her poems were written. The essay argues that her authorship served to depict the Sumerian literary heritage as a tangible object that could be acquired by people who did not speak Sumerian as their native language, since Enheduana’s poems condensed a cacophony of independent traditions into a single entity. The process primarily took place in the city of Nippur in the troubled decades after 1740 BC, as the ancient scholars desperately needed to assert their importance. They did so by claiming special access to Sumerian literature, and authorship served as an ideal vehicle to represent that literature and that access. In short, Enheduana became a body and a bridge for Sumerian literature, condensing it into a single object and allowing it to move into a new cultural context.

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Introduction

Literature begins in complete anonymity. The oldest known literary texts are entirely anonymous. For more than a millennium after the invention of writing, c. 3500 BC, literature would be composed, copied, and circulated without authorial attributions. This changed at the beginning of the second millennium BC, when the scholars of ancient Iraq made an author, the high priestess Enheduana, central to their literary corpus, attributing to her a series of hymns and autobiographical poems. For the first time in world history, it became possible to link a work of poetry to a named individual, and authorship was born.

Though modern scholars debate whether the historical Enheduana composed the poems attributed to her by the ancient scribes, the attribution is significant in itself. Whether or not it is historically accurate, it represents the earliest known

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instance of the very notion that literary works can be credited to a specific person. But why did this innovation take place, and why did it take place at that point in time?

In a nutshell, authorship gained in importance when the Sumerian language died out. The historical Enheduana lived in the 23rd century BC, but the preserved manuscripts of her poems were copied out much later, in the Old Babylonian period (19th–16th century BC). By then, Sumerian had ceased to be spoken as a living language, though it continued to be used as a language of literature, scholarship, and religious worship. In this essay, I argue that authorship was invented to represent a largely invented “Sumerian tradition” as a single, coherent, and tangible object that could be appropriated by Old Babylonian scribes. The idea of “the author” condensed what was in fact a complex, abstract literary heritage into a single figure.

The condensation of Sumerian was particularly significant in the context where Enheduana’s poems were most intensively studied: the city of Nippur in the decades after 1740 BC. For much of its history, Nippur was the religious centre of ancient Iraq, home to the temples of the most important deities in the Sumerian and Babylonian pantheon and the axis mundi of ancient cosmography. But in 1740 BC, Nippur was struck by political crises and social disruption. The city’s scholars desperately needed to assert their importance, and so invoked the memory of a venerable Sumerian culture to which they held special access. In this essay, I argue that Enheduana served as the embodiment of that culture and that access.

I analyse two texts attributed to Enheduana: the Temple Hymns, a collection of hymns addressed to the temples of various Sumerian cities, and the Exaltation of Inana, a prayer to the goddess Inana that includes an account of how Enheduana was cast into exile. I suggest that the Temple Hymns gathered the local traditions of Sumerian city states into a single text, turning a mishmash of local traditions into a composite but still coherent cultural identity. The figure of the author served to guarantee the underlying unity of the text, and with it, the unity of the culture depicted in that text. Meanwhile, the Exaltation fostered the ideal that Akkadian-speaking scholars could achieve perfect eloquence in Sumerian and employ that eloquence to address the gods. The figure of Enheduana thus transformed Sumerian from a heterogeneous congeries of traditions into a singular entity that others could appropriate and use.

In making this claim, I draw on the work of Alexander Beecroft (Authorship). Beecroft has explored the role of authorship in early Greece and China, arguing that authors became important in the transition from what he terms “epichoric” to “panchoric” forms of literary circulation—meaning the assimilation of local literary traditions into a new cultural whole. In Greece, the literature of each polis was gradually integrated into a Pan-Hellenic community, but the poems thereby lost some of the contextual information that had made them meaningful to their original
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epichoric community, including a tradition of oral delivery and references to local places and cults. The figure of the author made up for that loss, supplying the texts with an interpretative context as they moved into new territory, by grounding them in a historical and geographical setting and accounting for the circumstances of their composition (Beecroft *Authorship*, ch. 3 and 4). Authors thus served as a pre-package frame of understanding within which their texts could be made meaningful. Here I argue that a similar process explains the importance attached to Enheduana by Old Babylonian scholars. When the previously independent Sumerian traditions were collective into a new entity, the figure of Enheduana bridged the gap between the local literary traditions and their new, non-Sumerian readers. In short, authorship in the ancient world allowed literature to move beyond its place of origin.

**The roots of authorship**

During the third and early second millennium BC, the region we now call Iraq was divided into a multitude of city states, each with its own religious worship, administrative system, and local identity: Ur, Nippur, Uruk, Eridu, Kesh, Lagash, Isin, and so on. The cities were embroiled in a network of conflicts and alliances, but they remained largely independent of each other until the 23rd century BC, when king Sargon of Akkad brought them under a single rule, creating the short-lived Old Akkadian empire—the first empire of world history (Foster *Agade*).

At the time, the region was bilingual. The south mainly spoke Sumerian and the north mainly Akkadian, but the two languages intermingled throughout the area and were written with the same script, cuneiform. King Sargon presumably spoke Akkadian as his mother tongue but he installed his daughter, Enheduana, as high priestess of the god Nanna in the southern, Sumerian-speaking city of Ur. The few texts mentioning Enheduana that verifiably date to the Old Akkadian period are all in Sumerian, and her name is a Sumerian phrase that literally means “High priestess worthy of heaven” (or perhaps “The high priestess, the heavenly ornament”).

After generations of political instability and constant revolts, the Old Akkadian empire collapsed around year 2150 BC. At approximately the same time, Sumerian began to die out as a spoken language. The state that rose to take the place of the Old Akkadian empire, the Third Dynasty of Ur, implemented Sumerian as the language of administration and courtly life, but even then, it may already have been an artificial written language (for the question of when exactly Sumerian died out, see Woods, Rubio “Shulgi”, and Michalowski “Lives”). By at least the turn of the millennium, Sumerian had died out as a spoken idiom, becoming instead a learned language of scholarship and ritual, not unlike Latin in the Middle Ages. Meanwhile, the Akkadian language had split into a Babylonian dialect spoken in the south and an Assyrian dialect spoken in the north.
In the first centuries of the second millennium, a profound cultural shift took place, whereby Babylonian culture emerged as the heir of the Sumerian tradition. Much of what we know about the literary culture of the time comes from the Babylonian schools, known as edubba’a (literally “house of tablets”, or “house where tablets are distributed”). The schools taught the future priests and civil servants of Babylonia cuneiform writing, mathematics, and Sumerian grammar. The students copied their texts on clay tablets that have been preserved by the thousands, allowing us to reconstruct the curriculum in detail (Tinney, Veldhuis Elementary, Robson “Tablet House”).

Old Babylonian education consisted of two phases, elementary and advanced (see the overview in Robson “Tablet House” 47). During the elementary phase, students learned the cuneiform script, the Sumerian language, mathematics, and a comprehensive technical vocabulary. In the advanced phase, they turned to Sumerian literature, and especially two groups of texts: the Tetrad, a set of four hymns to kings and to the goddess of writing (Tinney), and the Decad, ten compositions of varying nature, including hymns, myths, and epic poetry (Delnero “Catalogues”).

Beside their curriculum, we know relatively little about Old Babylonian schools. We do not know who the teachers and the students were, or what kind of pedagogical practices accompanied the copying of texts. While there are some literary compositions that describe school life (Volk), they are quite unreliable as sources of historical evidence (Robson “Tablet House” 39, Civil 229). Further, as I return to below, our knowledge of Old Babylonian schools is heavily skewed towards one specific context, the city of Nippur during the reign of king Samsu-iluna (c. 1750–1712 BC).

A particularly important source of information about Old Babylonian schools is “House F” in Nippur, where archaeologists recovered no less than 1,425 cuneiform tablets of which 98% were school texts (Robson “Tablet House”). House F is a small glimpse of what an Old Babylonian school could look like, though it is difficult to tell how representative it would have been. It is an unimpressive domestic dwelling, c. 45 m² in size, with three small rooms and two courtyards. Had it not been for the thousands of texts recovered there, it would have been virtually indistinguishable from an ordinary Old Babylonian home.

It is in the Old Babylonian schools that authorship makes its first appearance in the historical record, as Enheduana’s works gained a central place in their curriculum. For the first time in preserved literary history, poems were treated as the output of an identifiable individual. The Exaltation became part of the Decad, and it is among the best attested works of Sumerian literature. A number of other poems were also attributed to Enheduana, including the Temple Hymns discussed...
below, another hymn to Inana, and two hymns to the moon god Nanna (for the latter, see J.G. Westenholz).

Sumerologists disagree about whether the historical Enheduana was indeed the author of these works (see e.g. Michalowski “Sailing” 184 versus Foster Agade 207). The earliest known manuscript of her poems dates to centuries after the Old Akkadian period, and while this may be just an accident of preservation, it is also possible that the texts were composed in Enheduana’s name long after her death. However, the question is not really relevant for the purposes of this essay. What interests me is not whether the historical person Enheduana was the “true” author of the poems, but why her purported authorship became so important to Old Babylonian scholars. Her poems may well have circulated orally for centuries, and indeed, two manuscript of the Temple Hymns date to preceding periods, the Third Dynasty of Ur (22nd–21st century BC) and the early Isin period (20th century BC). But it was in the edubba’a that, it seems, the poems first came to be widely read and carefully studied. As such, it was in the Old Babylonian schools that Enheduana’s authorship—and therefore authorship as such—first became a significant aspect of literary culture. Even if the poems were composed during the Old Akkadian period, they would have acquired new meanings and connotations when they were included in the Old Babylonian curriculum.

The question is then why authorship became so significant at just that time. Here I argue that it was due to the curious afterlife of Sumerian culture, combined with a political crisis that made this culture particularly salient. This argument does not invalidate the very real possibility that Enheduana was the author of the works attributed to her. Rather, I explore why her authorship seems to have become far more significant in the Old Babylonian period than it had previously been, and what it might have meant to the students who copied the poems in that historical context.

The invention of Sumerian
It is deceptively easy to think of the people who lived in Sumer and spoke Sumerian as “the Sumerians”. Likewise, it is tempting to speak of a single “Sumerian culture”, implying that it comprised a coherent world view and a single corpus of literary works. But things are not so straightforward. “Sumerian”, as an identity and not just a place, was created ex post facto (Rubio “Invention”). In the third millennium BC, there had been a notion of “Sumer” as a geographical region, and of “Sumerian” as a language that was spoken in that region, but there had been no concept of Sumerian as something one could be or of Sumerian culture as a bounded whole distinct from its neighbours. Sumer was a place and a language, not a people or a culture. Only a single text from the entire third millennium BC employs the term “Sumerian” to refer to a group of people (Rubio “Invention” 235). Otherwise, people saw
themselves as citizens of Ur, Nippur, Uruk, Lagash, Isin, Kish, or the like, but never referred to themselves as “Sumerian”.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the city as a building block of cultural identity during this period. Each city preserved its own customs, literary traditions, and state practices. Of course, the cities interacted with each other, but the texts often display a clearer awareness of mutual differences than of any overarching likeness. The Sumerian-speaking cities did share a common pantheon, but each god remained closely tied to a specific city: the king of the gods Enlil was tied to Nippur, the moon god Nanna to Ur, the wise god Enki to Eridu, the goddess Inana to Uruk, and so on. Further, the “Sumerian-speaking people” were not really a delimitable group either, since the region was effectively bilingual. In any given city people spoke Sumerian, Akkadian, or both. Finally, when empires brought the cities under a single rule, as with Sargon’s Old Akkadian dynasty, their territory was never limited to “Sumer” but included also other regions. In sum, during the third millennium, it is practically impossible to establish “Sumerian culture” as a clearly delimited, coherent entity.

However, during the Old Babylonian period, after the Sumerian language had ceased to be spoken, the edubba’a began to cultivate a sense of distinctive “Sumerianness” that the would-be scribes were made to study and revere. As shown by Niek Veldhuis (Nanše 75–76), the Old Babylonian curriculum promoted the illusion that southern Iraq had always been a unified state and not a set of independent cities. For example, the Sumerian King List arranges the chronology of the third millennium as if there had been, not multiple dynasties unfolding in parallel in each city, but a succession of kings ruling all of Sumer with power passing from one city to the next: first Eridu, then Kish, then Ur, and so on. (Michalowski “History”). Further, the very sequence of the curriculum promoted the notion of Sumer as a unified entity. Texts from Ur, Uruk, Nippur, and Lagash were studied in sequence, juxtaposed to give the impression that they belonged to the same tradition.

The Old Babylonian schools thus moulded the Sumerian literary heritage into a distinct cultural identity. As noted by Jerrold Cooper (1), “Sumerian identity as such appears only as an artefact of the scribal literary curriculum once the Sumerian language had to be acquired through education rather than as a mother tongue.” In other words, the death of the Sumerian language led to the birth of Sumerian culture. Sumerian-in-the-singular came about as a retrojection, a post-mortem reinvention of what had actually been a patchwork of local traditions. No one was ever born Sumerian, “[r]ather, to be Sumerian was to be learned. Sumerian is an identity that arose only once the Sumerian language had to be acquired in school” (Cooper 11, emphasis in the original).
To speak Sumerian, read Sumerian literature, and know Sumerian history were turned into the markers of an elite group of scholars serving as priests and court officials. The invented Sumerianness became a source of cultural capital that was produced within the institution of the *edubba’a*, a vehicle for the literate class to position themselves as a unified group commanding special access to the past (Veldhuis *Nanše* 46, Richardson, Steinkeller). Those who had successfully passed through the curriculum became “privy to a unique knowledge of the past, linguistic, historical, and poetic, that marked them as privileged individuals who shared knowledge as a bond of unity” (Michalowski “Literacy” 52).

So far I have spoken of the “Old Babylonian curriculum” as if it were a single thing with a single function. However, one must add an important reservation to this picture. We know the Old Babylonian curriculum mainly from one city, Nippur. Archaeological excavations have yielded far more school texts in Nippur than from anywhere else—almost nine tenths of the entire corpus—which obviously skews our image of Old Babylonian education as a whole (Robson “Tablet House” 52, Delnero “Inana” 142–46). To the extent that the preserved material allows us to compare different cities, a number of local differences emerge both in the structure of the curriculum and in its pedagogical goals (Delnero “Invention”).

Based on current evidence, it is reasonable to assume that there was never one general Old Babylonian curriculum, but a number of local traditions—related and at least somewhat similar, but not identical. The argument presented by Rubio, Veldhuis, and Cooper, that Old Babylonian schools constructed an ideal of a single Sumerian heritage, may still apply, but only in the limited context of Nippur. The curriculum did portray the Sumerian cities as part of a single culture, but this was a fiction that was embedded in one city and that was primarily meaningful there. Even as the Nippurian curriculum assembled local traditions into a new “pan-Sumerian” whole, it also sought to make Nippur the centre of that whole. This local context is key to the reception of Enheduana’s works, since the overwhelming majority of their manuscripts come from Nippur: 62 of 77 for the *Exaltation* and 37 of 44 for the *Temple Hymns* (excluding tablets of unknown provenience). Though Enheduana came from Akkad and lived in Ur, it was in Nippur that her works found fame.

Further, our knowledge of the Old Babylonian curriculum is limited not only to Nippur, but to a specific time frame. Though the tablets are difficult to date precisely, the archaeological context suggests that most of the recovered school texts were written between 1740 and 1722 BC (Brisch 38, Robson “Tablet House” 327). This may be more than a coincidence dictated by the vagaries of archaeological excavation: there is reason to believe that those decades did see a rise in the importance of scribal education.

**Authorship**
The years following 1740 BC were a time of deep crisis for Nippur. The city joined a rebellion against the Babylon-based rule of king Samsu-iluna that was mercilessly put down. Nippur was left in tatters. Its civil life was disrupted, its economy waned, and much of the population migrated north. Samsu-iluna’s power also deteriorated, as the state began to lose control over its southern cities. The overwhelming trove of school texts recovered at Nippur were thus produced in the immediate aftermath of a profound social crisis: As Nicole Brisch (39) puts it, “this is the historical background for the Sumerian literary texts as preserved. The Nippur texts offer us a glimpse into a school curriculum after the rebellion” (emphasis in the original).

The portrayal of “Sumer” as a singular, significant heritage must have born a special urgency at the time. In the face of Nippur’s dwindling status and deteriorating civil life, the city needed to assert its importance more than ever. Its claim to fame lay in being a centre of religious worship, literary erudition, and Sumerian heritage, so it is hardly surprising that the schools of the city should highlight the importance of just those things. Further, the curriculum’s implicit message of cultural unity must have been particularly conspicuous in a time where actual political unity was unravelling. As Brisch notes (40), the school texts may have been officially designed to offer ideological support for the idea of a unified Mesopotamia, an idea that the kings of Babylon tried to revive (with little success). Read unofficially they could at the same time subtly underline the fact that the kings at Babylon could not live up to the successes of the past. Indeed, the focus on the invented unity of the past would have been especially clear in the case of Enheduana, as her father Sargon was the most famous political unifier in the history of cuneiform cultures.

In the following sections, I argue that the creation of “Sumerian-in-the-singular” was the reason why Enheduana’s authorship became important in Old Babylonian schools. The notion of a Sumerian culture that could be accessed through education bolstered the Nippurian scholars’ sense of professional identity and prestige, at a point in time when that prestige was more direly needed than ever. Enheduana was perfectly suited to represent that notion, embodying as she did the ideals of literary erudition, a coherent Sumerian identity, and a unified system of worship.

In short, Enheduana came to serve as a body and a bridge for Sumerian identity. First, she personified the Sumerian literary tradition, condensing a broader mixture of traditions into a single figure and so guaranteeing its coherence, as I show through a reading of the Temple Hymns. Second, she provided a working model for how that tradition could be acquired by Akkadian-speaking scribes, as I show through a reading of the Exaltation.
Embodiment and anthology

The Temple Hymns comprise a total of forty-two hymns invoking the main temples of a number of Sumerian cities (a new edition of the text is being prepared by Monica Phillips). They are relatively short, between 8 and 23 lines each. According to the first editors of the text, Åke Sjöberg and Eugen Bergmann (3), the hymns “follow a definite pattern: address to the temple with hymnical epithets, followed by an address to the deity in similar style and a refrain”. Indeed, what matters here is not the content of the individual hymns but the form of the overall collection—or rather, the very fact that it is a collection, juxtaposing and standardizing hymns related to a number of local cults.

A postscript to the collection states that: “The composer (lit. ‘weaver’) of the tablet is Enheduana. / My lord, something has been created that no one had created before!” Given what we know about the literary history of the Temple Hymns, the metaphor of weaving seems apt. The composer of the text did not create it ex nihilo but drew on an existing tradition of praise poems addressed to temples, collecting and reshaping them to form a single text with a uniform format, like the threads of a textile being arranged into a new weave. It is thus the composition as a whole, rather than its individual parts, that “no one had created before” (see Helle “What Is an Author” 124).

If the Temple Hymns were composed by the historical Enheduana, they would have served a patent ideological purpose, as the literary equivalent of Sargon’s subjugation of the Sumerian city states under one empire. The cities included in the Temple Hymns are brought together and made to follow a consistent pattern, in a kind of hymnic imperialism. But even if the Temple Hymns are indeed Old Akkadian in origin, the collection would have gained a somewhat different function as it entered the Old Babylonian curriculum.

Even though the curriculum fostered the idea of “Sumer” as a unified entity, that process of unification did not mean that all local traditions were merely conflated into one. Local differences were preserved and juxtaposed to create a sense of togetherness. The Sumerian identity constructed in the Old Babylonian period was a mosaic, not a melting pot. The structure of the curriculum thus carried the indirect voice that speaks through the corpus in its entirety: the history of Uruk is our history, the history of Lagaš is our history, too, and so are the histories of Ur, Isin, and Nippur. There is one Sumerian language, one Sumerian history, one Sumerian heritage (Veldhuis Nanše 75–76).

[NB! The passage “the indirect voice ... one Sumerian heritage” is a quotation from Veldhuis; the quotation marks were accidentally deleted from the final copy.]

2 lu₂ dub zu₂ keš₂-da en-ḥe₂-du₂-an-na / lu₃g₃al-ĝu₁₀ ni₃g₂ u₃-tu na-me lu₂ nam-mu-un-u₃-tu, l. 543–44.
According to Veldhuis, the syncretism did not take place within any one text, rather it was the juxtaposition of texts within the curriculum as a whole that created the sense of unity. In the *Temple Hymns*, however, this implicit, corpus-wide process becomes much more concrete. Hymns from Eridu are placed directly next to hymns from Nippur, Kesh, Ur, and so on, all within the same text. The *Temple Hymns* is thus the fullest realization of the structure of Old Babylonian education more generally: the “indirect voice” that speaks through the corpus found its mouth in Enheduana.

As such, the hymns also make evident a contradiction at the heart of that structure, namely a tension between sameness and difference. “Paradoxically,” writes Veldhuis (Nanše 77), “the national character of Sumerian literature is created by the local background of many individual compositions.” The creation of a single heritage relied on a multitude of traditions that could be juxtaposed to form a new whole only insofar as they remained recognizably distinct. Even in its fullest Old Babylonian syncretism, Sumerian culture remained a composite construct. The format of the anthology was an ideal vehicle to reconcile that tension. It afforded the possibility of collecting without merging, of positing an overarching unity between cities without destroying their idiosyncrasy. In other words, the *Temple Hymns* do not “represent” or “depict” Sumerian identity, rather the structure of the collection is the structure of Sumerian identity at its clearest: Sumer came into being as an anthology.

It is therefore interesting to consider the relation between the format of the anthology and the accompanying postscript identifying Enheduana as its author. The local traditions required a sense of coherence if they were to be united despite their differences, and that coherence was provided by the author. The notion of authorship, especially the idea that different poems could be attributed to the same person, guaranteed the unity of what was fundamentally a composite text. In turn, the unity of that text made manifest the unity of what was fundamentally a composite culture. Just as the various hymns could be subsumed under one author, so could the various cities be subsumed under a single Sumerian identity. Enheduana thus embodied Sumerian in the sense that her singularity as a person, combined with her prolificacy as an author, reconciled the tension between the composite and the unified character of Sumerian culture. Authorship rose to prominence as a single voice that could sing of many cities.

But as noted above the construction of Sumerian took place in a specific local context, Nippur. The city was never the site of any major political power, nor was it vital as a hub of commerce or industry. Rather, it was important as a religious centre,

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3 The coming into being of Sumerian literature is thus comparable to the processes that took place in ancient Greece and China, which Beecroft describes as “the collecting of disparate textual units scattered over the panchoric territory” (“Comparing” 74).
the city of Enlil, king of the gods, and as the home of many important temples. This focus is reflected in the *Temple Hymns*. It is noteworthy that the cultural unity being constructed here is a specifically religious one. It consists of hymns and temples, not of kings and dynasties as in the *Sumerian King List*. That religious unity would have been particularly appropriate for a city that saw itself as primarily a religious capital.

Further, the very structure of the *Temple Hymns* reflects a Nippur-centric cosmology. The first hymn goes to E-Engura, Enki’s temple in Eridu, perhaps to acknowledge Eridu’s status as the primordial city where culture was said to have originated. But the following four hymns all go to temples in Nippur: the temple of Enlil, of his wife Ninlil, of his servant Nuska, and of his son Ninurta. By contrast, all other cities in the *Temple Hymn* receive just one hymn each, so it is no surprise to find that 37 of its 44 manuscripts come from Nippur (the last seven come from Ur and a further six are of unknown provenience). If the *Temple Hymns* were also studied in other cities, the hymns may have been arranged differently there, but we do not have the sources to show it. With the evidence presently at our disposal, we can only assume that the *Temple Hymns* gathered a set of local traditions into a new whole, but also made Nippur the centre of that whole. The creation of a collective identity was shaped by the context in which it took place.

This, then, is one reason why Enheduana’s authorship became important during the Old Babylonian period. The figure of the author rose to prominence as the unity of Sumerian culture became politically vital. In the one historical context in which we know that the *Temple Hymns* were studied extensively—Nippur after the failed rebellion—the hymns would have been an ideal source of social prestige for the embattled scholars: they represented the structure of Sumerian culture and reshaped it to fit contemporary needs. In need of support for their declining city, Nippurian scholars could see themselves as citizens of the core of an ancient world order, an order that was both composite, coherent, and religious in nature, and whose unity was guaranteed by the figure of Enheduana.

**Eloquence and appropriation**

The memory of Enheduana not only allowed for the creation of a Sumerian heritage, it also promoted the idea that this heritage could be appropriated by others. This becomes clear in the *Exaltation of Inana*, a hymn to Inana to whom the narrator Enheduana appeals for help (Zgoll). It contains a (pseudo-?) autobiographical section describing Enheduana’s plight: She has been cast into exile by a usurper and the deity she served, the moon god Nanna, refuses to answer her prayers. To remedy her situation, Enheduana must convince Inana to intervene in her stead and rule in her favour.

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4 To celebrate the building of a new temple in Ur, king Shulgi of the Third Dynasty Ur added a hymn to the composition, no. 9, so that there are in fact two hymns addressed to temples in Ur, but with no. 9 explicitly acknowledged as a supplementary addition (daḫ-ḫu-um, l. 134).
The resolution of the narrative crisis thus depends on the eloquence of its narrator. Armed with nothing but words, Enheduana must persuade Inana to assist her. But Enheduana’s power of speech has disappeared: “My once honeyed mouth has now become froth, / my power to please hearts is turned to dust.” This is the core dilemma of the Exaltation. If Enheduana does not regain her “honeyed mouth”, all will be lost. The crisis is eventually resolved through the composition of the poem itself. In a striking climactic scene, Enheduana creates the Exaltation, thereby regaining her eloquence and exalting Inana. The following day, a singer repeats the song that Enheduana composed, and a postscript states that Inana accepted her prayer.

The self-referential resolution thus makes eloquence the turning point of the poem. Enheduana’s ability to compose the Exaltation saves her from the predicament described in the Exaltation, meaning that her survival relies on a mastery of literary Sumerian. Amid the narrator’s boasts about her “honeyed mouth”, it is easy for modern readers to forget that Enheduana was presumably not a native speaker of Sumerian, but the princess of an Akkadian-speaking dynasty. Sargon and his heirs introduced the use of Akkadian as a language of administration and public discourse on par with Sumerian (Foster Agade 213–14), and though the historical Enheduana could easily have grown up fluent in Sumerian, the Old Babylonian pupils copying her works would likely have associated her with an Akkadian-speaking empire. We cannot be certain that they would have thought of Enheduana as a non-native speaker of Sumerian, but given her association with Sargon’s dynasty, it is also far from impossible.

In turn, that association would have created for them a space of identification. Just like them, Enheduana was an Akkadian speaker who had to master literary Sumerian. As with the Temple Hymns, here the medium is the message: the form of the Exaltation tells us as much as its content. It is written in a notoriously difficult Sumerian, full of recondite expressions, multiple layers of allusion, and vivid images. The narrator’s comparison of her speech with honey is very fitting: Enheduana’s poetic style seems somehow viscous—dense, slow, and highly enjoyable, with complex metaphors following each other in heavy succession. Often a single line is so compact that it can be read in more than one way, and translations of the poem differ substantially from one another. The sheer poetic quality of the narrator’s diction adds an element of irony to the crisis of eloquence described above. The readers know that the narrator will eventually regain her lost eloquence, because that loss is narrated to us in eloquent verses.

The language of the poem thus demonstrates the degree of mastery that speakers of Akkadian could achieve in Sumerian. As noted, the Exaltation was part of the Decad, and it is telling that in this select corpus of Sumerian literature, the

\[ \text{Authorship} \]

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5 \text{la la} \_\text{gu} 10 \text{šu ūh} 3-\text{a ba-ab-du}11 / \text{ni} \text{g} 2 \text{sa} 0-\text{sa} 0-\text{gu} 10 \text{sa} har-ta ba-da-ab-\text{gi} 4, l. 72–73.
most consummately poetic text was written by someone who may not have spoken Sumerian as her mother tongue. But that is precisely the point. The Exaltation divorces Sumerian eloquence from native speakers of Sumerian, turning it into an effective instrument that could be acquired and employed by anybody.

Aage Westenholz ("Old Akkadian" 76–77) argues that, while Enheduana’s "works are written in the most exquisite Sumerian", they also contain an "Akkadian spirit", making them "a blend of Sumerian and Akkadian tradition". Though it is a contentious matter to isolate Sumerian and Akkadian elements of a text, as Westenholz does here, his comment reflects a more widely held sense that Enheduana’s poetry was somehow poised between languages. Westenholz attributes this admixture of traditions to the historical Enheduana’s precarious position in the “turbulent times” of the Old Akkadian empire, but whatever its origin, the blend of Sumerian and Akkadian made Enheduana’s poetry an ideal vehicle for a cultural transfer between languages.6

Again, it is possible that the Exaltation was composed by the historical Enheduana and played a specific ideological function in the Old Akkadian period (Zgoll, Hallo and van Dijk, ch. 1 and 5), but in the Old Babylonian schools, it became a demonstration of the appropriability of Sumerian eloquence. It is important to note that at this time, Sumerian was fully tied to the schools. It was not all Akkadian speakers who could acquire Sumerian eloquence, but specifically school students. As Cooper puts it, the corpus of the edubba’a was "a Sumerian curriculum in which Sumerian literature is studied and the ability to write and speak Sumerian is valorized, but it is also clear that the Sumerian language must be learned" (11). Some humorous compositions contain idealized dialogues between school students boasting about their achievements: “Having been in school for the prescribed time, I have achieved (mastery) of Sumerian, of the scribal art, of the meaning of texts, of counting and accounting—I can even speak Sumerian!” (translation from Michalowski “Literacy” 44). Proficiency in Sumerian is expressly linked to the scribal profession and to the edubba’a. The student brags of speaking Sumerian fluently, but the very fact that this is something to brag about implies a lack of natural familiarity with the language, a distance that had to be overcome through education.

That distance is crucial to how Enheduana would have been perceived in the edubba’a. She bridged the gap that separated Old Babylonian students from the Sumerian language, not closing it, but advertising the prospect of crossing it. The Exaltation could serve two purposes in a pedagogical context. First, it demonstrated

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6 Likewise, Michalowski ("Where’s Al?") argues that bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian puns in the Hymn to the Hoe (also part of the Decad) were “a useful tool for instilling a sense of the living authority of Sumerian by means of the polyglotic simultaneous presence of the vernacular Akkadian embedded in the classical tongue” (199)—that is, reinterpreting Sumerian as a prestigious language radically entangled with Akkadian, and thus available for use to Akkadian-speaking students.

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the possibility that non-native speakers might acquire a remarkable degree of eloquence in Sumerian; second, it dramatized the rewards of acquiring it, as the narrator remedies her desperate situation through a mastery of language. The self-referential climax, with the composition of the story resolving the crisis of the story, makes a point that is unmistakably didactic: eloquence saves lives, so study hard.

But eloquence is not just eloquence. It matters that Enheduana displays a command, not of poetic language in general, but of poetic Sumerian. Sumerian was the language employed in religious ceremonies, and though it was possible to address the gods in Akkadian, Sumerian guaranteed direct access to the divine world. Again, this would have been significant in the context of the edubba, whose students generally pursued one of two career paths: officials at court or priests at the temples. As Rubio ("Invention" 249) notes, "it is no accident that most of these possible edubbas or tablet houses were the dwellings of priests and located near temples. Sumerian was a liturgical language throughout Mesopotamian history." Again, it would have been easy to turn the language of the Exaltation into a pedagogical point. Enheduana’s appeal to Inana proved effective not least because it was spoken in the language of gods, making that language worthy of acquisition.

Once more, this would have been a specifically Nippurian ideal. No other city placed as much emphasis on the mastery of Sumerian. Delnero ("Invention" 47) compares school texts found at Ur with those found at Nippur, noting that "the type of elitism that was conferred through scribal training differed between the Nippur and the Ur curricula". The Nippur curriculum emphasized recondite Sumerian literature and the full complexities of the language, while in Ur, "form seems to have taken precedence over substance" (Delnero "Invention" 45). What mattered in Ur was for tablets to look professional—clean, well-written, well-shaped—while the minutiae of recherché poetry in a dead language seem to have been less important. Not so in Nippur, where the ideal of Sumerian eloquence was part and parcel of the city’s self-perception.

The Exaltation thus displayed the promise of Sumerian eloquence in a historical context where access to that eloquence was highly restricted. Only elite urban children attended the schools, and only in Nippur did those schools focus so intensely on mastering Sumerian poetry. So despite the story taking place in Ur, it is again unsurprising to find that it was mainly studied in Nippur. Eleanor Robson ("Tablet House" 53) charts how many manuscripts of a given Sumerian literary text come from Nippur as compared to how many manuscripts of the text have been preserved in total, and the Exaltation emerges as the most “Nippurian” of all texts in the Decad: 86% of the sources come from Nippur. In fact, a full 38% come from House F specifically, which is perhaps unsurprising in light of its archaeological context. The school was located a mere 250 meters away from Nippur’s main temple (Robson "Tablet House" 40), so if the power of appealing to the gods in eloquent Sumerian was ever important anywhere, it was important there.
This is a second aspect of Enheduana’s authorship that made it central to the literary culture of the Old Babylonian period. Not only did the figure of Enheduana reduce the Sumerian heritage to a single entity, it also divorced that entity from Sumerian-speaking people. The language and its literature were made an object of appropriation, an instrument to be used rather than an abstract admixture of independent traditions.

**The cruelty of conservation**

I have argued that the invention of authorship provided a body and a bridge for the survival of Sumerian, meaning that the author became a way of condensing a fading culture into a single object and granting others access to that object. Enheduana thus emerges as a specifically Old Babylonian embodiment of Sumerian culture, and her authorship was crucially tied to the institution that celebrated it. The author represented the ideals of the *edubba’a*: the ideological unity of the Sumerian past and the sense of elite identity that accompanied it.

I have emphasized that Old Babylonian scholars simplified and transformed Sumerian heritage for their own purposes, but this is surely not what they thought they were doing. For them, Sumerian history was intrinsically valuable. The scholars were deeply invested in safe-guarding Sumerian, but any attempt at safe-guarding a culture inevitably transforms it. There is a cruelty to conservation: To establish a culture as worthy of preservation is also to transform, fix, flatten, simplify, instrumentalize, and reify it, thus turning a living tradition into a tangible artefact. The scholars’ attempt to preserve the Sumerian heritage led them to reduce its multiplicity, condense its cacophony, and separate it from its original context. But the process of conservation is cruel not least because that cruelty is often necessary. The past gains currency only if it is adapted to the purposes of the present, even if that adaption requires some degree of damage to the past that one wishes to protect. In the Old Babylonian context, preserving Sumerian meant reshaping it into a singular source of cultural capital. If, amid the crisis of 1740 BC, Nippur was to base its continued standing on the value of Sumerian literature, this literature had to be presented as a definite entity that non-Sumerians could access.

There is an inevitable nostalgia to such an operation, a sense that something had been lost and that it can only ever be preserved in part. Seth Richardson (178) argues that Old Babylonian scholars “approached Sumerian as a foreign language, but one in which the past itself was part of the foreignness; it was a cultural position stereotyped to connote antiquity first and foremost.” That is, the scholars preserved Sumerian for the present moment, grafting a new meaning onto it, but the temporal distance was itself a key part of that meaning. As such, while Enheduana’s authorship made the Sumerian heritage appropriable and thus “current” for Old Babylonian students, it also registered the disappearance of that heritage.
Rubio (“Invention” 231) notes that “the creation of a Sumerian literary corpus embodied a discourse grounded in the nostalgia of the power Sumer had once had and lost.” If anyone represented that discourse, it was Enheduana. Her works fully display the might of the Old Akkadian empire that had brought the city states under one rule. But they also illustrate the loss of that power. In the *Exaltation*, the narrator's predicament is that she has been exiled as the result of a rebellion, one of the many that eventually brought the empire to its knees. Further, as noted above, the ideal of the Sumerian past as a unified state would have been a double-edged sword in an Old Babylonian context. It could legitimize the contemporary Babylonian project of political unification, but it could also expose the shortcomings of that project in comparison with the invented Sumerian past (Brisch 40). Poised midway between imperial might and political collapse, rebellion and reparation, failure and success, the figure of Enheduana fully registers that ambiguity.

Enheduana was thus a nostalgic figure through and through, representing both the zenith of imperial power and its irrevocable loss. This nostalgia is indicative of the function of her authorship more generally. The figure of the author became a way of preserving a dead language and a lost culture, but in that process, the object of preservation was transformed almost beyond recognition. The Sumerian heritage was simplified and reified to become an identity and an instrument.

**Conclusion**

One question remains: why Enheduana? Any number of famous figures could have had any number of literary compositions attributed to them. If indeed the Nippurian scholars needed to embody Sumerian literature in one author, why did Enheduana come to play that role? One straightforward possibility is that Enheduana was the actual author of the poems, as Annette Zgoll (179–84) and others have forcefully argued. This would of course make her a particularly ideal candidate for literary fame, but it would not in itself be a sufficient explanation. Even if Enheduana could definitively be proven to have composed the texts, we would still have to explain why her authorship continued to matter five centuries after her death when all other Sumerian acts of authorship were consigned to oblivion. Whether Enheduana’s Old Babylonian fame is best understood as historical memory or as pure invention, we must account for the factors that made her so appealing.

I have already proposed some answers to this question: Enheduana’s straddling of the Sumerian and Akkadian languages, her prominent position in the religious system that had its centre in Nippur, and her double connection with both the Old Akkadian empire and its disintegration. One might add that Enheduana was not overly tied to any one city—she came from Akkad, served in Ur, worshipped an
Urukean goddess, and gave pride of place to Nippur in the Temple Hymns—perhaps allowing her to stand in for all Sumerian cities and not for just one tradition.\footnote{Similarly, Beecroft (Authorship 72–79) argues that ancient debates about Homer’s birthplace served to unite the author from any one polis, allowing his epics to function all the more forcefully as Pan-Hellenic charters of cultural cohesion to which no one city had special access.}

A final factor that should not be overlooked is Enheduana’s gender. Since all other known authors from cuneiform cultures were male, her femininity has struck many scholars as a particularly salient aspect of her authorship (see e.g. Michalowski “Sailing” 184–85 and Lion 94–95). However, in an Old Babylonian context, it may be less remarkable than it is usually taken to be. Robson (“Gendered Literacy”) shows that in the Sumerian literature studied in the edubba’a’s, literacy is generally associated not with men but with goddesses, chief among them Nidaba, the patron deity of scribes. Likewise, Brisch points to a possible “female paradigm” in the poetry about the king Shu-Sin, where royal women play a key ideological role in singing the king’s praises. In Sumerian literature, female authorship may thus have been less striking than it would become in later times. This may be a further reason why Enheduana was ideal suited to embody Sumerian literature, serving as a human counterpart to the literacy of goddesses such as Nidaba.

When the curriculum of the cuneiform schools was restructured after the Old Babylonian period, Enheduana’s works were left out. Her poetry soon faded from memory, leaving them entirely forgotten until their rediscovery in the 20th century AD. Cuneiform literature thereby reverted to its previous anonymity and would remain anonymous until authorship once again became important during the Neo-Assyrian and then the Seleucid periods (Helle “Role of Authors”; on authorship in Akkadian literature more generally, see Foster “Authorship” and Lambert). Though Enheduana’s authorship was in many ways exceptional—a rare flash of poetic attribution in an otherwise anonymous culture; the eloquent speech of a privileged woman in an otherwise patriarchal culture—it should be a site of far greater interest for historians of literature, as it is the earliest known instance of literary authorship.

\textit{Authorship}
Bibliography


A literary heritage: Authorship in the Neo-Assyrian period

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This paper was first presented at the AOS in Chicago (March 2019) and at the “Advanced Seminar in the Humanities” at Venice International University (April 2019), and I thank the participants of both conferences for their suggestions and comments. Further, I would like to thank Jeff Cooley, Enrique Jiménez, Henry Stadhouders, and Shiyanthi Thavapalan for sharing preliminary versions of their articles with me. Finally, I would like to thank the editor, Lucio Milano, my advisor, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, and Johannes Haubold, who made a number of valuable contributions to the argument.
The question of Neo-Assyrian authorship revolves around one text: the *Catalogue of Texts and Authors*. Known from three manuscripts from the royal library in Nineveh, the *Catalogue* is something of a historical puzzle. It has often been noted that cuneiform literature was almost entirely anonymous, but the *Catalogue* is a conspicuous exception to that rule. It comprises a list of texts, ranging from scholarly works like *Enuma Anu Enlil* to literary compositions like *Gilgamesh*, each of which is attributed to an author. Some authors are likely to be the actual composers of the texts, as with Kabti-ili-Marduk, who identifies himself as the author of *Erra* in the poem itself (V 42–44). However, other attributions are clearly unreliable, like those of the god Ea or the mythical sage Adapa. Indeed, most of the *Catalogue*’s attributions are of undecidable historicity, as there is no way of determining whether a person like Sin-leqi-unnenni, the purported author of *Gilgamesh*, ever existed. What is interesting about the *Catalogue* is therefore not so much the accuracy of its claims, but rather how unique those claims are in the cuneiform world.

Of course, the *Catalogue* is not the only instance of authorship in cuneiform cultures. Another famous author from ancient Iraq is Enheduana, who gained significant fame in the *edubba’a*’s of the Old Babylonian period. However, Enheduana was an isolated figure: she was the only author known at the time and she fell into oblivion when the school curriculum was restructured at the end of the Old Babylonian

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1 Lamb 1962.
2 See e.g. Hallo 1962, 14; Michalowski 1996, 183; Glassner 2001, 111; Veldhuis 2004, 59; Foster 2005, 19; van der Toorn 2007, chap. 2; Brisch 2011, 708; Worthington 2012, 44; Lenzi 2015, 151–53; and van de Mieroop 2016, 23.
3 George 2003, 28–33.
5 Zgoll 1997, 43; Helle 2019b.
The First Authors

period. By contrast, the Catalogue displays a systematic and comprehensive interest in authorship, linking texts to their authors not in isolation, but as part of a broader program. Further, a number of other Neo-Assyrian texts demonstrate that the interest in authorship was not limited to the Catalogue. Colophons, catalogues, and even the literary works themselves begin to reference authorship much more consistently than before. The question is why this development took place, and why it took place at that moment in time. As noted by Erle Leichty: “Authorship does not seem to have been of particular interest to the ancient Mesopotamian; at least not until the late first millennium.” So what was special about the late first millennium?

In the first part of the essay, I present an overview of Neo-Assyrian sources relating to authorship. In the second part, I examine the figure of the author as it appears in these sources, arguing that Neo-Assyrian authorship is connected with questions of ancestry, professionalization, and textual control: the figure of the author tied cuneiform compositions to a specific social context, namely families of professional scholars who held special access to the cuneiform tradition. In the third part, I speculate as to why authorship became important during the Neo-Assyrian period specifically, pursuing a suggestion first put forward by Piotr Michalowski that would link the emergence of authorship to the death of Akkadian and the “Aramaization of Mesopotamia.”

Within the field of Assyriology, authorship has often been discussed in historicist terms, as a question of whether the ancient scholars were correct in attributing, say, Gilgamesh to Sin-leqi-unnenni. However, the approach employed here is different: I am interested in authorship not as a historical reality but as a cultural narrative. Whether or not the authors actually existed, it is interesting that the ancient scholars found them interesting. The authorial claims are important not for their veracity, which

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6 Leichty 1988, 261.
8 See e.g. Lambert 1962, 77; Hallo 1962, 15–16; and George 2003, 28–30.
is often dubious anyway, but because they show a new discourse about literature coming into being: the emergence of the narrative of authorship.\(^9\)

Of course, the narratives of authorship that circulated among cuneiform scholars was not the same as those of European modernity, which tied authorship to notions of originality, intellectual property, and ethical accountability. None of these issues apply to cuneiform authors, who are more often depicted as textual mediators than as original creators. They are repeatedly shown relaying a text from a divine creator to a human audience (e.g. Kabti-ili-Marduk), or reworking a tangle of textual traditions into a new, standardized format (e.g. Esagil-kin-apli).\(^9\) This has led scholars to claim that these figures are not authors at all, but rather the editors, compilers, redactors, or “channels” of their texts.\(^9\) However, as I have argued at length elsewhere, the objection is invalid. Throughout the premodern world, authors are repeatedly depicted as mediators who transmit texts received from elsewhere (think only of Homer, who claims to relay a story told to him by the Muse).\(^9\) Far from invalidating their claim to authorship, the depiction of cuneiform figures as transmitters of texts is fully representative of how authors are depicted throughout literary history. Authorship in the Neo-Assyrian period is therefore not a historical aberration, but a fruitful case study for premodern authorship in general.

Some genres in the cuneiform corpus, most notably letters and royal inscriptions, were tied to a named composer in all historical periods, while other genres like contracts or treaties were never attributed to authors. There is thus little or no change in the authorship of these genres, and tellingly, they do not appear in the Catalogue. I have therefore excluded them from this study, which will instead focus on the authorship of narrative poetry, hymns, debates, proverb collections, medical

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\(^9\) This approach to authorship is based on the work of Graziosi 2002 and Beecroft 2010.


\(^9\) See e.g. Lenzi 2015, 151–53; van der Toorn 2007, 41; Charpin 2010, 179–81; and Glassner 2001, 113.

\(^9\) Helle 2019a.
compositions, omen compendia, ritual laments, ritual incantations, and the like. Finally, note that I use “Neo-Assyrian” to refer to the period from the 9th to the 7th century BCE, coinciding with the political hegemony of the Neo-Assyrian empire. Some sources examined below are Babylonian texts written during this period, so the question of “Neo-Assyrian authorship” would include eighth-century Babylonian sources relating to authors: “Neo-Assyrian” thus denotes a moment in time rather than a dialect.

Sources for Neo-Assyrian authorship

As noted above, the Catalogue is our primary source for Neo-Assyrian authorship. It is preserved in three single-column tablets from Kuyunjik, which display a minimum of textual variation; one of them carries a colophon identifying it as part of Ashurbanipal’s library (type “Asb. d”). The preserved text comprises the names of twenty-four authors, some of which are assigned more than one text (e.g., Taqisha-Gula, who is listed as the author of the Elevation of Ishtar as well as four other unidentified compositions). The texts are referred to either by their incipit or by their title, such as The Series of Etana (ēš-gār i-e-ta-na, section 6, l. 11). The Catalogue links texts to authors with the phrase “from the mouth of” (ša pi), as in: “[The Series] of the Fox, from the mouth of Ibni-Marduk, son of Ludumununna, scholar of Nippur” ([ēš-gā]r ka₃-a : ša pi-ı₃-du₄-amar-utu dumu l₄-dumu-nun-na la₃um-me-a nibru₄, section 6 l. 15’). The Catalogue gives pride of place to Ea and Adapa in the first entries, but otherwise no clear order can be discerned.14

Though the Catalogue’s systematic approach to authorship is exceptional in the cuneiform corpus, it is far from the only Neo-Assyrian text to reference authors.

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14 Pace van der Toorn 2007, 43, who claims that “[t]he Catalogue is arranged chronologically.”
Authorial claims from this period can be divided into five groups: (1) catalogues, (2) colophons and rubrics, (3) literary epilogues, (4) acrostics, and (5) “other.”

The first group includes the Catalogue and three other texts. A catalogue of The Series of Sidu attributes thirty-five bilingual compositions, dealing with agriculture and proverbial wisdom, to the eponymous author Sidu. The other two catalogues are the “Exorcist’s Manual” and a catalogue of the medical series Sagig and Alamdimmu, both of which attribute the series to Esagil-kin-apli. The latter is particularly noteworthy, as it includes an extended description of his motives and methods for compiling the series, which John Wee has dubbed “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto.”

The second group consists of colophons that, besides the conventional mention of the title, owner, and copyist of the text, also name its author. I have also included rubrics in this category, meaning short passages that summarize the preceding contents of a text, but which unlike a colophon are not placed at the end of the tablet. It is often unclear whether a colophon’s mention of its source (e.g. in the phrase “from the mouth of so-and-so”) is to be understood as an authorial attribution. In many cases, it can also be a more loosely understood invocation of an authoritative figure, who may have imparted the knowledge presented in the text but did not compose it himself (to take a parallel example, Plato is the author of the Symposium even as it presents the teachings of Socrates). I have only included those colophons and rubrics that make the authorial claim explicit by describing the circumstances of the text’s composition, or which reference figures who are known as authors from other texts. Based on these criteria, authorial attributions are found in the following texts: tablet 3 of UGU, attributed to

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6 K 1873, edited in Finkel 1986. For the figure of Sidu, see the references collected in Frahm 2010, 169–76.
7 KAR 144 and ND 4358 + 4366 / BM 41237 + 46607 + 47163. Both have recently been re-edited in Steinert 2018, by Marc Geller and Eric Schmidtsen respectively.
Enlil-muballit;\textsuperscript{18} tablet 26 of \textit{Shumma Alu}, which deals with snakes and is attributed to Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula;\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Zu-buru-dabbeba}, a series of incantations against field pests, attributed to Papsukkal-sha-iqbü-ul-inni;\textsuperscript{20} a collection of recipes against witchcraft and one against epilepsy, both attributed to Lu-Nanna;\textsuperscript{21} a collection of incantations to consecrate the ritual instrument \textit{urigallu}, and one collection of recipes against the “seizure-of-the-mountain" disease, both attributed to Ur-Nanna;\textsuperscript{22} a short hymn attributed to Ahassu-Sherua;\textsuperscript{23} and \textit{Uruana}, a botanical handbook attributed to king Ashurbanipal.\textsuperscript{24} Further, a tablet from Assur contains passages from \textit{Alamdimmû} that, according to its rubric, were not authored by Esagil-kin-apli. Finally, a short fragment of what appears to be a colophon mentions Taqisha-Gula and Amel-Papsukkal together but has otherwise resisted interpretation.\textsuperscript{25}

The third and the fourth groups come from the literary works themselves. The \textit{Gula Hymn} (l. 199) and \textit{Erra} (V 42) identify their composers in an epilogue, attributing themselves to Bullutsa-rabi and Kabti-ili-Marduk, respectively.\textsuperscript{26} In both texts, authorship is presented as a conversation with a god: Bullutsa-rabi’s hymn is a prayer to Gula, while Kabit-ili-Marduk claims that the epic was revealed to him by Erra himself. Two other texts, the \textit{Theodicy} and a pair of matching prayers to Marduk, refer to their

\textsuperscript{18} K 4023. See Steinert 2015, 129–30 with references to previous literature.
\textsuperscript{19} KAR 384 and 385, l. r. 44, edited in Heeßel 2007, 53–58.
\textsuperscript{20} K 2596, l. iii 17’-20’, edited in George and Taniguchi 2010, 106–13.
\textsuperscript{21} BAM 434 and 435, edited in Abusch and Schwemer 2011, no. 7.10.11; and BAM 476. For the figure of Lu-Nanna, see Schwemer 2015 and Haul 2003, 37–38.
\textsuperscript{22} BM 68961+, l. r. 21’, see Jiménez 2017, 213; and BM 64526, bottom edge, l. 2, edited in Stadhouders 2018, 164–79.
\textsuperscript{23} LKA 36, l. 5–7, edited in Menzel 1981, 62’–63’, no. 773.
\textsuperscript{24} BAK 321, l. 3, see Hunger 1968, 98–99.
\textsuperscript{25} K 8177, edited in Lambert 1962, 63 and 75. Lambert could not make much sense of the text, apart from the names of the two scholars, who are identified as “chief scholars of Babylon” (\textit{um-me-a dur-an-ki}, l. 3’). Despite repeated collations, the fragment remains obstinately unreadable to me.
authors Saggil-kin-ubbib and Nabû-ushebshi through acrostics woven into the poems.\(^{27}\) In these cases, the veracity of the authorial claims is all but assured, as the name of the author is part and parcel of the work itself. However, they are also more difficult to date than the colophons. The *Gula Hymn* and the *Theodicy* could easily have been composed before the Neo-Assyrian period, with the late second millennium BCE being a particularly likely date, though some scholars place them as late as the eighth century BCE.\(^{28}\) *Erra* is an especially difficult case: it has been dated to the ninth, eighth, and seventh century BCE, with no agreement in sight.\(^{29}\) Either way, even if they were composed earlier, they should still be included among “Neo-Assyrian” sources of authorship, as they were read, copied, and circulated by Neo-Assyrian scholars. As such, they were still part of Neo-Assyrian literary culture.\(^{30}\)

The texts mentioned so far all explicitly link the authors to their compositions, but these names also turn up elsewhere, in contexts where they are not explicitly identified as authors. In numerous colophons and administrative documents, scribes invoke an author as their family ancestor. For example, a family of lamentation priests in Uruk claimed descent from Sîn-leqi-unnenni, but without explicating that he was the author of *Gilgamesh*.\(^{31}\) Likewise, Lu-Nanna is mentioned in a list of sages from the incantation series *Bit Meseri*, where it is stated that he drove a dragon out of Ishtar’s temple, but

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\(^{27}\) For the *Theodicy*, see Lambert 1996, 63–91. For Nabû-ushebshi, see Lambert 1968, 130–32; Sweet 1969.

\(^{28}\) For the dating of the *Gula Hymn*, see Lambert 1967, 138–9, who concludes that it could have been composed anywhere between 1400 and 700 BCE. The *Theodicy* is often dated to the eleventh century BCE, because the *Uruk List of Kings and Sages* places Saggil-kin-ubbib under Nebuchadnezzar I and Adad-apla-iddina (see Oshima 2014, 121–25, with references). However, it is hardly a reliable source, as it also places Sîn-leqi-unnenni under the reign of Gilgamesh. Von Soden 1990, 143 argues that the *Theodicy* was composed between 800 and 750 BCE.

\(^{29}\) See Cagni 1969, 37–45 and Franke 2014, 320, with references.

\(^{30}\) On the possibility that Shubshi-mehré-Shakkan, the narrator of *Ludlul bil nemeqi*, should also be identified as its author, see Foster 1983 and Oshima 2014, 18–19. On the author Nabû-shuma-ukîn, who was a Neo-Babylonian prince and thus outside the scope of this article, see Finkel 1999.

\(^{31}\) Beaulieu 2000.
there he is not identified as the author of *Etana.* An interesting if rather obscure text, VR 44, lists the names of famous figures from cuneiform history in both Akkadian and Sumerian, including the authors Sidu/Enlil-ibni, Amel-Papsukkal/Ashgandu, and Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni/Ninshubur-dug-nu-balbal. Finally, a mysterious text includes the names Taqisha-Gula and Sidu alongside other notables, all of whom appear in a vertical column interrupting the flow of the text.

A particularly contentious set of sources concern the authorship of king Ashurbanipal, including the colophon to *Uruana* mentioned above, an acrostic bearing his name in a hymn to Marduk and Zarpanititu, as well as hymns to Ashur, Nanaya, Nabû, Tashmetu, Ishtar, and Shamash that refer to him as their composer. There has been considerable debate over whether or not Ashurbanipal was literate, as he claims to be in his inscriptions, but even if he could read and write, it is unlikely that he was able to compose poetry. The acrostic poem in particular would have required an impressive grasp of cuneiform polysemy. Of course, it is possible that Ashurbanipal played some role in the composition of the texts, but nonetheless, his authorial claim should be treated with skepticism. However, I argued above that even when authorial claims are likely to be fictitious, they are still interesting as sources for the cultural narrative that circulated at the time, and Ashurbanipal’s authorship is no exception. The fact that authorship had become so widespread and prestigious a feature of literary culture that the king himself would want to lay claim to it speaks volumes to the development that took place during the Neo-Assyrian period. Cuneiform scholarship had been dominated by anonymity for millennia, but it now celebrated authorship to such an extent that it became the envy of an emperor.

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33 Cooley forthcoming.
34 BM 34110 + 35163, edited in Lambert 1974, see also Reiner 2008.
The functions of the author

How, then, did the myth of authorship affect Neo-Assyrian scribal culture? In the following, I examine three aspects of the sources relating to authorship, arguing that authors appear as (1) family ancestors, (2) literate professionals, and (3) mechanisms of textual control. Taken together, these functions served to establish the scribes’ exclusive access to literature, depicting the cuneiform corpus as the possession of a small group of family guilds, whose social status depended on their control of this prestigious tradition.

1. Authors as family ancestors

The most prominent feature of Neo-Assyrian authorship is that the scribes invoked authors as their family ancestors. The connection between authorship and ancestry was noted already in 1957 by Wilfred Lambert, and subsequent studies have confirmed its importance, often arguing that the Neo-Assyrian surge in authorship was specifically caused by a rising interest in family lineages. Paul-Alain Beaulieu, for example, notes that the “[i]nterest in authorship, tradition, and the pedigree of great scholars and their works is peculiar to the late periods, when prominent urban families began to wear patronyms.” Likewise, Enrique Jiménez notes that the purported authors of the disputation poems are otherwise unknown except as ancestors, “suggest[ing] that the Catalogue’s ascription may have been triggered by the desire of some scribes to attribute important works to his own kin, rather than by the actual memory of the identity of their authors.”

The use of extended patronymics—that is, the practice of referring to oneself through both one’s own name, one’s father’s name, and the name of one’s ancestor—
has roots already in the second millennium, but picks up momentum in the eighth century and becomes still more widespread over the course of the later first millennium.\footnote{Nielsen 2011.} It is not only authors who are invoked as ancestors, but also figures like Ekur-zakir, Hunzu’u, and Egibi. Still, it is not uncommon that ancestors are connected with authorship in one way or another: either the ancestor is identified as an author in the \textit{Catalogue} (e.g. Sin-leqi-unnenni, Taqisha-Gula, and Ur-Nanna), or the author is himself identified as the descendant of a given ancestor, allowing other members of the same family to claim a connection with a famous author (e.g. Kabti-ilim-Marduk’s Dabibi, Gimil-Gula’s Ashgandu, Ibni-Marduk’s Lu-dumununa, and Shumu-libshi). There are even cases where the distinction between authorship and ancestry seems to evaporate entirely. One medical series was known as the \textit{Cures of the House of Dabibi} (\textit{bulltu bit Dabibi}),\footnote{This elusive series is known from BM 35512 and BAM 4. 4.03, as well as from the commentary texts uN-T4, W.22307/15, Si 276, and BM 59607, edited in the \textit{Cuneiform Commentaries Project} as 4.2.B, 4.2.G, 4.2.P, and 4.2.Q.} a title that apparently conflates authorship and ancestry. Likewise, a colophon to a \textit{shu’ila} prayer from Nippur states it was copied in “the house of Aba-Enlil-dari” (e.g. $1A$-$b$a-$50$-da-r[a]).\footnote{BMS 35 = K 2757, rev. 6.} Aba-Enlil-dari is elsewhere equated with Ahiqar, an Aramaic author, and with Mannu-kima-Enlil-Hatin, the ancestor of a scribal family in Achaemenid Nippur.\footnote{Beaulieu 2006, 190. The equation with Ahiqar is from the \textit{Uruk List of Kings and Sages}, l. 19–20, see Helle 2018, 233–34. The equation with Mannu-kima-Enlil-Hatin is from VR 44, l. iii 42’, see Cooley forthcoming.}

The ancestral patronymics evidently served as a way for the scribes to connect themselves not only with an extended family but also with the distant past, reinforcing their prestige. Claiming descent from authors must have been a particularly effective way to do so, as the scribes thereby associated themselves both with a famous person and with the work attributed to that person: Sin-leqi-unnenni’s descendants also shared
in the fame of *Gilgamesh*. As I return to below, ancestral patronymics became increasingly common after the dramatic social changes of the first millennium BCE, when Aramaic-speaking people became the demographic majority in Assyria and Babylonia. The invocation of ancestors can thus also be understood as a cultural defense mechanism, a way of entrenching one's traditional privilege in the face of a changing society.

By linking themselves with a well-known figure from the Kassite or even the Old Babylonian period, when most ancestors were said to have lived, the scholars anchored their sense of importance in the past, embedding themselves on a personal level in the tradition of cuneiform scholarship. A clear example of the link between authorship and scribal history is VR 44, the bilingual list of names noted above, which Jeff Cooley has dubbed “Onomastic Reflections on the History of the Land.” The list comprises famous historical figures such as kings, ancestors, scholars, and authors, who are arranged, not chronologically, but according to the “grammatological” principles of cuneiform scholarship: associations at the level of sound, spelling, bilingual equivalences, and so on. Cooley argues that the list rewrites the history of Assyria and Babylonia from a scribal perspective, appropriating the past and reshaping it for scholarly purposes. The fact that authors and ancestors feature so prominently in the list demonstrates their importance in connecting the illustrious past to the scribal present.

However, garnering prestige was only one side of the coin: the other was to establish control over the received tradition. Just as families of *kalû’s* and *āšipu’s* claimed descent from authors, so did other professional families invoke famous figures from their profession. For example, Shiyanthi Thavapalan notes that families of glassmakers

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44 Nielsen and Waerzeggers 2016.
45 Lambert 1957.
46 Cooley forthcoming.
traced their descent back to authors of glassmaking recipes. The trend became increasingly pronounced during the first millennium, so that in the Neo-Babylonian period, all temple brewers in Nippur invoked “Absummu the Sumerian” as their ancestor. Ancestry was thus closely linked to professional identity. Claiming descent from an author was also a way of inscribing oneself in a larger professional group, and specifically one that dealt with texts. The equation did not have to be strict: Sîn-leqi-unnenni was regarded as the ancestor of kalû’s though he himself was an āšipu. It was not his specific profession but rather his status as a textual expert that mattered to the scribes invoking him as their ancestor.

In turn, the connection between ancestors, authors, and family professions led to a restriction in who could access the texts attributed to those authors. A new cultural discourse began to depict cuneiform works as belonging only to people who could trace their descent to famous scholars. The “Geheimwissen colophons” note that the tablet to which they are appended contains secret information that should not be shown to the uninitiated, and Kathryn Stevens has shown that they mostly occur on tablets associated with their owners’ profession. For example, tablets containing lamentations were more likely to be labelled as secret if they were owned by a family of lamentation priests. There is thus a strong correlation between family professions and the attempt to control the knowledge of that profession. Further, attributions of authorship and assertions of secrecy appear directly next to each other in a number of texts, such as Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni’s Zu-buru-dabbeba (text no. 18, l. iii 17′–20′ and 25′–30′, respectively) and the astral rituals attributed to Lu-Nanna (rev. 17).

47 Thavapalan forthcoming.
49 The question of Sîn-leqi-unnenni’s profession was settled by the discovery of a miniature fragment from the Catalogue. See Jiménez 2017, 111–13.
50 Stevens 2013, see also Lenzi 2008a, 186–204.
51 George and Taniguchi 2010, 119 and 12 and Schwemer 2015, 220 and 223.
As Eleanor Robson puts it, there was an onus on scribal families “to jealously guard their knowledge as inherited professional secrets.” Likewise, Alan Lenzi has explored the ways in which Neo-Assyrian scribes presented their lore as a prestigious secret that could be traced back to the gods, and which had to be passed down along family lines. As argued by Francesca Rochberg, this exclusive access to knowledge created a circular bond of textual power: texts like Enuma Anu Enlil and Shumma Alu were viewed as important because the scholars continued to copy, refer, and defer to them, and in turn, the scholars were seen as important because of their intimate familiarity with those texts. For the Neo-Assyrian scholars, cuneiform literature thus became a “cultural heritage” in all senses of the word. The scholars saw themselves as the literal descendants of authors, whose works had been handed down to them through generations of scribes. And as the heirs of those texts, they were entitled to restrict access to them and derive their status from them.

This dynamic is made particularly clear in a text known as The Legend of Enmeduranki. The Legend states that Shamash and Adad revealed the secret of divination to the king Enmeduranki, who in turn passed it on to the citizens of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon. The text goes on to assert that only direct descendants of Enmeduranki who live in Nippur, Sippar, or Babylon are eligible to become divination priests (barû’s). The priests are allowed to teach the art of divination to their own sons, but are otherwise expected to act as “a guardian of the secret of the great gods” (na-şîr ad-ḫal dingirnaš galmeš, l. 19). Granted, Enmeduranki is not an author in the strict sense

52 “… à garder jalousement leur savoir comme autant de secrets professionnels hérités,” Robson 2007, 460. For a similar dynamic, see Thavapalan forthcoming.

53 Lenzi 2008a and 2013.


56 The actual qualifications to become a barû were never as strict in practice, as there were many diviners outside of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon. Besides, it would have been impossible to prove descent from Enmeduranki anyway.
of the word: no text directly attributes to him the authorship of any divinatory text. However, he does have much in common with other cuneiform authors who—as noted above—are often depicted as textual transmitters, receiving a text from a god and relaying it to a human audience. But more importantly, the story of Enmeduranki spells out a logic that underlies many other depictions of cuneiform authorship: the creation of a text or a scholarly practice is directly linked to issues of family descent, professional identity, and access to knowledge. The connection between authorship and ancestry in the Neo-Assyrian period thus allowed families of scholars to depict the cuneiform corpus as their exclusive possession—a birthright that guaranteed their standing in society.

2. Authors as literate professionals

The dynamic described above has direct parallels in other cultures. For example, the Greek Homeridae were a school of rhapsodes who claimed direct descent from Homer himself, and with it, special knowledge of the Homeric epics. They guarded that knowledge closely, since it was this family inheritance which distinguished them from other performers of epic poetry. However, despite the similarities, there is one important difference between the Greek and the Neo-Assyrian case: the Homeridae were oral performers, whereas Neo-Assyrian scholars were resolutely focused on writing. As a result, there is nothing in cuneiform cultures that resembles the Homeric notion of the author as a teller of tales. No bards, troubadours, singers, or rhapsodes are identified as authors in Neo-Assyrian sources. Alexander Beecroft argues that in ancient Greece and ancient China, the line between authorship and oral performance was all

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57 Foster 1991; Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensonner 2017. Further, a new Seleucid manuscript of the Legend is linked to a manuscript of the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, which is also focused on authorship. See Jiménez forthcoming.

but non-existent,\textsuperscript{59} but this was not the case in ancient Iraq, where literature was generally envisaged as the creation of literate scholars.

Many works of Sumerian and Akkadian literature may well have had an oral background,\textsuperscript{60} but that was not how they were perceived by the Assyrian and Babylonian scribes, who tied them to specifically textual professions. All authors in the \textit{Catalogue} whose profession is noted are scholars of one kind or another: sages (\textit{apkallu}'s), chief scholars (\textit{ummânu}'s), incantation priests (\textit{āšīpu}'s), and lamentation priests (\textit{kalâ}'s).\textsuperscript{61} The two exceptions are revealing, namely Ea, the patron deity of scribes and scholars, and Enmekar (section 3, l. 5'), the king who was said to have invented writing. By contrast, there are no \textit{nāru}'s, "singers,"\textsuperscript{62} and while the incantation and lamentation priests did perform their rituals orally, they were primarily literate experts whose education focused heavily on the acquisition of cuneiform.

One important and often overlooked function of Neo-Assyrian authorship was thus to entrench an exclusive connection between literature and literacy, ruling out the possibility that Akkadian poetry could belong to anyone who had not been trained in the intricacies of cuneiform.\textsuperscript{63} This is made particularly clear in the epilogue to \textit{Erra}, which describes how Erra revealed the epic in a dream to the scholar Kabti-ilî-Marduk, who set it down in writing without adding or omitting a single line. Erra then blesses

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Beecroft 2010, chapter 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} On the question of orality in cuneiform literature, see the essays collected in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout 1992.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Admittedly, the \textit{Catalogue} does seem to attribute a text to a horse (\textit{a-na pi-i anše-kur-ra iš-ṭur}, section 5 l. 20'), but the passage is highly fragmentary, and its phrasing differs from the \textit{Catalogue}'s other attributions of authorship, so the nature of the horse’s authorship remains unclear. See also Annus 2016, 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} By contrast, \textit{Ishme-Dagan} A mentions various musical compositions that “skilled singers created for me” (nar gal-an-zu-ne ma-an-ĝar-re-eš-a, l. 338, ETCSL 2.5-4.1). This kind of anonymous, collective, oral composition may well have been the norm in the early second millennium BCE, but not in the Neo-Assyrian period.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} See also Beaulieu 2007, 15.
\end{itemize}
the epic, saying that whoever circulates it will be spared an untimely death, including the singers who recites it (V 42–55). The epilogue thus establishes a clear hierarchy between the composition and the subsequent performance of the epic: scholars come before singers.

Not only are the authors depicted as literate scholars, but their names are also often written in a highly recondite form. The Seleucid text known as the *Uruk List of Kings and Sages* includes a selection of cuneiform authors, whose names are written with truly arcane strings of signs: Sîn-leqi-unnenni, Kabti-ili-Marduk, and Taqisha-Gula become '30-ti-é-r, 'idim-il-SÚ, and 'ta-qüš₇₄-d-me-me, respectively.⁶⁴ Often, these spellings deploy learned equivalences between Akkadian and Sumerian: Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni, for example, becomes md'sukkal-dug,nu-bal-bal, and Esagil-kin-apli is regularly written 'êš-gû-zi-gin-a (or -ibila), which Andrew George refers to as “a scholarly conceit, even a kind of cryptography.”⁶⁵ Likewise, Sidu was also known as Enlil-ibni, and Eckart Frahm proposes that the equation between the two names “is in all probability based on the fact that Sumerian si can be read in Akkadian as malû ‘to be full’ or mullû ‘to fill,’ words that sound similar to Mullîl, the Emesal rendering of Enlil’s name”—a chain of erudite associations that is typical of cuneiform scholarship. VR 44 pursues the full potential of these associations, reinterpreting even normal-looking names according to the bilingual value of the signs used to write them.⁶⁷

In short, not only were the authors identified as scholars, but one had to be a rather competent scholar oneself in order to even read their names. The displays of erudition appear not only in the names, but also in longer passages dealing with authorship. Irving Finkel writes of “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto” that “[i]n its rather cryptic use of a colophon-style mixture of Sumerian and Akkadian and its choice of unusual words and

⁶⁴ Helle 2018, 233–34.
⁶⁵ George 1993, 64.
⁶⁶ Frahm 2010, 173.
⁶⁷ Some of these associations are unpacked in Cooley forthcoming.
gods the passage embodies the protective attitude of the āšipu to his inherited lore.\textsuperscript{68}

Attributions of authorship thus served as a vehicle for literate scholars to express their unique access to literary tradition. This access was justified in part by their family descent (note Finkel’s use of the word “inherited”) and in part by the education that this family descent allowed them to acquire, an education that enabled them to compose texts which were incomprehensible to anyone but other hyper-literate scholars.\textsuperscript{69}

Finally, the link between authorship and professionalism may be embedded in the name of Oannes-Adapa, the mythical sage who was said to have laid the foundations of Babylonian culture, and who is listed at the very beginning of the Catalogue, second only to Ea.\textsuperscript{70} The first part of his name could be written in a variety of different ways, including $\text{m}_\text{u}^\text{n}$-\text{an-}na, $\text{u}_\text{e}$-\text{ma}$^\text{d}$-\text{n-im}, $\text{m}_\text{u}^\text{d}$-\text{an}, and $\text{m}_\text{u}^\text{n}$-\text{an}.\textsuperscript{71} “Oannes” is the Greek rendering of the name (Ὠάννης, as preserved in Berossus\textsuperscript{72}), probably reflecting a Late Babylonian pronunciation /oān/. By the time the Greek-speaking Seleucids took control of Babylonia, the Akkadian short vowel /u/ had become /o/, and /m/ had become /w/, which in turn disappeared if next to /o/.\textsuperscript{73} This indicates that the Neo-Assyrian pronunciation would have been something like /umān/, very close to the word ummānu, “chief scholar.” In his discussion of the name, Lambert is at pains to emphasize that “Oannes-Adapa” is not to be interpreted as “the chief scholar Adapa,”

\textsuperscript{68} Finkel 1988, 150. The nature of this “protective attitude” is explored more fully in Lenzi 2008a, chapters 2–3.

\textsuperscript{69} The close link between ancestry, authorship, and education is exemplified by a list of common Akkadian names that would-be scribes were made to study in schools, which included both the ancestor Dabibi and the author Saggil-kin-ubbib. See Gesche 2000, 89.

\textsuperscript{70} For Oannes as an author, see the Uruk List of Kings of Sages, l. 1; a fragmentary text found next to it, W.20030/84, edited in van Dijk and Mayer 1980, 20; the Verse Account of Nabonidus, V 12’, as discussed by Machinist and Tadmor 1993; and possibly the mysterious story of Enmerkar and Adapa, edited in Picchioni 1981, 102–9. See also Reiner 1961; Wilcke 1991; Streck 2003; and Sanders 2017, 38–68.

\textsuperscript{71} See the references collected in Lambert 1962, 73–74.

\textsuperscript{72} See e.g. Syncellus, Ecloga Chronographica 51, in Mosshammer 1984, 29.

\textsuperscript{73} Westenholz 2007, 283–84.
and I agree: Oannes is a name, not a title. But Lambert goes too far in disassociating Oannes from ummānu. One of his arguments is that “no example of ummānu written in any such abstruse way is known,” but as noted above, abstruse spellings abound when it comes to Neo-Assyrian authors. Even if “Oannes” did not originally mean “Scholar,” the scribes writing his name would surely have picked up on the connotation. The word for a high-ranking scholar was thus woven into the name of this supremely important author, meaning that authorship and professional identity had become inextricably intertwined.

3. Authors as mechanisms of textual control

One result of this emphasis on professional identity is that the Neo-Assyrian narratives of authorship depict Akkadian literature as decidedly not a vernacular, living tradition, but as the domain of a restricted group of experts. Indeed, it was not Akkadian poetry that circulated among the broader population of the Neo-Assyrian empire, since by this time, Akkadian had been all but replaced by Aramaic. Stories such as Gilgamesh or Etana were no longer “the stories of the streets,” as Michalowski puts it, but had become the exclusive purview of a small echelon of literate professionals. As a result, the texts themselves came to be perceived differently. Since it was no longer a living tradition, Akkadian literature was increasingly treated as somehow “set”: not a fluid, ever-changing mass of variants and performances, but a stable object that could be mapped and managed. Of course, cuneiform cultures remained manuscript cultures, and the transmission of texts was still affected by the vagaries of scribal copies and mistakes. The cuneiform corpus never reached the closure of the Biblical canon, and besides, new and innovative works continued to be composed long after the demise of Akkadian as a spoken language. However, during the Neo-Assyrian period there was an increasing sense that the most important texts had reached a final form that the scribes aspired to

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74 Lambert 1962, 74.

75 Michalowski 1996, 187; see also Beaulieu 2007.
transmit as flawlessly as possible, and that any variants and changes could be fully accounted for (not eliminated, but accounted for).

I would argue that the figure of the author played a key role in this shift. As noted by Niek Veldhuis, the attribution of a text to an author tells us as much about the text as it does about the author: “A traditional text is owned by whoever is part of this tradition. A text with an author has a proper form and an erratic one. The proper form is the one as conceived by the author. The erratic one deviates from that standard.” To take just one example, medical texts circulated from the Old Babylonian period onwards in many different variants, but the structure of the series found a definitive form at the end of the second millennium, in what Nils Heeßel calls the “serialization” of cuneiform literature. According to “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto,” the editing of *Sagiγ* and *Alamdimmû* was carried out by Esagil-kin-apli, who arranged the “tangled threads” of traditional material according to a new order, from the patient’s head to his feet. However, despite this edition, other versions of the medical series continued to circulate. A tablet from Assur notes in a colophon that it contains passages from the “old *Alamdimmû*, which Esagil-kin-apli did not untangle” (dišʾalam1-dim-mu-ur libir-ra šá É-sag-gil-gin-a nu duššušú, l. iii 6). This denial of authorship is as informative as any claim of authorship would be: it tells us that there was a standardized version of *Alamdimmû* attributed to Esagil-kin-apli, and that even versions which deviated from this standard were still defined in reference to his name. As Veldhuis puts it, “the emergence of authors’ names demonstrates that something has changed in the concept of a text.” What changed was that the texts became fixed. *Alamdimmû* no longer circulated in a number of fluid variants with equal claims to authority. Instead, there was a split between authoritative and alternative versions, and that split was embodied

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76 Veldhuis 2003, 21.
77 Heeßel 2011.
79 VAT 10493+10543, edited in Heeßel 2010.
80 Veldhuis 2003, 21.
by the author. The narratives of authorship did not undo the textual variation that is endemic to all manuscript cultures, but they did provide a way of mapping that variation, by drawing a line between texts that were tied to an author and those that were not.

Just as the authorial figure can establish differences between texts, it can also establish similarities between them: attributing two texts to the same author is a way of grouping them together. In “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto,” it is made clear that both Sagig and Alamdimmû are structured according to the same order, from head to feet: “regarding both series, their arrangement is one” (šá ėš-găr ki-lal-la-an ‘kēš’-su-nu diš-ma’, l. 68). The fact that both were attributed to Esagil-kin-apli guarantees that they were intrinsically connected. Now, a link between two medical series may not be surprising, but other connections are far less obvious. Take The Series of Sidu, which the Catalogue attributes to Sidu (section 6, l. 13’). In 1986, Finkel published a catalogue listing the thirty-five tablets of the series, many of which were already known as independent compositions, such as The Farmer’s Instructions or The Ballad of Early Rulers. However, at the time no one suspected that these texts belonged to the same series, since they are of very different types: proverb collections, agricultural almanacs, and what seems to be a drinking song. What they have in common is that they are all bilingual texts—much like their author, who is given two names, the Sumerian Sidu and the Akkadian Enlil-ibni. While it is technically possible that Sidu was a real individual, it seems far likelier that the author and his eponymous series were constructed to match one another, with bilingual texts grouped under a bilingual name. The figure of Sidu thus creates unexpected textual groupings and is in turn shaped by those groupings, as his authorship joins texts that would otherwise not seem similar.

81 Schmidtchen 2018b, 318.
82 Finkel 1986.
83 See the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, l. 14, and VR 44, l. iii 35’.
84 See the discussion in Frahm 2010, 174.
In sum, the figure of the author delimits what is included in a text and what is to be excluded from it, which texts belong together and which versions are to be kept apart. Neo-Assyrian authorship thus served as one way of managing the textual variation that is typical of manuscript cultures (of course, other strategies for doing so existed as well, as I return to below). As noted by Michel Foucault, the name of the author operates as a discursive function, tying some texts together (e.g. *Othello* and *Hamlet*), differentiating them from others (e.g. from Shakespeare’s will, which is not “authored” in the same sense as the plays), and assigning them a certain value (in this case, hyper-canon).\(^{85}\)

The name of the author is therefore a way of structuring discourse, establishing clear textual categories and hierarchies. Marc van de Mieroop argues that, in the cuneiform world, this function was distributed among several figures, including both the author, the scribe, and the owner of a text.\(^{86}\) Figures such as Kabti-ili-Marduk may not have been regarded as the original creators of the text in the modern sense of the term, but they were still “crucial for the author function, that is, the interaction with the discourse.”\(^{87}\)

A further aspect of the author function is that it is one way of establishing the value of a given text, and this is no less true in the cuneiform case. Since authors were often linked with gods, kings, and the distant past, authorial attributions also served to confer authority and legitimacy to the texts. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum and Klaus Wagensonner argue that authorship was part of the “narrative of authority” (*Autoritätsnarrative*) in cuneiform cultures, meaning textual strategies used to establish the reliability of a given composition.\(^{88}\) This authority was ultimately traced back to the god who revealed the text to an author, who wrote it down and passed it on to others. The scribes copying the text therefore had to do so without fault, in order to fully preserve the authority bestowed upon the text by its divine origins. Colophons sometimes describe the textual

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85 Foucault 1969.
87 Van de Mieroop 2016, 21.
88 Cancik-Kirschbaum and Wagensonner 2017.
pedigree of the tablet, referring to a particularly prestigious Vorlage and averring that it was copied accurately. In turn, the scribes also had to establish their own reliability as links in this chain of transmission. As described above, they did so by referring to their ancestry, thus proving themselves worthy of transmitting the authority of the text.

This sequence of revelation, transcription, and succession (“Offenbarung, Abschrift, Sukzession”) formed a powerful authorizing narrative in cuneiform cultures.

In sum, when Neo-Assyrian sources attribute a text to an author, they often portray that text as an object that is to be protected, authorized, and transmitted carefully. As depicted in these sources, Akkadian literature was very much not a vernacular, fluid, oral tradition, but a corpus of texts that had to be controlled and organized and whose continued authority was of paramount importance.

The birth of the author and the death of Akkadian

The previous section argued that the Neo-Assyrian discourse of authorship was not only an intellectual meditation upon the origins of literature, but also served a specific set of social functions: it tied a group of professional scholars to prestigious ancestors and established their exclusive access to, and textual control of, the corpus of Akkadian literature. The present section asks why this development took place in the Neo-Assyrian period. Many of the trends explored above—the use of ancestral patronymics, the establishment of family guilds, and the professionalization of literature—have roots

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89 See e.g. the colophon of BM 68061, which mentions not only the text’s Vorlage but also the Vorlage’s Vorlage. The text is thereby traced back to Ur-Nanna, who is mentioned in the Catalogue as the author of The Series of the Willow. See Jiménez 2017, 212–13 and Stadhouders 2018, 169.

90 See also Rochberg 2016, 222 on the link between textual authority and family lineage.
already in the second millennium,91 but it was the Neo-Assyrian period specifically that produced the vast majority of cuneiform sources relating to authorship. These sources often locate the authors in the distant past: Adapa, for example, is placed in mythical antiquity, Lu-Nanna under the reign of Shulgi (2094–2047 BCE), Enlil-muballit under Enlil-bani (1860–1837 BCE), and Esagil-kin-apli under Adad-apla-iddina (1168–1147 BCE). But no matter when they are set, the sources themselves date to Neo-Assyrian times. In short, the narratives of authorship may have been told in the past tense, but they were still told at a particular point in time and with a particular social purpose.

Piotr Michalowski argues that the Neo-Assyrian interest in authorship should be linked to the “Aramaization of Mesopotamia,”92 that is, the influx of Aramaic-speaking people and the ensuing replacement of Akkadian by Aramaic as the vernacular language. This demographic shift dramatically intensified under the Neo-Assyrian empire, through the state’s forced movement of peoples and through its subjugation of an ever-expanding territory.93 This resulted in two simultaneous and seemingly opposite developments during the eighth and seventh century: Akkadian culture circulated across the ancient Near East as the hegemonic ideology of the Assyrian empire, while also losing ground to Aramaic culture within Assyria itself.94 Akkadian thus expanded geographically while shrinking socially, becoming a widely revered but little understood language in an empire that increasingly spoke Aramaic, even at the king’s court. A letter from the reign of Tiglath-Pilescher III (745–727 BCE) tells us that

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91 For ancestral patronymics in the second millennium, see Nielsen 2011, 13 and passim. For the second-millennium Aramaic presence in Assyria, see Beaulieu 2006, 188. For Middle Assyrian family guilds, see Thavapalan forthcoming.
93 Zehnder 2007.
already by this time, the palace employed both Assyrian and Aramaic scholars (*ummanu’s*).95

This resulted in a counter-reaction among the old families of Assyria, who insisted on their difference from and superiority to Aramaic “new-comers.”96 As shown by Mario Fales, during the Neo-Assyrian period a new notion of “Assyrian” identity begins to appear, one that is markedly distinct from the other cultural identities co-existing in Assyria.97 The formation of Assyrian identity was strongly linked to the retention of social superiority in a changing demographic landscape, creating what Fales calls an “inherent link between the condition of ‘Assyrian’ and a privileged status in the eyes of the king.”98 In short, Akkadian culture and Assyrian identity underwent a double process of elevation and isolation, as they were increasingly cut off from the vernacular culture of an Aramaic-speaking world, but also closely linked to an imperial elite.99

This process of Aramaization and counter-reaction can be directly linked to the emergence of authorship. Take *The Legend of Enmeduranki*, which claims that only descendants of Enmeduranki can become diviners. In a world riven by cultural, linguistic, and demographic transformations, this claim takes on an added significance, as it essentially attempts to fix the possession of knowledge in a society where new social groups could become scribes, as the aforementioned letter tells us. Ironically, the *Legend* can be dated to the Neo-Assyrian period precisely because it employs the word *egirtu* (“letter”), an Aramaic loan-word: the increasing Aramaic influence on cuneiform scholarship can thus be detected even in a text that seeks to exclude Aramaic people from the scholarly profession.100

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95 SAA 19, 154 mentions “the scholars of the palace, whether Assyrian or Aramean” (*um-ma-nu ša e₂-gal lu-u₆₄-aš-šur-a-a lu-u₆₄-ar-ša-a, l. 3–5, Luukko 2012, 156).  
96 Beaulieu 2006, 189; Foster 2011, 120.  
97 Fales 2009.  
98 Fales 2009, 191.  
99 Fales 2010; Pongratz-Leisten 2013.  
100 Lambert 1998, 147.
Likewise, the increased use of ancestral patronymics can be tied to the “Aramaic influx.”\textsuperscript{101} John P. Nielsen and Caroline Waerzeggers argue that “the sudden and widespread increase in the adoption and use of family names by large sections of the urban population between the 8th and 7th centuries BC” was specifically a reaction to “the influx of Aramean tribal groups during the previous centuries.”\textsuperscript{102} In an attempt to address the instability triggered by the arrival of Aramaic tribes, the kings granted elite urban citizens direct control over the agricultural hinterland of their cities. In turn, this led to those elites justifying their new acquisitions by invoking ancestral rights, thus depicting themselves as part of an extended family with natural ties to both an urban profession and a rural district. Both the scholars and the plot of land were named after the same ancestor, and as argued by Nielsen and Waerzeggers, the “dual application of ancestral names to members of the emergent elite and to their landed estates suggests that there was a connection between the two.”\textsuperscript{103} More generally, Beaulieu has argued that the turn towards the past and the rising interest in antiquarianism during the first millennium BCE is to be interpreted as a cultural defense mechanism, a reaction to the dramatic social changes unfolding at the time, which sought to shore up the traditional privileges of Akkadian-speaking people.\textsuperscript{104}

A further and particularly important effect of the increase in the Aramaic-speaking population was the social contraction and eventual death of the Akkadian language. It is difficult to determine exactly when Akkadian died out, but the process was probably well under way by the Neo-Assyrian period.\textsuperscript{105} Of course, Akkadian continued to be used (and perhaps even spoken in some settings) until the first centuries CE, but it was replaced as the most commonly spoken language during the early first millennium BCE.

\textsuperscript{101} Nielsen and Waerzeggers 2016.

\textsuperscript{102} Nielsen and Waerzeggers 2016, 331–333.

\textsuperscript{103} Nielsen and Waerzeggers 2016, 333.

\textsuperscript{104} Beaulieu 2013, 133.

\textsuperscript{105} See e.g. Leichty 1993, 27–29; Beaulieu 2006, 187–92; Frahm 2011, 336–37; and Hackl 2018, with references.
As argued by Michalowski, “at least from the ninth century onwards, and most probably earlier as well, the vernacular language of Assyria was not Akkadian but Aramaic.”\(^{106}\)

This shift did not mean that Akkadian lost all importance, rather, it led to what Philippe Clancier calls “une contraction des sphères d’emploi”\(^{107}\) towards the end of the Neo-Assyrian period: effectively a division of labor between languages, with Akkadian used for official documents, religious practice, and learned scholarship, and Aramaic used everywhere else. Inevitably, this Akkadian-Aramaic hybridity began to intrude even in the “high” sphere of cuneiform scholarship, in the form of loan words and Aramaic calques.\(^{108}\)

As such, Akkadian actually became more prestigious than ever during this period, as the preferred language of administration and scholarship in the mightiest empire the world had ever seen. But the shift also meant that Akkadian went from being the language that scribes would have spoken by default, as their mother tongue, to being a class marker acquired through education. In the Middle Babylonian period, the ability to speak Akkadian would have meant nothing special, but by the seventh century, that same ability would have signified a specific education, profession, identity, and social status.\(^{109}\)

It is very possible that Akkadian literature had always been first and foremost the domain of textual experts.\(^{110}\) For example, despite *Enuma Elish*’s request that it be taught to “shepherd and herdsman” (\(\text{š}\)ipa \(\nu\) \(\text{na-qi-d}i\), VII 148), its complex graphic games would only have made sense to professional scribes. Still, the link between Akkadian literature and professional education must have become even stronger after the downfall of Akkadian as a spoken language, when this literature could be accessed only by those who had the possibility of learning a dead tongue. In turn, its association with higher

\(^{106}\) Michalowski 2004, 169.

\(^{107}\) Clancier 2007, 22.

\(^{108}\) Beaulieu 2006, 188–90.


\(^{110}\) See e.g. Beaulieu 2007.
learning meant that this literature became more than ever a marker of cultural capital. Knowledge of Akkadian poetry was a sign of prestige and distinction. Far from attempting to proselytize the Akkadian language, simplify the cuneiform system, or translate Akkadian poetry into Aramaic, the cuneiform scribes did just the opposite. Access to Akkadian literature was restricted and surveilled, because it was the exclusivity of this access that guaranteed the status of the scribes. A Akkadian literature was not to be popularized, but protected—and as argued above, the narratives of authorship were one way of establishing that control.

Further, the death of Akkadian also led to a gradual fixing of the Akkadian literary corpus. Any remnant of oral culture had definitively disappeared, and the textual fluidity that characterized Akkadian literature during the Middle Babylonian period had been drastically reduced by the editorial work of the late second millennium BCE. With the language itself dying out, Akkadian literature became still more “set,” as a tradition to which modifications and additions could certainly be made, but which was for the most part a fixed, received corpus. The scribes were expected to copy, study, interpret, and transmit the corpus, but only under relatively rare circumstances did they change or expand it. This is how it became possible to establish the kind of textual control I discussed above. Akkadian literature was no longer a tangle of traditions or a sea of fluid variants, but an object that could be delimited, mapped, and managed.

The other major development in Neo-Assyrian literary culture, the rise of commentaries, may reflect a similar development. As argued by Eckart Frahm, “one of the main reasons why commentaries gained such an importance during the first millennium” was that the scholarly and literary texts, “now regarded as essentially unchangeable, became increasingly difficult to understand for the scholars who read,

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111 Lenzi 2013.
112 See also Rochberg 2016, 225, who links the standardization of cuneiform works to their circulation among scholars who derived their power from it: “texts did not become canonical by being standardized, but rather became standardized (or relatively standardized) because they had the force of authority for a community of scribes.”
The First Authors

The texts were written in dead and difficult languages—Sumerian and Standard Babylonian—and because they were seen as “fixed,” they could not be revised into a more readily understandable form. The scribes devised the commentaries as a solution to make the texts understandable and to fix their interpretation. In the preceding section, I argued that narratives of authorship served a similar function, as they were a paratextual vehicle for commenting on texts, fixing their authority, linking them to each other, distinguishing between variants, tracing their pedigree, and so on.114

The rise of cuneiform authorship has often been linked to the editing and “serialization” of major cuneiform works in the late second millennium BCE, since authors like Esagil-kin-apli and Sin-leqi-unnenni can be dated to this period.115 Indeed, it is possible that the historical reality of most cuneiform authors (such as it is) is to be found in the Isin II period’s revising of texts, as argued by Heeßel.116 But the narratives of authorship belong to a different context altogether, that of the Neo Assyrian empire. As such, the cuneiform narratives of authorship are best understood in parallel, not to the eleventh-century standardization of Akkadian literature, but to the eighth-century process of commentary formation. Like the commentaries, the Neo-Assyrian authorship constitutes a belated metatextual reflection on works that by that time had become standardized, fixed, and difficult to understand.

Conclusion

The essay sought to answer two key questions relating to Neo-Assyrian authorship: why did narratives of authorship take hold in the otherwise anonymous literary culture of

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113 Frahm 2011, 336
114 For a similar argument linking language death to intellectual innovation, see Leichty 1993.
115 See e.g. Lambert 1957, 2–4; Finkel 1988; George 2003, 28–31; Heeßel 2011, 193–95.
the cuneiform world, and why did they do so during the Neo-Assyrian period? I attempted to answer the first question by identifying some key functions of the authorial figure in Neo-Assyrian culture, arguing that authors are depicted as ancestors, professionals, and mechanisms of control, tying Akkadian literature to a narrowly defined group of scribal families. The second question is more difficult to answer, and rather than giving a single reason, I have sought to place the emergence of authorship at the confluence of a number of interconnected developments, namely the use of ancestral patronymics, the formation of family guilds, the professionalization of literature, the Aramaization of Mesopotamia, the decline of Akkadian as a spoken language, the standardization of cuneiform texts, the creation of commentary texts, and so on. The rise of authorship can thus be linked to a number of factors, but all those factors are related to the transformation of Akkadian literature from a living tradition into a fixed cultural heritage.

In sum, the narratives of authorship helped the scribes of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE make sense of a new cultural reality. They found themselves the heirs of a prestigious tradition, linguistically isolated but socially elevated, and occupying a professional role that had been shaped by their family ties and educational background. There were, in a word, ṭupšarru’s: Akkadian-speaking scribes who were trained in the complexities of cuneiform, and who now had to find a place for themselves in an increasingly Aramaic-speaking world, where the importance of their knowledge and their literature could no longer be taken for granted. The figure of the author was one of the solutions they devised. The narratives of authorship that circulated among Neo-Assyrian scribes shaped Akkadian literature in their image and according to their needs: as a domain of ancestral relations, textual expertise, and ancient authority. Authorship thus allowed Akkadian literature to survive the demise of the Akkadian language as a spoken idiom, as Akkadian literature became the exclusive, cherished, and carefully maintained property of select families of scribes.
Chapter Eleven

The role of authors in the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”: Canonization and cultural contact


**NB!** The appendix to this article contains an edition of the *Uruk List of Kings and Sages*, but since its publication, a new manuscript of the text was discovered by Enrique Jiménez, which is included in the thesis's appendix (no. 5.1). Please ignore p. 232–234 in the article and refer to the main appendix instead.
The Role of Authors in the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”: Canonization and Cultural Contact

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“Of earlier roses only names remain. We hold naked names.”
- Bernard of Cluny, De contemptu mundi

Introduction

It was the 16th of May 165 BC, and in the city of Uruk, a scholar named Anu-belshunu sat down to write a list. Meanwhile, his king Antiochus IV was preparing for a military expedition from which he would not return alive. After the king’s sudden illness, the throne would pass to his nine-year-old heir, precipitating a period of political instability that would eventually bring about the collapse of Seleucid rule. Anu-belshunu, of course, knew nothing of this, but was preoccupied with the matter at hand: writing out a list of thirty-two famous kings and sages from the long history of cuneiform culture.

Anu-belshunu came from a long line of lamentation priests (kalû’s) in Uruk, and had good reason to be proud of this. These priests also worked as astronomers, their calculations allowing them to predict the movements of the planets and thus time their rituals precisely; indeed, Babylonian astronomy was renowned throughout the ancient world for its accuracy. The grandfather of our scribe, also named Anu-belshunu, had been a prolific astronomer, but our Anu-belshunu took no interest in this aspect of his trade—not a single mathematical or astronomical tablet has been preserved from his hand. He seems to have been more interested in the history, education, and rituals of the Urukean lamentation priests, and perhaps this special interest can help to account for the

* I would like to thank Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Nicole Brisch, and Claus Ambos for their helpful remarks on the draft version of this article. Further, the anonymous reviewers contributed with many extraordinarily useful suggestions and corrections, for which I am very grateful. All shortcomings remain my own. For the abbreviation CTA, see n. 6 below.

1 Book 1, l. 952: “stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.”


The uniqueness of the text that he copied (or composed?) on that day in 165 BC.

The list of kings and sages includes a selection of the most famous authors of Babylonian literature. This is, in fact, surprising: given the otherwise predominant anonymity of Babylonian literature, any interest in the authorship of literary texts—let alone the placement of authors alongside mighty kings and mythical sages—represented a fundamental break with the tradition of the time. But this break was, I will argue, motivated by a profound respect for just that tradition, and by a desire to preserve it during an uncertain time. This paper will analyze the role of authorship in this text, the so-called “Uruk List of Kings and Sages.”

Cultural Collapse and the Appearance of Authors

The five centuries leading up to the writing of that text had been a time of dramatic transformation. The two great empires of the cuneiform world, the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian, had crumbled to dust. Babylon had lost its independence, first to Persian and then to Seleucid rule. The hegemony once enjoyed by the Akkadian language and literature had gradually and quietly ended. Supplanted by Aramaic, Akkadian was no longer a living language, but a learned idiom spoken only by the scholars of cuneiform. Babylonian culture had been brought into intensive contact with all sorts of newcomers—Aramaic, Greek, Persian, and Jewish cultures, to name but a few.

As cuneiform culture began to succumb to such pressures, it was increasingly restricted to a small group of learned scholars. But even as isolated as these scholars were from the society around them, their world was changing as well. Once, their status had depended on an association with the king, but with the loss of political independence, the affiliation of the scholars shifted from palace to temple. At the same time, the academic work of the scholars was also transformed, through what may be called the major paradigm shifts of the first millennium BC. Astrology had shifted from a focus on the interpretation of omens to an interest in mathematical calculation; a vast network of correspondences was established between natural phenomena such as stones, trees, and constellations; speculative theology revived long dead gods while demoting others; and so on.

This paper will focus on another such transformation undergone by cuneiform culture. Beginning with the Late Assyrian period, scholars became interested in authors. Considering the importance today of the figure of the author, the change is remarkable. Cuneiform culture had once before afforded importance to an author, when Enheduana was a legendary figure in Old Babylonian schools; but she had been the exception rather than the rule, and was long forgotten by the first millennium. Never before, in Babylon or elsewhere, had there been an extensive and systematic interest in the people lurking behind literary texts. Yet that is exactly what began to happen: a literary tradition dominated for millennia by anonymity was now organized into a catalogue of authors, and scholars began to invoke those authors as mythical family ancestors. Piotr Michalowski connects this development with the increasingly intense intermingling and irrelevance of the literature thus catalogued—that is, with the “Aramaization of Mesopotamia,” as he puts it, and the death of Akkadian. In short, as cuneiform culture waned, the figure of the author waxed. The list of authors written by Anu-belshunu should be viewed against this background: as the culmination of a slow cultural shift that eventually gave rise to the author. But before turning to the text itself, I will briefly sketch the historical context in which it was written.

The Hellenistic period was a fragile floruit for the scholars of cuneiform. As Philippe Clancier notes, “la...”

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4 It is probable that this process of language death began later than is usually assumed for Akkadian, but it was almost certainly complete by the second century BC. See Johannes Hackl, “Language Death and Dying Reconsidered: The Rôle of Late Babylonian as a Vernacular Language,” in Proceedings of the 53rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Moscow/Petersburg), Late Babylonian Workshop in Honor of Muhammad A. Dandamaev, ed. Cornelia Wunsch (Winona Lake, IN, forthcoming).


culture suméro-akkadienne, bien loin de disparaître avec la fin de l’indépendance mésopotamienne, non seulement survécut, mais encore fit preuve d’un dynamisme brillant."9 The last guardians of this culture were a circle of learned urban notables, a local elite left largely to their own devices by the Seleucid empire. During the third and early second century BC, the temples in Babylon and Uruk enjoyed widespread juridical and economic autonomy, and retained much of their traditional prestige. The priests who constituted the assembly of these temples accordingly held privileged positions in the administration of their cities.

While these positions guaranteed them both influence and affluence, they were also disconnected from society, so much so that the Greeks regarded them as a separate ethnicity, the “Chaldean tribes.” By seeking to preserve their tradition, Paul-Alain Beaulieu argues, they “retreated into the imaginary space provided by the temples and the schools, laying the grounds for the emergence of the Chaldeans as an identifiable community of scholars, astronomers, and diviners.”10 This community was tightly knit: in Uruk it counted no more than half a dozen families interlinked by a network of apprenticeship. Though this secured an exclusive status for the scholars, it also made that status highly precarious. What is striking about them, notes Clancier, “c’est la fragilité du milieu des notables urbains qui dépendait quasi totalement du bon vouloir des différents pouvoirs s’exerçant sur la Mésopotamie.”11

This made the community of priests ever more vulnerable to new social transformations. During the reign of Antiochus IV (175–164 BC), a Greek colony was introduced in Babylon, and so the Babylonian temple assembly now had to share its authority with an assembly of Greek citizens (although it is unclear how sharp the division between the two groups really was, particularly in the subsequent Parthian period).14 A further shock came in the 160s BC, when the temple assembly began to lose its control over the juridical and economic administration of the city. This change is more clearly documented for Babylon, but a similar process most probably ran parallel in Uruk.15

For the cuneiform scholars, the economic consequences of this loss of autonomy had been disastrous. As a result, when their social standing was again upended by the Parthian invasion of 141 BC, and again a decade later by the burning of Bit Resh, the main temple of Uruk, cuneiform began to dwindle definitively, and by 108 BC it had entirely disappeared from the city.16 Leo Oppenheim likened these final cuneiform scholars to “islands engulfed by a thoroughly changed surrounding,”17 and indeed the seas of culture had but to shift slightly before those islands were finally submerged.

The Uruk List of Kings and Sages

The list I will discuss here was written just as this brittle renaissance was coming to a close, in the immediate aftermath of the reforms that robbed the temple

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assemblies of their autonomy. The text is preserved in only one manuscript, a single-column tablet unearthed in Uruk’s Bit Resh temple, part of a cluster of ritual texts belonging to the lamentation priests (an annotated transliteration of the text is included in the appendix):

-[In the time] of king Ayyalu: the sage was Oannes.
-[In the time] of king Alalgar: the sage was Oannes-duga.
-[In the time] of king Ameluana: the sage was Enmeduga.
-[In the time] of king Amegalana: the sage was Enmebaluga.
-[In the time] of king Enmeushumgalana: the sage was Enmebaluga.
-[In the time] of king Dumuzi, the shepherd: the sage was An-Enlilda.
-[In the time] of king Enmeduranki: the sage was Utu-abzu.
-[After the Flood,] during the reign of king Enmerkar: the sage was Nungal-pirigal. He brought down [Ishtar] from the heavens into the Eana-temple. [He made] a balag-drum of bronze [together with its “hands”] of lapis lazuli by the craft of Ninagal (i.e., of the blacksmith).
-[On the] holy da[is], the seat of Papsukkal?, he established the balag-drum, in Anu’s presence.

-[In the time of] king [ . . . ]: the scholar was Esagil-kin-apli.
-[In the time of] king Adad-apla-iddina: the scholar was Esagil-kin-ubba.
-[In the time of] king Nebuchadnezzar: the scholar was Esagil-kin-ubba.
-[In the time of] king Esarhaddon the scholar was Aba-Enlil-dari, [whom] the Arameans call Ahiqar. He is [also known] as Achiacharus.

priest of the gods Anu and Antu, an Urukean. By his own hand. Uruk, month Ayyar, day 10, year 147, king Antiochos IV. He who fears Anu will not remove it!

The text consists of four sections separated by horizontal rulings, each corresponding to a major epoch of history. The first section records the mythical time before the Flood; the sages of this section are semi-divine creatures that rose from the sea to lay the foundations of civilization. The following ruling presumably marks the coming of the Flood, and the postdiluvian sage of this section, Nungal-pirigal, is fully human.\(^1\) As recently shown by Claus Ambos, the second section describes a transition in the cult at Uruk, from the original cult of the sky-god Anu to that of the goddess Ishtar, who is brought down from the heavens and into her Urukean temple.\(^1\) The ousted sky-god is appeased by the invention of the balag-drum, and with it, the art of singing lamentation songs to soothe angry gods. The double ruling thus marks a deep division in the history of Uruk, a transition that the Late Babylonian scholars attempted to reverse by restoring the cult of Anu. As Ambos concludes, “for the Hellenistic scholars in Uruk, the rupture caused by this event must have been enormous.”\(^2\)

After this double ruling follows a list of legendary and historical kings. The scholars listed with them are all known from other sources as authors of famous cuneiform texts. The overall structure of the list is strictly symmetrical: there are eight sages before the double ruling and eight scholars after it. The pair of scholars serving together under Abi-esuh are matched by Esagil-kin-ubba, whose career spans two kings, so as to preserve the symmetry. This structure has not previously been remarked on, since the editions of Jan van Dijk and Alan Lenzi failed to mark the double ruling, and so Nungal-pirigal was grouped with his fellow humans rather than with the semi-divine sages. But in fact, the structure of the text is highly important. The fact that there are precisely eight sages and eight

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\(^{1}\) That Nungal-pirigal is human, unlike the previous sages, is made clear by the incantation in *Bit mēseri*, l. III 28; see Rykle Borger, “Die Beschworungsserie *Bit mēseri* und die Himmelfahrt Henochs,” *JNES* 33 (1974): 192.


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human scholars establishes a symmetrical relation between the two groups. The authors are presented as the latter-day mirrors of their mythical predecessors. The list is no random assemblage of cuneiform VIPs, but a programmatic and schematic juxtaposition of kings, demigods, and authors.

The fifth and final section of the text is a colophon, the only place where a scribe faithfully copying a text could leave his personal stamp. This colophon is particularly interesting, for it notes that the tablet was written not by an apprentice scribe, as would usually be the case at Seleucid Uruk, but by its owner himself: the phrase “by his own hand” is found in only three colophons, all of which belong to Anu-belshunu. But what does that mean for our text?

Eleanor Robson argues that colophons “sont des seuils paratextuels qui se situent hors du corps principal d’une œuvre, mais servent de trait d’union entre les intentions de l’auteur et la réception du lecteur.” Here the colophon redirects us to Anu-belshunu himself, and if one examines his full name, it is easy to see why: he claims descent from Sin-leqi-unnenni, the author of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the first scholar listed after the double ruling. By both invoking Sin-leqi-unnenni as his ancestor and assigning him this place of honor in the list, Anu-belshunu implicitly underscores the importance of his own identity as scholar and heir to Babylonian culture.

Indeed, Sin-leqi-unnenni is not the only connection between the text and its owner. In its miniature retelling of Babylonian cultural history, the list is particularly focused on the city of Uruk and on the profession of the lamentation priests. It was said that Oannes, the first of the sages, built the Bit Resh temple in Uruk where the text was found, and that the seven sages laid the foundation of the walls of Uruk. These walls were completed by Gilgamesh, the first king after the double ruling; he, like his predecessor Enmerkar, was king of Uruk. As Ambos argues, the main division of the text and its only narrative section deal with the restructuring of the Uruk cult; Taqisha-Gula was known as the author of *The Exaltation of Ishtar*, a hymn that deals with this elevation of Ishtar above her father Anu; and Esarhaddon, the last of the kings, had rebuilt the Bit Resh temple after millennia of disuse. The text thereby participates in the construction of what Kathryn Stevens has called “a locally focused yet transhistorical identity.”

The emphasis of the list falls not only on the city, but also on its scholars, and specifically on the lamentation priests. The narrative section recalls the invention of their holy instrument, the balag-drum, and with it, their art of soothing angered gods; the author Taqisha-Gula is known from other sources as a lamentation priest. Lenzi further interprets the text as a “myth of scribal succession.” The myth entails that by learning the mysteries of cuneiform, scribes entered a line of descent stretching back through famous scholars, semi-divine sages, and all the way to the gods themselves. The structure of the list entails that cuneiform scholars were the proper successors to the semi-divine sages that had founded civilization. Further, the list of mythical figures includes the insti-tutor of the three core crafts of cuneiform scholarship: Oannes, the founder of *ūsīpūtu*, Enmeduranki, the founder of *bārātu*, and Nungal-pirigal, the founder of *kalātu*.

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22 Oscendrijver, “Netzwerke,” 633–35. Besides the present text, one is the letter regarding the education of lamentation priests mentioned in n. 3 above, and the other is the building ritual *TU* 45, edited by Linssen, *Cults*, 283–92, rev. l. 25.


24 It is also possible that Anu-belshunu composed the list himself, as no other manuscripts of the text are known and there is no explicit mention of an original in the colophon. However, it is impossible to know for sure.
In short, the texts tell a miniature history of the city of Uruk, its gods, temples, and scholars. It functioned as a form of “historical autobiography” for Anu-belshunu, outlining the origins of his professional and local identity—and did so at a point in time when that identity was at its most fragile.

Authors in the Uruk List

But how is the story told? Ambos remarks on the fact that apart from the story of Nungal-pirigal, “the names of important figures are simply listed as keywords, which, however, would no doubt have triggered memories of characteristic Uruk-related events associated with their lives and activities. Thus the text is reduced, for the most part, to the form of a list of personal names.”91 In the remainder of this essay, I want to explore exactly that process of reduction, the mechanism by which a cultural history can be reduced to a list of names, and by which these names in turn come to signify a larger cultural sphere. I will argue that a crucial part of this reduction is the metonymic reference that proceeds from the name of authors to the connotations of their texts.

For what does it mean that the scholars listed here were not only signposts in the history of Uruk, or links in a chain of scribal transmission, but also authors? All eight scholars, three of the kings, and three of the sages are known from other sources as authors of famous cuneiform compositions, and Table 1 gives a list of the names attributed to them. As it shows, most of the attributions come from the Late Assyrian Catalogue of Texts and Authors mentioned above (herein abbreviated CTA),32 while some attributions come directly from within the texts themselves. Note that in the case of Nungal-pirigal and Enmeduranki, it is not a specific text that is attributed to them, but an entire genre of scholarly texts.33

It seems to me highly significant that all the scholars in the list, and a significant proportion of the kings and sages as well, are known from other sources as authors.34 This is unlikely to be an accident. However, previous scholarship has not emphasized the fact that they are authors, mostly discussing them as scholars more broadly. What would it mean for our interpretation of the text if we focused on their role as authors, specifically? It should of course be noted that the idea of the author has changed much over the last two millennia, and the Babylonian ideal of authorship differs in many respects from those that are current today. These ancient figures were not novelists or Romantic poets, but rather learned scholars to whom texts were attributed traditionally.35 Further, many cuneiform authors are presented not as creating their texts out of thin air, but as receiving them from a god and then transmitting them to humanity.36 Yet this characterization leaves much unanswered. What role did authors play in Seleucid Uruk? What was the significance of authorship at this time? What cultural connotations did their names convey?

A methodological digression will be necessary before answering these questions. An oft-noted aspect of cuneiform culture is its lack of explicit metadiscourse. Rather than expressions through abstract discussions, scribes relied on lists of particulars and implicit comparisons. “In Mesopotamia there was no metalanguage” writes Michalowski; rather, “reflexivity was part of the construction of the text itself.”37 Accordingly, the meaning of authorship in this con-
text cannot be fixed by reference to emic abstractions, for such remain unknown to us, but must be derived from the way the texts themselves are constructed, and particularly so in the case of schematic lists.

Compare, for example, the position of Oannes and Ahiqar at the beginning and end of the list, respectively. Oannes was the most important of the sages, and Babylonian culture owed to him its self-perceived antiquity and pride of place among all cultures. Ahiqar, by contrast, was no Babylonian at all, but a folk hero of the Aramaic literature that had replaced Akkadian as the new culture of the land. Ahiqar represented a clear break with the tradition being listed, but was also appropriated into that tradition by his incorporation in this text. The comparison between the two figures illustrates the quandary of Babylonian culture in a Hellenistic world. It was a uniquely ancient tradition, stretching back millennia in time to the mythic Oannes, but it was also in constant contact and interaction with other cultures. The original fusion

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Table 1—Authors and attributed texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Text attributed to them (with source of attribution)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sages</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oannes</td>
<td>Two unknown compositions (CTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeduranki</td>
<td>The craft of divination, bārītu (the Legend of Enmeduranki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nungal-pi-ral</td>
<td>The craft of lamentation, kalātu (the Uruk List itself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmerkar</td>
<td>Two unknown compositions (CTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Naram-Sin']</td>
<td>The Cuthean Legend (by the ending of the legend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scholars</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin-leqi-unninni</td>
<td>The Epic of Gilgamesh (CTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabti-il-Marduk</td>
<td>The Epic of Erra (CTA, the ending of the epic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidu, aka. Enli-ibni</td>
<td>The Series of Sidu (CTA, a catalogue of the Series)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimil-Gula</td>
<td>One unknown composition (CTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>The Exaltation of Ištart, two unknown compositions, Tablet 26 of Shumma Alu (CTA, the colophon of the text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esagil-kin-apli</td>
<td>The medical series Šaqiq and Alamdimmû (the ‘Exorcist’s manual’ and a catalogue of Šaqiq)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esagil-kin-ubba</td>
<td>The Babylonian Theodicy (CTA, the acrostic of the poem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahiqar</td>
<td>The Proverbs of Ahiqar (the narrative frame of the poems)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 Oannes seems also to be treated as an author in the highly fragmentary text BaM Beih. 2, 89, noted in n. 1 above. Arguably, Berossus depicts Oannes as the author also of Enuma Elish; see Geert de Breucker, “Berossos between Tradition and Innovation,” in The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture, ed. K. Radner and E. Robson (Oxford, 2011), 644. Finally, the Verse Account of Nabonidus, V 12, mentions Oannes as the author of the otherwise unknown series Uskar Anu Enilil, but this may be a satirical jab at Nabonidus’ lack of learning; see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” in Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East, ed. Matlits Heinz and Marian H. Feldman (Winona Lake, IN, 2007), 162–63.

2 See Lambert, “Qualifications.”

3 Note that this is based on a proposed restoration of the text, which was previously read [Ibb]-i Sin.


5 For Shumma Alu 26, which the colophon of KAR 384+ attributes to the joint authorship of Taqisha-Gula and Amel-Papsukkal, see Nils P. Hafeli, Divinatorische Texte I: Terrestrische, teratologische, physiognomische und oneiromantische Texte, Keilschrifttexte aus Assur literarischen Inhalts 1, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 116 (Wiesbaden, 2007), 53–58. Taqisha-Gula is also attested, again together with Amel-Papsukal, in the unpublished colophon K 8177, and he is mentioned, together with Sidu (see previous note), in a highly cryptic Late Babylonian text which mentions the names of famous figures of cuneiform history, see Wilfred G. Lambert, “A Piece of Esoteric Babylonian Learning,” in RA 68 (1974).


7 Oannes Two unknown compositions (CTA)
of Sumerian and Babylonian culture was constantly supplemented by new additions, such as the Aramaic and perhaps also Greek traditions that the thrice-named Ahiqar represented.\textsuperscript{39} If Oannes pointed to the unique past of cuneiform culture, Ahiqar pointed to its entangled present. But crucially, these issues were not discussed explicitly in cuneiform sources, but were addressed only through implicit comparisons and positional contrasts such as those between Oannes and Ahiqar.

Given this “implicit reflexivity” in our text, what was then being said about authorship? What discursive position were the authors assigned by such contrasts and comparisons?

Most striking is the propinquity of authors with kings and semi-divine sages. This is a privileged position indeed—short of actual apotheosis, one can scarcely imagine anything higher. There was in fact some precedent for this; some earlier Assyrian king lists included not only the sequence of monarchs, but their chief scholars as well.\textsuperscript{40} However, none of the scholars mentioned there were authors to whom literary works were attributed, while in the Uruk List, the scholars seem to be included not because of any historical association, but rather due to the literary significance of their name. In this text, the political and the cultural aspects are each other’s flip side, as the nostalgically-remembered might of Babylonian and Assyrian kings is placed on equal footing with the medical authority of Esagil-kin-apli and the moral reflections of Esagil-kin-ubba.

If they are “horizontally” juxtaposed with kings, the human authors are also “vertically” juxtaposed with the sages. As Lenzi argues, this arrangement positions the scholars as heirs to an immense privilege; their descent partakes of the divine. Further, some of the sages, most notably Oannes, were also remembered as authors.\textsuperscript{41} The act of authoring literature is thereby retrojected into mythology, implying that the human authors were in fact continuing an activity that had its roots in the beginning of time.

In short, authors play a double role in the text. The position assigned to them highlights their personal importance as heirs to the sages and advisors to the kings, and at the same time, the names of the authors also act as metonyms pointing outside the text to the compositions attributed to them. Just as the name “Shakespeare” is not a personal name like any other, but summons Iago and Yorick in its wake, so too the mention of Kabti-ili-Marduk evokes the \textit{Epic of Erra}. Any importance assigned to the authors is therefore implicitly passed on to the texts to which they allude. The aggrandizements of authors also elevate their works, since their names invoke a larger and implicitly exalted cultural history.

If, as Ambos argues, the list constitutes “the matrix of a chronicle of Uruk,” then this is a strikingly literary chronicle. Indeed, the list’s interest in authors exceeds the limits of the city, as the included authors stem also from Babylon and Nineveh. In what follows, I will focus specifically on the list of authors that is woven into the text’s historical scheme, and argue that the included authors represent not just a random sample of scholars, but a schematic canon purporting to represent cuneiform culture as a whole.

\textbf{The Author-function and the Canon}

The question then becomes how the name of the author came to wield such metonymic power. How did it succeed in assigning a privileged place to literature, and in telling a cultural history through nothing but names? And why did authors acquire that role exactly as the literature and culture thus elevated were on their deathbeds? To answer those questions, I begin by considering the relation between authors and canons.

Michel Foucault provided a new foundation for the study of authorship with his 1969 address, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?”\textsuperscript{42} Here Foucault sought to describe

\textsuperscript{39} Ahiqar is given at least two and possibly three names in the text. See the notes to l. 21 for a discussion of whether Ahiqar was also given a variant of the Greek name Achiacharos.

\textsuperscript{40} The Assyrian king lists mentioning \textit{umma\textsuperscript{n}u’s} are numbers 10, 12, 14, 15, and 17, according to the numbering of A. Kirk Grayson, “Koniglisten und Chroniken,” \textit{Reallexikon der Assyriologie} 6 (1980–83): 115–25. Thus, for example, Nabu-apla-iddina is mentioned as the \textit{umma\textsuperscript{n}u’s} of Sennacherib, and Nabu-zeru-lishir Ishtar-shuma-eresh as the joint \textit{umma\textsuperscript{n}u’s} of Esarhaddon (King List 12, iv 1’–13’). In King List 12, the chief scholar is included regularly beginning from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser II (iii 9’–12’), but King List 15 mentions an \textit{umma\textsuperscript{n}u’s} already for the 14th century king Enlil-narari (5’–6’). However, the evidence for the practice is scant; the lists are fragmentary, and King Lists 14 and 15 have only one preserved \textit{umma\textsuperscript{n}u’s} each. See the discussion in Stephen J. Lieberman, “Canonical and Official Cuneiform Texts: Towards an Understanding of Assurbanipal’s Personal Tablet Collection,” in \textit{Lingering over Words}, ed. Abusch, Huehnergard, and Steinkeller, 313.


\textsuperscript{42} Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” \textit{Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie} 63 (1969).
the author not as a creative force behind texts, but as a principle by which texts are organized—that is, as an entity operating entirely at the level of discourse. I will give three brief examples of how this principle operates. For one, the name of an author can group texts into oeuvres. The name “Woolf,” for example, connotes a whole corpus of novels, which are thereby brought under a single heading (i.e., as “Woolfian”). For another, the name of an author can define certain texts (such as literature) as “authored,” in contrast to other works (such as letters) which are simply “written.” To use Foucault’s example, the collected works of Nietzsche would not include his laundry bills. And for a third example, an author is retroactively constructed, as we project onto her name the various intentions and meanings, the coherence and contradictions, which we believe ourselves to merely “find” in a text.

Of course, the specific workings of the “author-function,” as Foucault termed it, differ widely between discursive contexts, depending on genre, period, and the system of knowledge operating at the time. Yet such differences reveal exactly that the name of the author is not an ahistorical “fact,” but a discursive function regulating how texts circulate and signify within a specific context. As Foucault puts it, this means that the name of the author

court, en quelque sorte, à la limite des textes, qu’i1l les découpe, qu’il en suit les arêtes, qu’il en manifeste le mode d’être ou, du moins, qu’il le caractérise. Il manifeste l’événement d’un certain ensemble de discours, et il se réfère au statut de ce discours à l’intérieur d’une société et à l’intérieur d’une culture. 43

A striking aspect of this description is how easily it could also be applied to another key concept of literature: the canon. Much like the name of the author, a canon serves to delimit a certain group of discourses, separating texts that are included from those that are left out, assigning a definite form and a specific status to those texts, and so on. This is not to say that assigning an author to a work is the same as canonizing it. Rather, canons and authors can be understood as different but intersecting operations that define the discursive position in which a given text will find its place. Both serve to keep texts in that place: a canonical status forbids emendation, while the intention of the author supposedly dictates which interpretations are possible and which are spurious.

The relation between authors and canons in a cuneiform context is complicated by the contentious history of the latter term in the field of Assyriology.

But this controversy had swirled around a notion of canonicity that belongs specifically to biblical studies, and especially around what is now more often called the serialization of certain compositions at the end of the second millennium BC. 45 Yet applying a notion of the canon influenced more by literary than theological criticism changes the question considerably. Though it is debatable, for example, whether the Babylonian epic Enuma Elish was ever canonical in the Biblical sense (stable, unamendable, part of a defined corpus of canonical texts), there can be no question that it was indeed canonical in the broader literary sense (authoritative, influential, highly valued). In much the same way, James Joyce is part of a Western literary canon despite the infamous philological fluidity of his texts.

More recently, Francesca Rochberg has argued that the discussion of whether cuneiform texts are to be regarded as canonical should focus less on fixity, and more on power. 46 The canon, in Rochberg’s argument, holds discursive force inasmuch as it creates a community of scholars who are bound by its influence and invested in its status. This dovetails with John Guillory’s argument that canons do not enshrine a set of values as much as they render certain texts the standard by which cultural value is measured. 47 Canons produce cultural capital for those that are given access to it within an institutional setting such as the school.

43 Ibid.: 83.
44 Ibid.: 83.
46 Heefel, “Sieben Tafeln aus sieben Städten.”
47 Rochberg, “Canon and Power.”
Returning to the Uruk List, we now see more clearly that the list of apparently bare names in fact marshals a larger literary sphere, arranging its works in rank and file. What I provisionally referred to as the author’s metonymic power is to be understood more precisely as Foucault’s “discursive function,” the principle by which an entire cultural field is mapped and managed. The works referred to through the expedient of their authors’ names are thereby also separated from other kinds of texts for which such reference is impossible, and grouped together in the elevated space we today call “literature.” Then, by its symmetries and juxtapositions, the list makes clear that this space is not like any other: this corpus stands on equal footing with kings and demigods. The selection is exclusive, systematic, and mighty. In short, it is a cuneiform canon.

That canon imbued the included texts with a cultural capital that became forceful within Guillory’s “institutional setting”: in Seleucid Uruk, that meant the temple, what Beauleic calls the “imaginary space” to which the scholars had retreated. The list tells the story of that temple, how it was founded, transformed, and restored over time. The list further points to the literary and scholarly texts that secured a privileged social standing for the scholars who knew them, and who served at the temple. It carried a double ideological message: these works of literature were important because they were canonical, and the Hellenistic scholars were important because they were the keepers of that canon. The institutional frame thus creates a community that is both (in Rochberg’s words) invested in and bound to the power of the canon, which in this text means the power of the author’s name (a feature that is its true novelty).

However, we should not think of the canon as ever-stable. It is easy to believe that the texts and the guardians of the canon were assured of the cultural power they held, for that is the image of permanence that canons seek to project. Harold Bloom provides an instructive counterpoint to that illusion, arguing that the canon “does not make us free of cultural anxiety. Rather, it confirms our cultural anxieties, yet helps to give them form and coherence.”48 Canonical authors are most often ambiguous, uncanny figures, their works suffused by strangeness. As an example of the canon’s anxieties, Bloom highlights “the fear of mortality, which in the art of literature is transmuted into the quest to be canonical, to join communal or societal memory.”49 In the Uruk List, this anxiety is palpable, as the listed authors were just then slipping out of societal memory.

Rather than dispelling such anxiety, however, the text arranges it in a sort of linguistic palimpsest. The Sumerian of the first section is overlaid by the Akkadian of the next, and the progression accelerates in the final lines where one person is given three names: the archaizing Sumerian Aba-Enil-dari, the explicitly Aramaic Ahiqar, and the Greek form Achiacharus. This sequence is in fact a miniature re-enactment of the linguistic drama that had been playing out over the past millennium, as scholarly Sumerian and Akkadian were first joined and then gradually replaced by Aramaic and Greek.50 Though Anu-belshunu could not have known how close the older languages were to being supplanted entirely, it is certainly striking that his overview of cuneiform culture ends not in Akkadian, but in Greek (even if one does not accept my suggestion of taking the name in l. 21 as “Achiacharus,” preferring instead the older reading “Nikarchos,” this does not change the thrust of the argument here, as this name is also Greek). The list thereby seems to point to the threat of irrelevance, the entanglement of culture, and a looming language death—but crucially, these anxieties are “given form.” The canon arranges these fears in a coherent sequence.

To summarize: in the Uruk List, authors came to stand in for a larger cultural system through the discursive operation of their names. Broader questions of cultural antiquity, linguistic succession, political sovereignty, and local and professional identity were condensed into the figures of Ahiqar, Oannes, Sin-leqi-unnini, and others. The text offers a canonical selection of literary works, the implicit promise being that these authors were representative of their tradition—that knowing them and their works was to know Babylonian culture, its value, and its fears.

One must tread carefully here. There is no guarantee that this was precisely how the text was read in antiquity, no assurance that the listed authors were indeed seen as representative. Despite the hints given

49 Ibid., 19.
50 Clancier, “Cuneiform Culture’s Last Guardians,” 769, writes that the scholars “defined themselves through their maintenance of traditional cuneiform culture, including the perpetuation of Akkadian and Sumerian, they spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue and Greek when dealing with the state authorities.”
by the structure of the list, we can never fully know the social position of the author reflected in the text. The interpretation of the list of authors as a canon of culture must accordingly be met with a degree of skepticism, but lists of authors functioning as canons of culture are a common phenomenon, not least in the modern world. When asked to summarize the history of Italian literature, for example, we would most likely also produce a list of names—Dante, Manzoni, Carducci, etc. Indeed, this was already the case in the wider Hellenistic world by the end of the third century BC, as the Alexandrian list of classics composed by Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samos elevated a set of paradigmatic authors from each literary genre—and so also their texts, but only by implication. It was Hesiod and not his *Theogony* that was made a pinnacle of epic poetry.

**The Condensation of Culture**

Despite these Alexandrian forerunners, creating a list of canonical authors was a profound innovation within the context of cuneiform culture. Even though the Late Assyrian scholars had been the first to study and catalogue attributions of authorship, they had not produced anything resembling a canon of authors. In the following, I will place the change in the role of authors within the context of a broader process of cultural contact and self-definition during the Hellenistic period, and describe the wider consequences of canonization. To explain the novelty of the text, I would like first to place it alongside three contemporaneous compositions: the *Babyloniaca* of Berossus, and two pseudo-historical letters addressed to king Assurbanipal.

Berossus was a priest who composed a history of Babylonian culture, from Creation on up to his own time. This composition, known as the *Babyloniaca*, survives only through fragmentary second- and third-hand citations, but nevertheless the aim of the text seems clear: Berossus sought to inform the new Seleucid kings of Babylonia of the venerable tradition of the land they were now to rule. The *Babyloniaca*, writes Geert de Breucker, “can be considered as a ‘historical canon,’ an introduction to everything the author thought his intended Greek-speaking audience should know about Babylonian history and culture.”

It has often been remarked that in writing a history of Babylon, Berossus also departed from Babylonian historiographical customs, in which no such format existed.\(^{52}\) Cuneiform history was written through chronicles and king lists, not overarching narratives. But this genre gave Berossus the possibility of doing something not previously attempted in the cuneiform tradition: to tell the story of all Babylonian culture, from its geography through its myths to its sequence of kings. I do not mean to dismiss the existing Babylonian tradition, or to suggest that Berossus somehow improved upon it, but merely to argue that a change in aim took place during this period. Berossus set out to tell the story of not one aspect, but of all Babylonian culture (or more precisely all the audience “needed” to know), building what de Breucker calls a “historical canon.”

The two letters were written around the turn of the first century BC, but purported to be copies of actual historical missives sent five centuries earlier by the scholars of Babylon and Borsippa to the Assyrian king Assurbanipal.\(^{53}\) The scholars allegedly responded to the king’s request to copy all texts available to them and ship them north to Nineveh. But, as first suggested by Eckhart Frahm and argued more fully by Ronnie Goldstein, the letters are in fact pseudo-historical compositions later modified to suit the interests of the times, if they were not entirely invented in the Seleucid period.\(^{54}\) According to Goldstein, the scholars used the letters to recall the greatness of Assurbanipal’s library, which for them stood on par with its successor in Alexandria. By telling the story of how the Assyrian king had collected tablets from Babylon and


Its neighbor Borsippa, the Babylonians emphasized the role of their own cities in the construction of that literary monument.

I want to point to a difference noted by Goldstein between these pseudo-historical letters and the far more prosaic missives concerning the library that we know actually date to Assurbanipal’s reign. Only the later copies state the king’s desire to build a library containing “the entire corpus of scribal learning.” As far as we can tell from contemporaneous evidence, Goldstein argues, the original Assyrian library had no such totalizing ambition. Assurbanipal was certainly a dedicated collector of scribal lore, and probably wanted to gather as many scholarly texts as possible. But the texts that unambiguously date to his reign do not, according to Goldstein, evince a notion that it was possible to physically bring together cuneiform scholarship in its entirety. It was only in the Seleucid period that this idea gained hold—that of gathering all of Babylonian learning in one place.

In much the same way, Berossus tells the story of how the god Ea ordered his servant Ziusudra “to bury together all tablets, the first, the middle, and the last” in the city of Sippar to protect them from the coming Deluge. The classical cuneiform myths of the Flood do not mention this episode. In both cases, the differences between the Hellenistic texts and their precursors reveal a distinct and new fantasy. It is a dream of collecting all knowledge in one place, of gathering an entire culture in one imaginary locale, be it within a library built of memories, hidden safely underground, or within the structure of the text itself—that is, in the historical canon that tells its readers all they need to know.

The Uruk List of Kings and Sages shares in this same project. It likewise aimed to give a synoptic overview of an entire culture. With its brevity, metonymy, and symmetry, the text sketched out a miniature version of a far broader tradition. In Ambos’ words, it reduced the history of Uruk, its gods, temples, and scholars, to a list of names. It gathered a string of important works of cuneiform literature into one short, schematic, easily surveyed list. When the name of the authors were put at the service of canonical selection, the result was exactly this: oeuvres were referred to by the shorthand of their authors, a broad cultural complex reduced to a supposedly representative sample. The transition from the extreme antiquity of Oannes to the present of the colophon played out in just twenty-five lines. Once again, the difference with respect to earlier works is revealing. The catalogue of authors written in the Late Assyrian period is a far more exhaustive document, including many more authors and the titles of numerous compositions. The names of authors were no shorthand; they did not stand for but in apposition to their texts. Further, it is not clear by which principle the Late Assyrian text CTA was organized; besides giving pride of place in its first lines to Ea, god of wisdom, and to Oannes, it did not arrange the names of the authors according to any easily recognizable pattern. In short, this earlier catalogue was not synoptic; it was neither brief, metonymic, or schematic. The author’s name had not yet acquired the full range of functions attributed to it by Foucault. Only in the Seleucid period did cuneiform scholars find it imperative to gather the wealth of Babylonian culture in one place, to reduce a literary world to a single text.

This was certainly not the first time in the history of cuneiform cultures that authorship became important, and the Uruk List does not mark the invention of authorship as such. But it does register a change in the role of authors, which came to not only grant prestige to a single text or family of scholars, but to produce what we may today understand as a

55 BM 28825, l. 8: kullat ḫuIRR̲u. See Goldstein, “Late Babylonian Letters on Collecting Tablets”: 203.
56 Verbrugghe and Wickersham, Berossus and Manetho, 44 and 49. In the Greek text, the god and his servant are called Kronos and Xisouthros, respectively.
57 Though this tradition may be what is hinted at in the Epic of Erra, where it is said that Sippar was not destroyed by the Flood (l. IV 47–50).
58 Compare Beaulieu, “Berossus,” 143, who states that Berossus put together “for the first time a synoptic account of Babylonian traditions.”

59 It is worth noting that this selection leaves out a vast amount of non-literary cuneiform scholarship especially, including key works such as the omen series Enuma Anu Enlil and Shumma Izbu.
60 Lambert, “Catalogue.”
61 An interesting parallel is found in Christian Sch rermann, “Composite Authorship in Western Zhu Bronze Inscriptions: The Case of the ‘Tiānwáng Gui 天王簋 Inscription’,” in That Wonderful Composite Called Author, ed. C. Sch rermann and R. C. Steineck (Leiden, 2014), 51, who notes that in the Chinese context, the “first avowal of authorship that is both authentic and elaborate was formulated by Siá Qián 司馬遷, the co-author of a comprehensive world history.” This history, written shortly after the Uruk List in 108 bc, runs from the first mythical emperors to the author’s own time. Viewed in light of the Babylonian context, what is striking is the connection between the establishment of an authorial figure and the condensation of a cultural history to a single text.
canon of cuneiform culture. As in previous periods, authors continued to be markers of cultural identity. But unlike the case of either Enheduana or the Late Assyrian period, the culture thus marked was also metonymically condensed into the figure of the author. Of course, it should be stressed that the canon given in the list is not a fair representation of a Babylonian tradition, especially since multiple and contradictory versions of this tradition co-existed at any one time. The text sets out to give a biography of the city of Uruk, and in so doing focuses even more specifically on the profession of the lamentation priests, and on the Sin-leqi-unnenni family. A canon put together by an incantation priest in Borsippa would have looked quite different indeed. But the effect of the text lay exactly in exalting that local selection and transforming it into a supposedly representative sample of all of cuneiform literature.

The comments of both de Breucker and Goldstein suggest that this project was a reaction to a confrontation with Greek rule, the multicultural intermingling of Hellenism, and the threat to the status of the scholars that this brought about. The loss of cultural hegemony must have forced the Babylonian intellectuals to rethink their position. Though Babylon had many times before come under foreign rule, dynasties such as the Amorites and Kassites had time and again adopted cuneiform culture as their own. After 539 BC, however, this was no longer the case. As Benjamin Foster puts it:

Mesopotamian self-consciousness was based on the serene assumption that foreigners, given the necessity and the opportunity, would adapt themselves to Mesopotamian culture. The Persian Empire was the first instance of a ruling people in Mesopotamia who did not, but considered Mesopotamia part of a larger whole that belonged to them.

Babylon, quite simply, was no longer the center of the world. The project of collecting all culture into one synoptic overview followed from that cultural demotion. Ousted from its previous hegemony, Babylonian literature could no longer be seen as the sum total of all literature, the only literature worth transmitting. It had become one unity among others, suddenly only a parallel to Greek, Aramaic, and Persian cultures. As a result, there arose a need to delimit the nature and the extent of this newly non-universal entity. If the Babylonian literary tradition had to compete with other cultures, rather than being simply the literary tradition, it needed to be defined. What was special about it? What was part of it, and what was not? What were its highlights, what did one need to know about it?

The historical narrative of Berossus and the fantasy of Assurbanipal’s library did exactly this: they gathered all there was to know about their culture into one place, so that it could be surveyed and delimited. The same was true for the Uruk List, in that it gave a concise and schematic overview of a literary culture. This also explains why the notion of “canonicity” relevant for this period is so different from that applicable to the previous millennium. A canon assembles a group of texts into a distinguished discursive unity, and in doing so presupposes that this literary unit is a subset of all literature. In this period, that realization had become particularly acute. No longer identical with literature tout court, Babylonian literature had to be redefined, and the name of the author served perfectly to carry out that function: to select, condense, and organize texts.

To be clear, I am not arguing that the canonization of Babylonian culture was an effect of Greek influence as such, or a product of Hellenistic cross-pollination. I view it as a specifically Babylonian development, but one that took place as a reaction to cultural contact and subsequent changes in the scholars’ social standing. It was a counter-current brought about by new hegemonies and threats of the Hellenistic period, which forced these scholars to stake out a claim for cultural superiority in order to preserve their status. In order to do so, they had to define, delimit, and exalt the scholarly tradition they wanted to protect, and on which their social standing relied. In short, they had to produce a canon.

Conclusion

It may well be that “cultural identity” is always retroactive, always a reconstruction of what is effectively already lost. A flourishing culture is perhaps too

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I owe this point to a discussion with Markus Stachon. See also Piotr Michalowski, “Mesopotamian Vistas on Axial Transformation”, in Axial Civilizations and World History, ed. J. P. Árnason, S. Eisenstadt, and B. Wittrock (Leiden, 2004), 175–79.
cacophonous, too proliferate, too eagerly splintering into genres, groups, and subcultures to be reduced to one identity in any meaningful sense. But a culture either on the brink of death, in deep turmoil, or confronted with an Other against which it needs to define itself, not only can but must be reduced to something singular. For example, Nick Veldhuis has shown that the Old Babylonian schools assembled a Sumerian literary heritage to be imparted to the Babylonian students just as Sumerian culture and language had died out. Gonzalo Rubio further insists that there was no such thing as a “Sumerian identity” before that time—“Sumerian” in the singular was an invention of Old Babylonian scribes, manifesting itself in the canonization of the school curriculum.64 In short, cultural identity arrived ex post facto.

The canon, writes Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, is “a complexity-reducing mechanism,”65 and as such, it inevitably brings about a diminution of the culture it seek to amplify. So when, for example, Berossus sought to promote Babylonian culture, showcasing its antiquity and its proud tradition, he thereby also reduced it to something whose entire history could be told in a single text.66 In much the same way, the Uruk List is so very short and schematic, but still presents a history of the city and its gods from primordial times to the present, reduced to a set of memory-triggering names of authors. It thus achieves the condensation of culture exactly by the metonymic power of the author’s name.

This article has argued that such a reduction was motivated by a cultural anxiety about the place of cuneiform scholarship in a Hellenistic world. This anxiety should not be understood as a concrete fear:

while we today know that cuneiform would disappear completely from Uruk only sixty years after the writing of this text, we cannot impute such prescience to Anubelshunu. Rather, the anxiety was of a more general sort, a question of whether there could be a place for cuneiform culture in the Hellenistic world once the importance of its temples began to ebb away. The loss of the juridical and economic autonomy of the temple assemblies in 160s bc may have been a final straw for the Urukean scholars, but it was only the culmination of a long, gradual process of cultural demotion. The brief renaissance enjoyed by cuneiform scholarship at Uruk during the Seleucid period ended in a string of cultural shocks, the last and most definitive of which would come with the Parthian invasion in 141 bc.

Appendix – Transliteration of the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”

First published by Jan van Dijk in 1962,67 the tablet is currently in the Baghdad Museum and bears the excavation number W 20030.7 (= UVR 18, BA K 101 B, Ba M Beih. 2, 89). It is written in a slanting Late Babylonian hand, and contains a number of odd writings (šu for šu in l. 18, a perhaps erroneous mi in l. 20, etc.), as well as learned ones (such as ‘iddim-il-ša for Kabti-ili-Marduk in l. 13). Its choice of words is also occasionally archaic, such as balaggu for the lilissu-drum, and ahammu for the Arameans.68

Obverse

1 [ina tar-]i 'a-a-lu šarru (lugal) : 'umšš-60 apkallu (abgal)
2 [ina tar-]i 'a-lá-al-gar šarru (lugal) : 'umšš-60-dug-ga
apkallu (abgal)
3 [ina tar-]i 'am-me-lu-aa-na šarru (lugal) : 'en-me-dug-ga
apkallu (abgal)
4 [ina tar-]i 'am-megal-an-na šarru (lugal) : 'en-me
megalam-ma apkallu (abgal)
5 [ina tar-]i 'en-me-ni-mag-an-na šarru (lugal) : 'en-
me-šulug-ga apkallu (abgal)
6 [ina tar-]i 'dumu-zi rešš šarru (sipalugal) : 60-šš-
il-lil-da apkallu (abgal)
7 [ina tar-]i 'en-me-'dur-an-ki šarru (lugal) : 'u-ti-abzu
apkallu (abgal)

64 Nick Veldhuis, Religion, Literature, and Scholarship: The Sumerian Composition Nanu and the Birds, with a Catalogue of Sumerian Bird Names, CM 22 (Leiden, 2004), 75; Gonzalo Rubio, “The Inventions of Sumerian: Literature and the Artifacts of Identity,” in Problems of Canonarity, ed. Ryholt and Barjamovic, 246–52. Rubio notes that this is a “specific variety of canonization” (n. 36), because it lacks one defining characteristic of the canon: the focus on authors.

65 Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Kanoniske konstellationer: om litteraturhistorie, kanonstudier og 1920’ernes litteratur (Odense, Denmark, 2003), 49 (“en kompleksitetsreducerende mekanisme”); Guillory, Cultural Capital, 33

66 Note also that before the Persian period, there had not been a single term for southern Mesopotamia and its inhabitants. The term “Babylonian” meant a citizen of Babylon, only in this period did it come to signify a broader cultural collective as a single entity; see Beaulieu, “Official and Vernacular Languages,” 205–206.

The Role of Authors in the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”  

9: This surprising passage has close parallels in a bilingual text published by Erica Reiner, where the sage is called Nun-pirigaldim, and in an incantation from Bit mēseri, where he is called Nungal-pirigaldim.⁶⁰

10: The proposed restoration was first made by Amar Annus, based on a parallel to the ritual commentary text O. 175, l. 16,⁷⁰ which lists the names of the seven “hands” (šu. "[arki abūbi (cērī mar-urúi) ina] palē (bala-c) en-me-
kar īrru (lugal) : nun-gal-piri-gal ābakli (abgal) 9 [15 i-šu iami (an-c) ana é-an-na ú-šē-ri-du balagqa sīparra (balag zabar) 10 [it-ti qātā tišu ugnāti [[šu.]'i"m-oš-šu-ma-gin-na] ina ii-pir-4 niu-ā-gal 11 [i-pui ina ṗar]akhī ([bā]a) ēllī (kū) alār(ki) šu-baṭ ṗa-ṗa-šu-sukkal balagqa (balag) ina mab-rī 60 ú-ši-nu

Reverse


Notes to the text

9: This surprising passage has close parallels in a bilingual text published by Erica Reiner, where the sage is called Nun-pirigaldim, and in an incantation from Bit mēseri, where he is called Nungal-pirigaldim.⁶⁰

10: The proposed restoration was first made by Amar Annus, based on a parallel to the ritual commentary text O. 175, l. 16,⁷⁰ which lists the names of the seven “hands” (šu.

II”m-s) of the bronze līlissu-drum. Though the nature of these “hands” is unclear (are they handles? drumsticks?), this is the only word known to me referring to a part of the ritual kettledrum that fits the preserved traces.

11: This line has proven very thorny indeed. Lenzi already suggested that the sign LUY might be read sukkal, but I rejected it, would propose that the sequence DINGIR-LUY-LUY might be read ”paṗišu-sukkal, though it is befuddling to see the very simple sign paṗiš replaced by LUY (might it be a mistake by phonetic similarity or “dictée interieure,” writing daṗiš for /paṗiš/). But what is then, “the place of Papsukkal”! As noted by Beaulieu, Papsukkal is associated with the cult dais (paraḵku) in all rituals from Bit Resh that mention his name.⁷² Accordingly, I restore [bā]a in the beginning of the line, and the new database Late Babylonian Signs (LaBaSi)⁷³ provides us with parallel attestations of the sign that bear a striking similarity to the preserved traces—see, e.g., YOS 19, 61, l. 13 and BM 28918, l. 5. For the association between the balag instrument and the cult dais at Seleucid Uruk, see the eclipse ritual BM 4, 6:42 // BM 154701:2.⁷⁴

L. 12: The sign lugal seems to have been erased by the scribe, though there is no obvious reason why this should be the case.

L. 13: Van Dijk restored this name as [Ibbi]-Sin, but the traces indicate that the last sign ended in a vertical wedge. Instead, I cautiously propose to read [na-ra]mušišu 30. The Old Akkadian king may in fact fit rather well in the context. He is listed just after Gilgamesh, and both were regarded as authors of “narrative literature”—a royal third-person autobiographical account. The association between Naram-Sin and Kabi-ili-Marduk likewise makes sense, as both dedicated the authorship of the composition attributed to them to the god Erra: see the Cuneiform Legend (Late Version, l. 151) and the Epic of Erra (l. V 39–46), respectively. Finally, several texts attest to an antiquarian fascination with Naram-Sin, most famously by Nabonidus.⁷⁵

L. 15: The second scholar in this line must be Taqisha-Gula: his name is well-attested as a family ancestor in this period, and he is known as the author of the Exalation of Ishtar from the Catalogue of Texts and Authors, section 4, l. 9,. However, the spelling of his name in the text is quite

Footnotes


⁷¹ See Lenzi, “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”: 140, fn. 8 for an overview of previous attempts.


⁷³ For LaBaSi, see http://labasi.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/browsing/glyphs?identifier-&sign=84, accessed 25 July 2018.


strange, $^1\text{ta-\text{AH}}^-\text{me-\text{me}}$. According to the lexical lists, both $	ext{AH}-\text{KASKAL}$ and $\text{KASKAL}-\text{AH}$ can be read $\text{ki}-\text{i}$ (ML 14, p. 400, ll. 112–13), yielding $\text{ki}_1^\text{i}$ and $\text{ki}_2^\text{i}$ respectively.\textsuperscript{76} One may thus emend a $\text{KASKAL}$ either before or after the $\text{AH}$ to give a new but not impossible reading $\text{qi}^\text{i} 13/15$.\textsuperscript{81}

L. 16–18: This sequence of kings and scholars has been much discussed; as for the restoration of the king’s name in l. 16, see van Dijk’s remark that the break is very short here, indeed, there is space for no more than two short signs.\textsuperscript{77}

L. 18: For the emendation of $\text{LU}$ to the determinative $\text{lû}$, see Lenzi, “Uruk List,” 141, n. 10.

L. 21: Van Dijk proposed to read the somewhat cryptic sequence $^1\text{ni-qa-qu-ru-šu-\text{u}}$ as “Nikarchos,” emending $\text{šu}$ to $\text{su}$, and leaving the first three signs of the line unrestored. Lenzi followed this reading and proposed a plausible rationale for how Nikarchos came to be included in this text, though this proposal is, by Lenzi’s own admission, tentative.\textsuperscript{78} Here I would like to propose an alternative (if no less tentative) reading. Van Dijk had originally dismissed the restoration of the first three signs as $[\text{ia}-\text{ni}-\text{i}]$ (in parallel to l. 14) because “das würde bedeuten, daß Ahiqar auch noch einen griechischen Namen hätte.”\textsuperscript{79} But in fact, Ahiqar does have a Greek name, as attested in Strabo’s Geography, 16.2.39, where he is called Ἀχιάχαρος. He bears a similar name in the Book of Tobit, which variously calls him Achicarus, Acharus, Ἀχιάκαρος, Ἀχιάχαρος, עקיבא, רכיב, ראכיב, etc.

How then to harmonize this name with our text? One possibility is to take $\text{ni}$ as $\text{iā}$, though such a reading is all but unattested outside lexical lists—see especially ML 14, p. 214, l. 10. The lexical list in question is the same as the one discussed for l. 15, so it is significant that three fragments of it stem from Seleucid Uruk. The reading is also employed in the writing of the divine name Ḥaya as $^4\text{ba-\text{iā}}$, including in a manuscript of $\text{Shurpu}$ from Seleucid Uruk.\textsuperscript{80} Note also that the sign $\text{ni}$ was known as $\text{iā}$, so the association might not have been so far-fetched after all.\textsuperscript{81} Yet even if such a reading is possible, this would still leave the question of how well it fits with the other writings of the name. The initial $\gamma$ may be the result of an Aramaic origin, and the Hebrew form $^7\text{gygr}$ is intriguingly close to my postulated $\text{Taqaguru}$.

The difficulties involved are many, and so the proposal must remain tentative. Note, however, that the previous reading of the name as Nikarchos would by no means preclude the interpretation proposed above. Thus, a reading of the list as a miniature canon of authors does not run counter to the interpretation developed by Lenzi, since both view the list as a response to the social and cultural pressures faced by the Urukean scholars at the time.

The sign lugal is written directly beneath $^1\text{an-\text{ti}^-\text{i}-\text{ku}\text{-\text{su}}}$, presumably because the scribe forgot to write it in the previously line and so added it at the end of the text instead.

L. 25: The sign lugal is written directly beneath $^1\text{an-\text{ti}^-\text{i}-\text{ku}\text{-\text{su}}}$, presumably because the scribe forgot to write it in the previous line and so added it at the end of the text instead.

\textsuperscript{76} Rykde Borger, Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon, 2. edition, AOAT 305 (Münster, 2010), 103 and 170.


\textsuperscript{78} Lenzi, “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”: 163–65.

\textsuperscript{79} van Dijk, “Inschriftenfunde”: 52.
The thesis has studied how and why literary authorship first made its appearance in the historical record, through a contextualized close reading of the narratives of authorship preserved in cuneiform sources. Authorship emerged in connection with a string of cultural crises that afflicted the scribes and scholars of ancient Iraq, and the figure of the author served as a way of managing the cultural heritage that ensured the social standing of these literate professionals. Authorship thus arose from within a matrix of institutions that produced and relied on cultural prestige, including schools, temples, palaces, and scribal families. I also examined how the narratives of authorship produced in these historical circumstances were actually told, which led me to two overall conclusions. First, cuneiform authors are repeatedly depicted as standing midway between the origins and final version of a text, and this is a widely recurrent feature of authorship in the premodern world. Second, according to the narrative of authorship itself, the figure of the author is not created by the author alone, but co-created, re-created, and carried through time by a literary community.
It is a common topos in author theory to assert that studying authorship is in fact a way of studying anything but authorship. Bennett argues that theoretical debates about authorship are based on broader disagreements “about notions of subjectivity and agency and about what it means to be human.” According to Beecroft, “talking about the author turns out to be a convenient way to talk about how texts are read or written,” so the “greatest intrinsic interest that ancient accounts of authorship should hold for us lies not in what they have to say about authors,” but in what they tell us about circulation, genres, and cultural identity. Felski, who studies “allegories of authorship” in contemporary feminist criticism, notes that “[a]n allegory says one thing and means another; it deploys an image in order to convey a larger moral, political, or philosophical message”—and the allegories of authorship are no different, leading Felski to consider topics such as race, sexuality, psychoanalysis, performative identity, and periodization. Reception, philosophy, politics, even what it means to be human: all this seems embedded in the strange figure of the author. It is therefore no surprise that this thesis has touched upon a wide range of topics as well. Studying the historical context in which the narratives of authorship circulated led me to consider issues such as institutional power, language death, cultural heritage and professional identity. Studying the tropes of authorship in the cuneiform world raised questions about textuality, authority, and the “fishy” status of semi-divine beings. If the thesis was too wide-ranging in its concerns, that is because the authorial figure sits at the intersection of an almost impossibly large number of cultural tensions.

But though it may have diverged into a horde of subtopics, the thesis was motivated by a relatively simple question: How did authorship begin? If authorship has not always been around, why did it start? According to Google Trends, the phrase “first ever author”

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1 Bennett, *The Author*, 8.
was googled 2,153 times between 2004 and the time of writing (January 27, 2020). There is in contemporary Western culture an insistent curiosity about origins, beginnings, foundations, and firsts. We want to know how cultural phenomena began, either to explain them or, as I noted in the introduction, to show that they are not universal conditions but the products of specific circumstances. In writing the thesis I felt a constant ambiguity towards this impulse. I felt that I had to honor the popular interest which motivated the thesis in the first place: my doctoral research is publicly funded, so if people want to know how authorship began, I want to tell them. My research on Enheduana ended up on the front page of the Danish newspaper Politiken, in an article entitled: “The world’s first author was an Iraqi princess.” There is no way Enheduana would have made the headlines had it not been for the word “first” in that sentence. At the same time, I felt uncomfortable about this emphasis on origins. Since the publication of Samuel Noah Kramer’s History Begins in Sumer, Assyriologist have often been loath to emphasize that, for many of the phenomena we study, cuneiform texts are the earliest known sources. There is a widely held sense that the interest in “origins” is an anachronistic Western imposition, and that the image of Mesopotamia as the “cradle of civilization” is an infantilizing construct.

This problem is only exacerbated in the case of authorship. As Bennett notes, “it is an odd question, ‘who was the first author?’, one which is itself immersed in what we might call an authorcentrist or auteurist ideology, in an unreflecting and perhaps rather superficial sense that literary culture is invariably based around isolated individuals.

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4 https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=first%20ever%20author, accessed February 7, 2020. This is just a very rough indication of interest in the topic. A systematic study would take into account different search engines, related keywords, variations in statistical methodology, and so on.

5 Bech-Danielsen, “Verdens første forfatter.”

around the solitary figure of the genius.” In other words, searching for the “first ever author” is tantamount to searching for the authorship of authorship. In investigating the origins of authors, we are caught up in the logic of the phenomenon we study and so unable to understand it from without.

I believe—or rather, hope—that my study has found a way to navigate this dilemma. While the thesis does focus on the earliest known authors, the narratives of authorship I examine do not emphasize an authorial “firstness.” On the contrary, they depict authorship as a form of mediation and rearrangement, deferring the ultimate origins of the text to a “creative elsewhere”: the gods, the sages, or a far-off antiquity. Further, cuneiform authors cannot meaningfully be thought of as “isolated individuals” or “solitary figures,” since the author is depicted in cuneiform sources as the shared creation of many persons, who speak with the authors or circulate their texts and thus create and sustain the authorial persona. Cuneiform authors are social entities, being consistently juxtaposed with a variety of other figures: conversing with gods, advising kings, passing their words on to future scribes, and so on.

The thesis was carried out at Aarhus University, whose latinate motto reads *solidum petit in profundis*: “Seek solidity in the depths.” It conjures the notion that, beneath a sea of confusion and change, there is a solid bedrock to be found. This would be good news for scholars like me who spend their days researching the deepest layers of recorded history. Perhaps, by making our way back to the very oldest cultures, we can recover a firm footing, a single and solid origin that will explain all the fluid complexity that came later. Unfortunately, this is not the case. There is no solidity to be found in origins, no clarity in the depths. By studying the oldest known instances of a given phenomenon, one generally finds only gradual transitions, composite entities, cultural hybridity, multiple middles, and the pervasive notion that the *real* origin is to be found even further back. In this thesis, I have been unable to study the actual authors who

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7 Bennett, *The Author*, 30.
composed works like *Gilgamesh, Etana,* or *Sagit:* all we have are belated narratives created during times of crisis, which tell not of origins but mediation. Studying the first authors yields no solid bedrock, just messy myths with all their fascinating complexities.

**Further study**

Even for a topic as seemingly small as authorship in ancient Iraq, there is always more to be said. Further research might address those aspects and genres I explicitly left out, such as divine authorship or the authorship of letters and royal inscriptions. One may also return to etic questions about how cuneiform literature was actually composed, as long as the methodological considerations presented here are kept in mind. If the narratives of authorship are just that—culturally situated narratives—can one find alternative ways of reconstructing literary production in ancient Iraq “wie es eigentlich gewesen”? Perhaps.

Here, I would like to briefly discuss four questions I researched during the writing of the thesis, but which had to be left out for reasons of space. First, gender. As noted on p. 184–85, cuneiform scholarship witnessed a transition from female authorship and protective deities in the Old Babylonian period to male authorship and deities in the later half of the second millennium. It is worth noting that the shift may be related to the connection between literary production and sexual procreation. In the colophon to *The Temple Hymns,* and perhaps also in the *Exaltation* (see p. 134), Enheduana’s composition is described using the metaphor of childbirth, though no men are involved in this procreation. Contrariwise, in *The Legend of Enmeduranki,* the circulation of the diviner’s corpus is directly related to establishment of scribal families, where fathers teach their sons what Enmeduranki revealed to the citizens of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon, which Shamash and Adad had revealed to him. Each generation thus sees a reenactment of the original scene of authorship, in an ongoing symmetrical transfer of knowledge. But crucially, this repeated scene of procreation and transmission takes
place entirely among men, leaving out women in the propagation of the family. As I argue elsewhere, the link between textual production and same-sex procreation finds a particularly dramatic realization in *Enuma Elish*.  

The second topic I would have liked to investigate is the circulation of Ahiqar's authorial figure in a post-cuneiform world. Ahiqar, the Aramaic author and folk-hero mentioned at the end of the *Uruk List* (see p. 245–46), often appears in situations of extreme cultural hybridity. According to legend, he was an Aramaic scholar who served at the Neo-Assyrian court but was exiled to Egypt, where he restored his reputation through feats of intellect, eventually becoming the chief scholar of the Assyrian king.

The story is best known from a manuscript found at Elephantine, in Upper Egypt, written by a Jewish group of Aramaic-speaking mercenaries who served as the Persian empire's Egyptian outpost. In the *Uruk List*, he is given a Sumerian, and Aramaic, and perhaps also a Greek name. In the *Book of Tobit*, Ahiqar's story is used as a framing device, with Ahiqar appearing at the beginning and end of the book, and there are a number of similarities between his story and that of the Jewish scholar Tobit, who is also exiled from Assyria to Egypt. Already constructed from a mosaic of cultures—Aramaic, Assyrian, Egyptian Sumerian, Persian, Jewish, and Greek—the story of Ahiqar was further translated into Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Sahidic Coptic, Ethiopic, Old Turkic, Old Church Slavonic, and Romanian. In this vertiginously multilingual circulation, Ahiqar often occupies a cultural position defined in opposition to several other groups at once. He is not just Aramaic-Assyrian, but Aramaic-Assyrian-Egyptian, or Jewish-Persian-Egyptian, or Sumerian-Aramaic-Greek, or Aramaic-Jewish-Assyrian-Egyptian, and so on. In short, the questions of cultural contact, identity, and heritage I

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8 Helle, “Marduk’s Penis.”


10 Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*.

11 Greenfield, “Ahiqar in the Book of Tobit.”

12 See the essays collected in Contini and Grottanelli, *Il saggio Ahiqar*. 
examined in the second part of the thesis clearly apply to Ahiqar as well. The difference is that the world in which his story circulated was no longer kept together by the cuneiform script.\(^9\)

Another figure I would have liked to study in closer detail is Oannes-Adapa, the semi-divine sage, half-fish and half-human, who according to Berossus laid the foundations of cuneiform culture. In chap. 7, I explored how Oannes straddles a number of cultural thresholds, especially those between the human, the divine, and the animal; and in chap. 10, I considered a possible link between his name and the word *ummānu*. But there is much more to be said about this figure. As I discuss in the notes to the *Catalogue* (no. 2.1, section 1, l. 5–7), some have argued that Oannes was the mythical author of *Enuma Elish*, but there are several difficulties with this idea. Another topic I would have liked to explore is the development of Oannes in the early first millennium BCE. There was an older rather different myth about Adapa in the second millennium, which told of how he broke the wing of the South Wind and almost became immortal, but was instead granted the secret of magic. Here, he is no founder of culture, nor is he part god or part fish; he is “merely” a particularly intelligent human priest to whom the art of performing magic incantations was first revealed. During the first millennium, the practice of reciting incantations was increasingly institutionalized, and Adapa’s role changed accordingly. This shift has been analyzed by Michalowski and Seth L. Sanders,\(^{14}\) but it has not been remarked that the professionalization of incantations also led to Oannes-Adapa being regarded as an author, which he was not in the older tradition. Further, there is the Late Babylonian story about Oannes’s interaction with Enmekar, but this is fragmentary and obscure. In short, Oannes’s authorship is a topic that deserves further study but is also beset by several difficulties.

\(^9\) Damrosch, “Scriptworld,” proposes that in the ancient Near East, literary circulation was shaped by the shared use of the cuneiform writing system, creating what he calls a single “scriptworld.” A closer study of Ahiqar would allow us to understand what happened to literary circulation after the cuneiform scriptworld collapsed, while its memory and prestige lingered on.

\(^{14}\) Michalowski, “Adapa”; Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch*, chap. 1, part 3.
Finally, the thesis has repeatedly pursued parallels between authorship in cuneiform cultures and authorship in other parts of the premodern world, from ancient China to medieval France. But I have not explored connections between Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian literature and their immediate neighbors: Ugaritic, Hittite, Egyptian, and Biblical literature. As noted in the introduction, I consider the rise of authorship in those cultures to be a parallel but separate historical development, which would require independent investigations. However, those investigations might also consider the similarities between them. Consider the parallel between Enheduana and Kantuzili, the author of a Hittite prayer to the sun god. Just like Enheduana, Kantuzili was part of a dynasty that had been established recently and violently, and he founded a tradition of prayers that were more personal in tone and had a named first-person speaker. And just as Enheduana can be said to mediate between the Sumerian and Akkadian tradition (see p. 200), so Kantuzili mediated between the Babylonian and Hittite tradition. I am not suggesting that Kantuzili knew of or was inspired by Enheduana, merely that it would be fruitful to compare the two.

Parallels and perspectives

While certain parallels may be found between the Sumerian and Akkadian tradition and the rest of the ancient Near East, I believe that the element which lends itself most easily to generalization is the emphasis on mediation, textual transmission, and authorial symmetry. In chap. 4, I showed that the notion of authorship as mediation is prevalent across a range of contexts, but since the publication of that article, a wealth of new examples has come to my attention. Some were included as parallel examples of weaving and dreaming in chap. 5, but still more could be mentioned, as there are tropes of authorial mediation to be found practically everywhere in literary history.

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15 Singer, "Kantuzili the Priest."
Some of the metaphors are remarkable. Seneca likens poets to bees, who gather pollen from many different flowers before distilling it into honey—that is, turning the influence of existing poems into new verses. In the *Book of Leinster* (c. 1150 CE) it is said that the Táin, Ireland's national epic, was recovered from oblivion by the poet Senchán Torpéist, who heard it from the ghost of one of its main characters, Fergus mac Róich, making the author a “medium” in the literal sense (much like the *fin de siècle* ghost secretaries discussed on p. 93). What is noteworthy about this proliferation of parallels is that they enable a range of cross-cultural comparisons. Burke argues that the post-structuralist notion of authorship as a momentary rearrangement of discourse places the author in a position strikingly similar to the medieval *auctor*: just as medieval authors mediate between God and books, so do poststructuralist authors mediate between discourse and texts. The similarity should not lead us to think that the situations are alike in every respect, but it does warrant a consideration of the relevant parallels and differences. Mediation can serve as a frame of comparison, which does not require exact similitude but rather leads us to see the differences between the comparanda in a new light.

For example, I noted that Kabti-ilı-Marduk’s claim to authorship places him in a grammatically split position as both subject and object of writing (p. 102–103). Compare this with the medieval German *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200 CE), whose opening sentence contains a similar ambiguity. Literally it translates as: “In ancient tales we are told – many marvels of renowned heroes, of great hardship, of joys, festivities, of weeping and lamenting, of bold warriors’ battles – you may now hear told!”* This construction is known as an apo koinu, where two clauses have the same object, meaning that the list at the center is the object of both the preceding and the following verb. Just as in Kabti-

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17 Best et al., *Book of Leinster*, 5:1119.
ili-Marduk, one finds a syntactically split narrative of authorship, but here it is the contents of the story—the marvels, hardships, joys, and griefs—that are placed in a Janus-faced position. A closer analysis might reveal what these differences mean for the respective narratives of authorship and the cultural assumptions behind them.

Often, one comes across problematic words that can denote either authorship or transmission, so it is unclear whether the poet claims to have composed the story from scratch or merely passed it on from a previous source. This is the case in Middle Egyptian, where the verb šš can mean either “to compose” or “to copy,” and as Andrew Kraebel points out, when Bonaventure describes the four ways in which a man can make a book (see p. 72–73), he “uses the a single verb, scribere, to denote the actions of the scribe, compiler, commentator, and author.” These verbal ambiguities are vexing if one treats authorial composition and scribal transmission as diametrical opposites; but if one recognizes that premodern sources treat the two as overlapping activities, the ambiguities become instead a source of insight. Consider the last line of the medieval French *Chanson de Roland* (11th century CE): “Here ends the story which Turoldus declinet.” The word *declinet* can mean “to relate, compose, complete, copy, recite, decline in health, approach one’s end, etc.,” so it is unclear what Turoldus claims to be doing: transmitting the story from a previous source, crafting a new composition, copying it in writing, reciting it orally, or dying? As I have argued, all six activities can be said to constitute authorship in the premodern world and often appear in tandem.

An important aspect I did not emphasize sufficiently in chap. 4 is that in contemporary academic discourse on authorship, authority and mediation are often counterpoised, but that is not necessarily the case in premodern sources. That is, just because the author claims to be a link in a chain rather than the original fount of

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22 *Song of Roland*, 156.
creation, that does not make him a humble and servile transmitter, and it certainly doesn't bar him from aggrandizing himself or claiming proprietary rights over the story. At the end of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* (c. 1180 CE), the narrator tells us that he has related the story just as it was told to him by others, but goes on to insist that all other versions of it are mendacious fabrications: his is the only true version, even if he did not create it himself (l. 6814–18).\(^{24}\) In another story of a feline knight, namely the Georgian national epic *Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli (12\(^{th}\) century CE), the poet introduces himself with full bombast and self-celebration: "I think myself far from the least of those who've played [at praising the monarch].\(^{25}\) But despite this authorial pride, he also makes clear that he did not invent the plot of the story himself: "An ancient Persian tale I took, and in the Georgian tongue retold. Until that time, it was an unset pearl; from hand to hand it rolled, but I transformed it," turning it into "a sparkling diamond centerpiece.\(^{26}\) In short, textual authority and poetic pride are not at odds with authorial mediation, but can easily coexist with it.

Finally, the notion of authorship as mediation can have wide-ranging philosophical implications, as shown by Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* (1\(^{st}\) century BCE). In the introductory section, Lucretius describes the poem as a translation of Greek philosophy into Latin verse, making clear that the ideas he discusses in the text are not his own, but a poetically expressed version of Epicurus's philosophy (I 136–45).\(^{27}\) From this description of his authorship, Lucretius transitions directly into the ontological argument that nothing is created out of nothing, and that the entire world as we perceive it must be a series of rearrangements of the same fundamental elements (I 146–58), which Lucretius goes on to term "atoms." These atoms can make up the world in all

\(^{24}\) Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain*, 203.

\(^{25}\) Rustaveli, *Knight in the Panther Skin*, 11.

\(^{26}\) Rustaveli, 12.

its variety in the same way letters can be put together to form new words in infinite combination (I 197–98 and passim). In other words, Lucretius’ depiction of his own authorship as a translation and the act of writing as the endless recombination of letters directly parallels his philosophical vision of a universe where nothing new is ever created, and where change can only be effected by the ceaseless recirculation of the same essential entities. Medial authorship is thus ontologically unavoidable in a world where all we see around us is a temporary rearrangement of letters and elements.

In sum, the notion of authorship as transmission offers a vast range of analytical applications and comparative possibilities, from textual authority to the building blocks of the universe, and here I have only just begun to explore what authorial mediation might mean for literary history.

**Behind the mask**

However, tracing tropes and unpacking the structures and contexts of authorial narratives only gets us so far. At the end of the day, most readers will be left with a strong desire to know who actually wrote the texts that have come down to us. In this thesis, I pursued the argument that it is more fruitful to study authorship as an always culturally embedded and partly fictitious account of how texts come into being, rather than as a set of historical facts. This approach has served me well, and has led, I believe, to a deeper understanding of Akkadian literature and the world in which it circulated. But that does not mean that I wouldn't personally like to know whether Sin-leqi-unnenni really created the Standard Babylonian version of *Gilgamesh*. Methodological caveats aside, of course I want to know whether the actual daughter of Sargon wrote the *Exaltation*. These are texts I love deeply, so there is an undeniable impulse in me of wanting to understand where they came from. I have tried to show that paying attentions to narratives and putting aside the question of historical veracity is a rewarding choice, but I won't deny that for most people, there will also be an
unshakable sense of discontentment to it. Ideally, we want to peer through time to catch a glimpse of the real author at work, stylus in hand. But even under the best of circumstances, that desire is hard to satisfy, and cuneiform cultures certainly don’t offer the best of circumstances.

I am reminded here of a story about Sayat Nova (1712–1795 CE), a famous Armenian troubadour who composed poetry in Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Russian, sometimes mixing languages in the same poem. It is said that a young poet once went in search of Sayat Nova, who had gone into hiding as a retired monk. Arriving in Tblisi, the young man happened to meet Sayat Nova on the street but failed to recognize his disguise, and so asked him where he might find the famous poet. Sayat Nova switched to Azerbaijani and replied: *bilmanam, tanimanam, gormanam,* meaning, “I don’t know him, I don’t recognize him, I haven’t seen him.” The young man was shocked that there should be a single person in the Caucasus who didn’t know of Sayat Nova, but then realized that the words could also mean: “know that I am him, recognize that I am him, see that I am him.” Awestruck at the wordplay and starstruck by the poet, the young man snapped his *saz* in two and fled Tblisi.

What’s the point of the story? Simply this: the “true author” does not hide somewhere behind his disguises and ambiguities but reveals himself through those masks and double meanings. Behind the fame and the puns, there’s just a man. The entity we know as “authorship” has only an oblique relation to the actual producers of literature, for it is always constructed from anecdotes, narratives, and tropes. Incidentally, Sayat Nova also illustrates the second main argument of the thesis—the link between authorship and the appropriation and simplification of cultural heritage. In the story, we hear an Armenian man speaking Azerbaijani in what is now the Georgian capital. Unsurprisingly, today Armenia, Azerbaijan and George all claim the famous poet as their own and deny that he should be anything other than theirs. But these national

28 Jarahzadeh, “Bard of the Caucasus.”
29 Jarahzadeh.
divisions are modern constructs, and cultural identity would have been a much more fluid affair in the 18th century. By making Sayat Nova Armenian or Azerbaijani or Georgian, one slights the achievements of this amazingly versatile and multilingual poet, simplifying a complex heritage to suit contemporary needs. Authorship may be “just” a narrative, but it is a narrative with myriad messy consequences.
Appendix

Cuneiform sources
This appendix includes a selection of cuneiform sources relating to authorship. While I have sought to be as comprehensive as possible (within the given constraints of time and space), a degree of subjective selection is unavoidable in the compilation of such a corpus. For example, I have not included every text relating to Oannes-Adapa, the antediluvian sages, or Ashurbanipal’s claim to authorship. Conversely, some texts have been included that are not authorial attributions as such, but which shed light on the logic or phraseology of cuneiform authorship (e.g. the epilogue to Enuma Elish, no. 1.8). Overall, I believe that the appendix will give an extensive if not all-embracing overview of cuneiform sources related to authors.

The appendix is divided into five categories. (1) “Narrative depictions of authorship” are passages that describe the composition of a text as a sequence of events (rather than merely attributing a text to an author). (2) “Catalogues” are here understood as lists of texts or lists of the tablets and subseries that make up a text. (3) “Colophons and rubrics” are paratextual markers placed outside the composition proper and often separated from it by a ruling, which describe the nature of that composition—be it an entire tablet (in which case it is a colophon) or merely a section of it (in which case it is a rubric). (4) “Acrostics” are compositions that reference their author in the first (or last) signs of each line. (5) The final category, “Other texts,” includes a variety of genres: two chronicles, an incantation, a satire, and an onomastic list, as well as two texts of an obscure nature. For each text, I present an introduction, translation, and transliteration of the text, a reference to its latest edition, and explanatory notes.
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1.1 The Exaltation of Inana

The passage is the culmination of Enheduana’s *Exaltation of Inana*, where the narrator appeals to Inana for help: she has been sent into exile by the usurper Lugal-Ane, but Nanna, the god she used to serve, refuses to step in. Towards the end of the poem, Enheduana describes how she composed the *Exaltation* during a nightly communion with Inana and had it performed by a gala on the following day. The *Exaltation* is known from a large number of manuscripts dating to the Old Babylonian period.

Translation

135
Queen, beloved of Heaven! I will recount your wrath.
I have piled up the coals, I have prepared the purifying ritual.
The Temple of the Holy Inn awaits you. Will you heart not have pity on me?
(My heart) was full, too full—Queen, Lady!—so for you I gave birth to it:
what I have told you in the dead of night,
a gala-singer shall repeat for you at midday.

Composite text

135
nin ki-aĝ₂, an-na-ĝu₂, mir-mir-za ga-am₃-du₄
ne-mur mu-dub šu-luḫ si bi₅-in-sa₂
e₂-eš₂-dam-ku₁ ma-ra-an-ĝal₂ ša₃-zu na-ma-še₄-de₅
im-ma-si im-ma-diri-ga-ta nin UN-gal ma-ra-du₂
ni₆-gi₅-u₂-na ma-ra-an-du₃-ga-am₃
14₀
gala-e an-bar₇-ke₈ šu ḫu-mu-ra-ab-gi₉-gi₁₄

Notes

Note that the numbering in Delnero’s score transliteration differs from Zgoll’s edition; in Delnero, the passage is l. 136–41.

L. 137: The “Temple of the Holy (or Pure) Inn” (e₂-eš₂-dam-ku₃, written without the initial e₂ in some manuscripts) is a ritual locale associated with Inana. On its identification as a specific site in Girsu, Uruk, or Ur, or as a more generally understood place where rituals to Inana were performed, see Zgoll, 427–28.

L. 138: On the phrase “it was full, it was exceeding” (im-ma-im-ma-diri-ga-ta), see Zgoll, 428, who on the basis of parallels to other Sumerian compositions argues that it is an idiomatic expression referring to distress overwhelming the heart of the speaker.

Note also that the manuscripts differ with regards to the last sign of the line. According to the score transliteration in Delnero, 2101, four manuscripts have du₁₁, three have du₃, one has du₂, and one has du₈. Zgoll, 490, argues that du₂ is the original reading, since (1) it is the lectio difficilior, (2) the writing du₁₁ could have been influenced by the presence of the same sign at the end of the following line, and (3) du₂ is also used to denote the creation of literary texts in *The Temple Hymns* (l. 544, no. 3.1). However, it is also possible that the ambiguity evinced by the manuscript tradition should be understood as intentional, as argued on p. 134 above.
1.2 Erra

The passage constitutes an epilogue to the main story of Erra, where the god of war Erra goes on a rampage and almost destroys the entire universe. At the end of the epic, Erra reveals the text to the author Kabti-ili-Marduk in a dream. Erra then blesses the epic, announcing that all who copy, memorize, recite, praise, discuss, store, or otherwise circulate it will be protected from violence. It is debated when exactly it was written, though it was probably between the 9th and 7th century BCE.

Translation

V 39 For years without number, (let there be) this song of praise for
the great lord Nergal and the hero Ishum:

V 40 How Erra, enraged, decided to flatten the lands and ravage their people,
and how his counsellor Ishum calmed him, so that he spared the
survivors.
The weaver of its tablets was Kabti-ili-Marduk, son of Dabibi:
He let him see it at nighttime, and when he recited it upon waking,

he neglected nothing,

nor did he add a single line to it.

V 45 Erra heard it and approved,
rejoicing over that which concerned his vanguard Ishum.
All the gods praised his sign!
Thus spoke the hero Erra:

“Let wealth pile up in the shrine of the god who reveres this song,

while (the god) who scorned it shall smell no incense.

The king who magnifies my name shall rule (all) corners (of the earth)
and the lord who declaims the praise of my heroic might shall have no rival.
The singer who recites it shall not die in disaster:
his words will be sweet to the king and to the lord.

The scribe who grasps it will shall escape from the enemy country and
become famous in his own country,
and in the shrine of the scholars where my name is always mentioned, I
will broaden their minds.

In the house where this tablet is placed, even when Erra rages and the
Seven slaughter,
the sword of disaster will not draw near: Peace will be upon it.

May this song be performed forever, may it endure for all future!

May all lands hear it, and may they revere my might,

may the settled people see it, and may they make my name great!

Composite text

V 39 ša₂-nat la ni-bi ta-nīt-ti bēlī (en) rabī (gal-i) Nergal (ʾurī₃-gal) u
qu-ra-du ʾI-šum

V 40 ša₄ Er₃-ra i-gu-gu-ma ana sa-pan mātātī (kur₄₄me₄) u, ʔul-:eq ni-šī.₁šī₄
iš-ku-nu pa-ni-šu₃

I-šum ma-lik-šu, u₄-ni-ḫu-šu-ma i-zi₄bu₄ ri-ḫa-ni-šu
ka-šir kam-mi₄šu₃, ʾKab-ti-ilī (dingir₄₄me₄₄).₄Mar-dūk mār (dumu) ʾDa-bī-bi
iṇa šat mu-šī u₄-šab-ri-šu₃-ma ki-i ša₄, iṇa mu-na-at-ti id-bu-bu
a-a-am-ma ul iḥ-ṭi

e-da šu-ma ul u₄-rad-di a-na muḥ-ḥi

V 45 iš-me-šu-ma ʾEr₃-ra im-da-ḥar pa-ni-šu₃
ša₄, ʾI-šum a-lik maḥ-ṛi-šu₃, i-ṭib el-šu (ugu-šu₃)
ili (dingir₄₄me₄₄) naḥ-ḥar-šu₃-nu i-na-ad-du it-ti-šu₃
u ki-a-am iq-ta-bi qu-ra-du ʾEr₃-ra
ilu (dingir) ša₄, za-ma-ra ṣa₄-a-šu₃, i-na-du ina a-šir₃-ti-šu₃, lik-tam-me-ra

Notes

V 40–41: The passage presents several syntactical difficulties (characteristic of *Erra* in general): How do the various parts of the sentence fit together, and who is to be identified as its subject? This couplet is clearly a dependent clause introduced by ša, but what is it dependent on? Foster’s translation in *Before the Muses*, 910, takes it as an anticipatory genitive construction dependent on *kammīšu*: “How it came to pass that Erra grew angry (...) the composer of its text was Kabti-ili-Marduk” (emphasis added). Meanwhile, Cagni, 254–55, takes the clause to be dependent on the previous line, explicating the nature of the *tanittu* (“praise,” “glory,” “song”) mentioned in line V 39, and therefore takes the
pronominal suffix of *kammišu* as referring to Erra: “della sua tavoletta” (emphasis added). I opt for a compromise, taking the couplet V 40–41 as dependent on V 39, and *kammišu* as also referring back to *tanittu*. This further clarifies the reference of the -šu in V 43, which would again refer to *tanittu*, that is, to the contents of the epic itself.

V 42: The word *kammišu* could be either plural or singular, and as I discuss in a forthcoming essay, “Tablets as Episodes,” this has important consequences for our conceptualization of narrative structures in Akkadian literature. Cagni, 255, argues that it is singular, pointing to V 57, where the text clearly refers to itself as a single tablet (*ṭuppū šāšu*). However, since the epic actually consisted of five tablets, I choose to translate *kammišu* as plural: “its tablets.”

V 43: Several uncertainties surround this crucial line, especially regarding the identity of its grammatical subjects. The translators are divided as to which god is said to reveal the text to the author: Erra or Ishum? Erra is the main character of the epic, but Ishum is clearly portrayed as a master of words throughout the story. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 311, offers a cautious compromise: “(Some god) revealed it to him.” Here I opt—not without hesitation—for Erra.

Another question is who recites the text: The god who revealed it or Kabti-ilili-Marduk? One interpretation (e.g. Foster’s) would read the line, “just as he (the god) had recited it, so he (the author) omitted nothing,” the other (e.g. Dalley’s and Cagni’s) would read “when he (the author) recited it, he omitted nothing.” It is worth noting that the structure described on pp. 102–103 above, namely the split pronouns and stylistic parallelism, applies to the text regardless of which version one opts for. That being said, the notion that the god first revealed the text in a dream and then recited it again in the morning seems unnecessarily convoluted to me: the other option offers a far clearer sequence of events.

V 46: The line poses now familiar problems: Is the subject of the verb Erra or Ishum, and how does the clause introduced by ša relate to the rest of the passage? The phrase could be rendered either, “As for his vanguard Ishum, he (Ishum) also
rejoiced over it" (a strange use of ša), or, “That (part of the text) which belonged to his vanguard Ishum—he (Erra) rejoiced over it.” Aiming for consistency with my previous choices, I have taken Erra as the subject and ša as denoting the contents of the text, as in V 40.

V 47: The word ittišu could mean either “with him” or “his sign.” I am persuaded by the suggestion in Foster, Before the Muses, 910, that the line refers to the text itself becoming a “sign” or textual manifestation of Erra (akin to a heavenly object or a divine statue embodying the god), and that this is why the text acquires prophylactic powers in the following section.
1.3 The Great Gula Hymn

The Great Gula Hymn is divided into twenty sections, alternately praising Gula and her consort Ninurta, both of whom are referred to by a string of different aliases. The last section turns to the human supplicant who composed the hymn, Bullussa-rabi, who then asks for help in return. The date of composition is difficult to determine, and Lambert, “Gula Hymn” 109, offers a very cautious estimate of “1400–700 B.C.”

Translation

188 [ ] both gods [ ]
Have mercy on the servant who fears your divinity [ ]

190 Be mindful of his speech, be present at his prayer,
accept his petition, listen to his words.
Sit (as judges) and bring order to his case,
correct his confusion and light up his darkness,
let him tear off the cloak of mourning and be dressed in (new) clothes!

195 The servant who has bowed his neck:
By the unshakeable order of your great divinity—let his life be long!
Gula, great lady, whose helper is Ninurta:
Plead his case with your mighty splendid spouse!
Let him summon life for Bullussa-rabi,
so that he may bow down before you every day.

Composite text

188 [ ] x ili (dingirmeš) ki-lal-[la-an]
[re]-e-ma ar,-du pa-liši ilütkunu (dingir-ti-ku-n[u]) [ ]

190 [a-n]a e-peš pi-i-[šu], qu-la ana ni-iš qätēšu (šuII-šu), i-zîz-za
[m]u-ug-ra un-nin-ni-[šu], ši-ma-a qa-ba-a-[šu],
The phrase ša Ninurta rēšušu could be taken to mean either that Gula is Ninurta's helper (“of Ninurta, she is his helper”), or that Ninurta is Gula's (“she of whom Ninurta is the helper”). The latter interpretation makes for less knotty syntax in Akkadian, but requires us to take the suffix -šu as a mistake for -ša. Such mistakes are common in first millennium manuscripts and accordingly, Lambert's text edition opts for the latter option. I follow him here, but I would note that the ambiguity is possibly intentional.

L. 198: A similar ambiguity applies to the following line: To whom do the words ana gašru šūpi ḫāmīriki refer to? Lambert, 129, parses the phrase as consisting of an adverbial construction, “with your might,” and an address to Gula, “resplendent spouse.” But this translation relocates the possessive suffix from ḫāmīru to gašru, which seems unwarranted. Instead, I follow Foster, Before the Muses, 591, in taking the word “spouse” to refer to Ninurta rather than Gula, and both adjectives as dependent on ḫāmīriki.
1.4 A bilingual prayer to Nergal

The text is a single-column tablet from the library of Nineveh, which preserves a bilingual hymn to Nergal, the god of death and pestilence, with each line given in both Sumerian and Akkadian. There are sometimes significant differences between the two versions, and in the translation, I follow the Sumerian text and give the Akkadian in parentheses when they diverge. In the last lines of the hymn, the author identifies himself as Bel-remanni and entreats the god for help, in a passage similar to that found in *The Great Gula Hymn* (no. 1.3). The text was published by Kerr Macmillan in 1906 but has since escaped attention, and a new edition is being prepared by Jon Beltz, who kindly made it available to me. The hymn is difficult to date, with the late second millennium or the Neo-Assyrian period being the most likely candidates.

**Translation**

Rev. 2–3 Erra, strong one (Akk.: Nergal, counselor), who loves giving life

Rev. 4–5 Your city Marad, which has faced trouble, [ ] compassion!

Rev. 6–7 God! (Akk.: Nergal!) Look steadfastly upon your city Marad

Rev. 8–9 And I, whose life is troubled (Akk.: I, the servant who reveres you)

Rev. 10–11 Bel-remanni, who you have spared from death, [his] life

Rev. 12 [ ] strong Nergal, strongest of the gods

Rev. 13 Written and checked according to a copy from Cutha.

**Composite text**

Rev. 2  

\[ ^{1}\text{Er}^{3}\text{-ra a-}^{\text{g} \text{a}}^{\text{l}} \text{t-i-la z} \text{i k} \text{a-}[\text{ag}] \]

\( \text{Nergal (}^{4}\text{u-gur) mun-tal-}^{\text{ku} \text{ s} \text{a, bu} \text{l} \text{-}^{\text{lu} \text{t} \text{f} \text{i}^{3} \text{-} r} \text{a} \text{m}-^{\text{m} [u]} \text{]} \]

\( \text{ur} \text{u-zu Mar}-^{\text{r} \text{a} \text{da}^{\text{h}} \text{n} \text{i} \text{g} \text{-} \text{gi} \text{g t} \text{uku-a r} \text{u} \text{u} \text{-}^{\text{r} \text{u}^{\text{m}}} \text{]} \]

Rev. 5  

\( \text{a} \text{l} \text{i} \text{k} \text{a (ur} \text{-ka) un} \text{Ma-} \text{rad} \text{ s} \text{a, ma-ru-u} \text{s-ti in-}^{\text{hu} \text{-}[u-r^{\text{r}^{\text{m}}}]} \)
The First Authors

The text edition

Rev. 10: Bél-rēma[ni] ([k]en-re-ma[n-ni]) [ ] f nam x¹ e₂-a f x¹ [ ]
[ ] f m.u₂-tu tag-mi-lu na-f.piš³-[ti-šu]

Rev. 13: ki-i-pi-i ṭup-pu gabarē (gaba-ri) Kuti (gu₂-du₅-a³) ša₂-ṭir-ma [ba-ri]

Text edition: K 5268+5333a; Macmillan, Some Cuneiform Tablets, no. 10; Beltz, forthcoming.

Notes

Rev. 4: As noted by Betlz, the use of uru₂ for “city,” here and in rev. 6, is an unusual Emesal feature in a otherwise consistently Emegir text.
1.5 The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sîn
(Standard Babylonian)

The Cuthean Legend tells of king Naram-Sîn’s trials following his slight of the gods—trials that he records on a stele to warn future kings not to repeat his mistakes. The passages quoted below, which come from the beginning and end of the story’s Standard Babylonian version, describe Naram-Sîn’s composition of the pseudo-autobiographical narrative. The latter passage is followed by a set of moral instructions addressed to future kings and their scribes.

Translation

1  [Open the tablet box and] read out the stele
   [that I, Naram-Sîn,] son of Sargon,

3  [wrote down and left for] future days.
   (...)

149 You, whoever you are—governor, prince, or anyone else
150 whom the gods call upon to rule as king—
   for you I made this tablet box, for you I wrote this stele.
   In the city of Cutha, in the temple of Emeslam,
   in the shrine of Nergal: there I left it for you.
   Behold this stele,

155 listen to the words of this stele!

Composite text

1  [tup-šen-na pi-te-ma] narâ (na-ru-a) ši-tas-sî
   [ša a-na-ku 1Na-ram-430] mār (dumu) Šarru-ki’n (’lugal-gi-na)

3  [iš-tu-ru-ma e-zî-bu-šu a-na] u₄-me ša-a-tî
   (...)

Translation

1  [Open the tablet box and] read out the stele
   [that I, Naram-Sîn,] son of Sargon,

3  [wrote down and left for] future days.
   (...)

149 You, whoever you are—governor, prince, or anyone else
150 whom the gods call upon to rule as king—
   for you I made this tablet box, for you I wrote this stele.
   In the city of Cutha, in the temple of Emeslam,
   in the shrine of Nergal: there I left it for you.
   Behold this stele,

155 listen to the words of this stele!
at-ta man-nu lu-u ı̇ššakku (ensı̇) u rubû (nun) lu-u mim-ma ša,-na-ma
ša ilu (dingir) i-nam-bu-šu,-ma šarrûta (lugal-ta) įppuš (du,-uš)
ṭup-šen-na e-pu-uš-ka narâ (na-ru,-a) aš,-ṭur-ka
i-na Kutî (gu,-du,-a) ina E,-mes-lam
i-na pa-paḫ Nergal (ṭu-gur) e-zi-bak-ka
narâ (u-na-ru,-a) an-na-a a-mur-ma
ša, pi-i narê (u-na-ru,-a) an-na-a ši-me-ma


Notes
L. 1: For this restoration see Walker, “Second Tablet,” 193–94. Note also the close parallel to Gilgamesh (no. 1.6), which is perhaps the most significant aspects of the passage in the context of cuneiform authorship.

L. 153: For ezēbu, “to leave,” as referring to textual reception, see the rubric in UGU tablet 3 (no. 3.12, l. iv 24') and the Urak Chronicles of the Kings of Ur (no. 5.5, l. 17).
1.6 *Gilgamesh* (Standard Babylonian)

The passage, from the prologue of the epic's Standard Babylonian version, describes the composition of *Gilgamesh* by Gilgamesh himself. It is not an authorial claim as such (cuneiform scholars would later attribute the epic to Sin-leqi-unninni) but the passage is still relevant for the understanding of *narû* literature, the relation between kingship and authorship, and poetic self-reference in Akkadian literature.

**Translation**

I 7  
He discovered a secret, revealed a hidden matter,  
and brought home a story from before the Flood.  
He came back from distant roads, exhausted but at peace

I 10  
as he sat down all (his) trials on a stele.  
(...)

I 24  
[Look?] for the cedarwood box,  
undo its lock of bronze,  
open the door to its secrets,  
take up the tablet of lapis lazuli, and read out

I 28  
what Gilgamesh went through, all the suffering.

**Composite text**

I 7  
[ni]-šir-ta i-mur-ma ka-tim-ti ip-ti t₁₁
[u]b-la te₆ e-sha₂₆ a-am a-bu-b₁₁
[u]r-ha ru-uq-ta il-li-kam-ma a-ni-il ṣušu₂₃ ṣu-šu₂₃

I 10  
[ša₂₆-k]in i-na narē (₃₆₇ na₂₆-a) ka-lu ma-na-aḫ-ti  
(...)

I 24  
[a-mur₁₁] ṣu-up-šen-na ša₂₆, erēni (₃₆₇ erin)  
[pu-ut-te₆]r ṣa₂₆-gal-li-šu₂₆ siparri (zabar)
The First Authors

\[
\begin{align*}
[p\text{-}\text{te-}m]a \ b\text{b}a &\ (k\text{a}_\text{s}) \ \text{s}a, \ n\text{-}\text{sir}-\text{ti}-\text{su}, \\
[i\text{-}\text{s}]i\text{-}\text{ma} \ \text{tu}\text{p}-\text{pi} \ uq\text{n}\text{i} &\ (\text{sa}\text{-za-gin}_\text{s}) \ \text{si}-\text{tas}-\text{si}
\end{align*}
\]

I 28

\[
\begin{align*}
[m\text{-}m]u-u, \ \text{Gilg}ame\text{š} \ (\text{gi}\text{-}\text{s-gim}_\text{s}-\text{ma}\text{s}) \ ittallaku \ (\text{du}-\text{du}-\text{ku}) &\ \\
\text{ka-}lu \ mar-\text{-}a\text{-}a-ti
\end{align*}
\]


Notes

I 11–23: The passage that separates the two excerpts quoted here deals with the walls of Uruk. As noted by Annette Zgoll, “monumentum aere perennius,” the walls and the text are linked by a chiastic relation: first Gilgamesh’ creation of the text is described (l. 7–10), then his creation of the walls (l. 11–14); the reader is then invited to inspect the walls and the city they enclose (l. 15–23) and finally to inspect the text (l. 24–28).

I 24: The discovery of a Middle Babylonian manuscript of the epic from Ugarit, re-edited by George in “The Gilgameš Epic at Ugarit,” 239–41, confirms most of George’s restorations of this passage. However, the Ugarit recension is not identical with the Standard Babylonian one, and the description of the tablet box that spans four lines in the latter consists of only three lines in the former. The restoration of the initial verb in I 24 as [a-mur] therefore remains uncertain.
1.7 The Kesh Temple Hymn

*The Kesh Temple Hymn* celebrates Enlil's decision to elevate Kesh among the Sumerian cities through a glorification of his temple. The hymn was part of the Decad, the selection of ten Sumerian literary texts that also included the *Exaltation*. A prologue describes how the hymn was composed: first recited orally by Enlil and then reworked into a text by Nidaba. The passage describes divine and not human authorship, and is therefore not part of the thesis's main object of study, but it is still relevant insofar as it shares the terminology and structure of other cuneiform accounts of authorship.

**Translation**

8 When Kesh lifted its head among the lands,
   Enlil spoke the hymn of Kesh.
10 Nidaba was its arbiter (?):
   with its words as threads, she wove it,
12 and held it in her hand, written on a tablet.

**Composite text**

8 Keš₂₃ kur-kur-ra saĝ il₂₄-bi
   "En-lil₂₃-le Keš₂₃ za₅₃-mi₂₅ am₅₃-ma-ab-be₂.
10 "Nidaba nu-ka-aš-bi-im
   inim-bi-ta sa-gin₃ im-da-an-sur
12 dub-ba sar-sar šu-še₅₃ al-ĝa₂-ĝa₂

Notes

L. 10: The word nu-ka-aš is obscure. Gragg, 178, argues that it can be interpreted as an abbreviated form of nun-kaš-bar, which is attested elsewhere as an epithet of Sin. He further notes a bilingual text in which the expression kaš--bar is equated with the Akkadian phrase pursā parāsu, “making decisions,” leading to a translation of nun-kaš-bar as “master of decision-making,” here rendered “arbiter.” It is unfortunate that the word should be so difficult to interpret, since it clearly relates to Nidaba’s role in composing the text out of already existing strands of material—a key aspect of cuneiform authorship. Indeed, most editors would find “master of decision-making” a pleasant epithet!

L. 11: My rendering of the text follows the translation given in Black et al., *Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 326. One point of divergence is that I translate sa as “threads” rather than “net,” because the latter meaning is usually preceded by the determinative Giš, which this sign is not. Understood as “net,” the metaphor would apply to the entire finished composition, while “threads” would more aptly refer to the individual words being strung together. Note also that when sa is used for an individual thread, it usually means “strings (of a musical instrument)” — a fitting connotation in this context.
1.8 *Enuma Elish*

The story of Marduk defeating Tiamat and becoming king of the gods ends with a list of the fifty names assigned to him by the other gods. The two passages quoted here then describe the composition of the epic. While relevant for the context of cuneiform authorship, this is not an authorial claim as such, as the composer is left anonymous.

**Translation**

VII 143  With the title "Fifty," the great gods  
called him by his fifty names: they made his path supreme.

VII 145  Let (the names) be grasped, let the first one reveal (them)!  
Let the wise and the learned discuss (them) together,  
let the father repeat (them) so that the son understands,

VII 148  let them open the mind of shepherd and herdsman!

(...)  

VII 157  A revelation that the first one recited before him (i.e. Marduk):  
He wrote it down and set it up for the future to hear  
the destiny of Marduk, whom the Igigi-gods exalted.

VII 160  Wherever people drink water, let them speak his name.  
[This, now, is] the song of Marduk,

VII 162  who bound Tiamat and was given power.

**Composite text**

VII 143  *ina zik-ri ḫa-an-ša-a ili (dingirmeš) rabûti (galmeš)*  
*ḫa-an-ša-a šu-me, e-šu im-bu-u, u,-ša,-ti-ru al-kat,-su*

VII 145  *li-įš-šab-tu,-ma maḥ-ru-u li-kal-lim*  
*en-qu mu-du-u mit-ḫa-riš lim-tal-ku*  
*li-ša,-an-ni-ma a-bu ma-ri li-ša,-ḫi-iz*
VII 148  ša,raʾī (ḫusipa) u na-qi,-di li-pat-ta-a uz-na-šu,-un
(...)

VII 157  tak-lim-ti maḫ-ru-u, id-bu-bu pa-nu-uš-šu
iš-ṭur-ma iš-ta-kan ana ši-me,-e ar-ku-ti
ši-mat Marduk (ʾamar-utu) ša u[I]-lu-u, ili (dingirmeš) ʾI,-gi,-giš

VII 160  e-ma m[u]-u, iš-šat-tu-u, šu-u[m-šu,-] li-zak-ru
i-n[a-an-n]a-am-ma za-ma-ru ša, Marduk (ʾamar-utu)

VII 162  [ša₂] Ti-[amat i]k-mu-ma il-qu-u šar-ru-ti


Notes

VII 143: The list of names culminates with Marduk receiving the title “Fifty,” which both refers collectively to the other names (as the gods call his fifty names “with” (ina) the title “Fifty”) and itself constitutes one final name. Indeed, it is a particularly significant one, since the designation “50” was previously reserved for Enlil, the older king of the gods, whom Marduk replaced. I would argue that the relation between the name “Fifty” and the other fifty names reflects the ontological nature of Marduk himself: he is at one and the same time an independent entity and a composite being dispersed across the fifty names, identities, and functions attributed to him by the other gods.

VII 148: Alternatively, it may be the shepherd and herdsman who are the subject of the line: “Let them open their ears (to hear the names).”

VII 159–61: The restoration and interpretation of these difficult and fragmentary lines follow the text edition by Lambert, 132–33.
1.9 The Legend of Enmeduranki

The text presents the legendary background for the cuneiform practice of divination, and links this background to the criteria one must fulfill to become a diviner. It survives in four Neo-Assyrian manuscripts from Nineveh, as well as a recently discovered exemplar from Seleucid Uruk (Jiménez, “Young Anu-belshunu,” see the introduction to the Uruk List, no 5.1). After the quoted passage, the text goes on to specify what will happen to the diviner who does not meet the criteria set forth in the text, and ends by explaining the hidden significance of various implements employed in divination.

Like a number of the other passages quoted in this section, this is not an authorial claim as such but is still relevant to cuneiform authorship in a number of other ways: the symmetrical structure in the scene of revelation, the restriction of access to revealed knowledge, and the direct descent that links Enmeduranki to the diviners all have close parallels in other cuneiform accounts of authorship.

Translation

1  Enmeduranki, ki[ng of Sippar],
beloved of Anu, Enlil, [and Ea]:
Shamash [ ] from the Ebabbar.

Shamash and Adad [led him into] their assembly,
Shamash and Adad [honored him],
Shamash and Adad [seated him before] them on a throne of gold,
revealed to him how to examine oil in water—a secret of Anu, [Enlil,
and Ea—]
gave him the liver—tablet of the gods, a mystery of heaven and earth—
and had him carry cedar tree, a wood beloved by the great gods.
And he, according to their command (?), led the citizens of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon into his presence, honored them and seated them before him on thrones, revealed to them how to examine oil in water—a secret of Anu, Enlil, and Ea—gave them the liver—tablet of the gods, a mystery of heaven and earth—and had them carry cedar tree, a wood beloved by the great gods.

The liver—tablet of the gods, a secret of heaven and earth—how to examine oil in water—a mystery of Anu, Enlil, and Ea—as well as the commentaries, *Enuma Anu Enlil*, and calculation:
The learned scholar, who guards the mystery of the great gods, will have his beloved son swear an oath by the tablet and by the stylus, before Shamash and Adad, and (only) then he will teach him (these things).

If a diviner’s son, an oil-sage from a lasting family, descendant of Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, is a man who lays down the wooden bowl, who carries the cedar tree, who blesses the king, who is a *sigbarû*-priest of Shamash, a creature of Ninhursag, conceived by a *neshakku*-priest from a holy family, and is himself perfect in feature and form, then he may step into the presence of Shamash and Adad, the place of divination and decisions.
Composite text

1

_En-me-du-an-ki š[ar, Sippari (zimbríš)]_

na-ra-am ʰA-nim ʰEn-lil, [u ʰE₂-a]

Šamaš (ʰút) ina E₂-babbar-ra [ ]

Šamaš (ʰút) u Adad (ʰškur) ana puḫrissunu (ukkinn-šu,-nu)

[ u,-še-ri-bu-šu-ma ]

5

Šamaš (ʰút) u Adad (ʰškur) [ u,-kab-bi-tu-šu ]

Šamaš (ʰút) u Adad (ʰškur) ina kussi (ʰšgu-za) ḫurāši (ku,ši)

ma-ḥ[ar-šu-nu u,-še-ši-bu-šu ]

šamma (i₃⁺gi₃mēš) ina mé (aᵐēš) na-ṭa-šum ni-šir-ti ʰA-nim

[ʰEn-lil, u ʰE₂-a u,-ša] b-ru-šu

ṭup-pi ili (dingirᵐēš) ta-kal-ta pi-riš-ti šamē (an-e) u erṣetim (ki-tim )

[l] ḫ-di-nu-šu

erēna (ʰšgerēn) n[a-ra]m ili (dingirᵐēš) rabûti (galᵐēš) u,-še-eš-šu-uṣ, qat-su

u₃ šu-u₃ [ki-ma p][išun₅-šu-nu-ma] ([k]a³⁺-šu-nu-ma) mār (dumuᵐēš)

Nippuri (nihru¹⁴)

Sippari (¹'zimbríški) [ u B]ábili ([k]a₃⁺-dingir-raᵏi) ana pā-šu-

u₃,-še-rib-šu-nu₃-ti-ma₁ u₃,-kab-bi-su-nu₃-ti ina kussi (ʰšgu-za)

ma₁[ḫar₁⁻š][u u,-š]eš-ib-šu-nu₃-ti

šamma (i₃⁺gi₃mēš) ina mé (aᵐēš) na-ṭa-šum ni-šir-ti ʰA-nim ʰEn-lil, u ʰE₂-a

u₃,-šab-ru-šu-nu₃-ti

ṭup-pi ili (dingirᵐēš) ta-kal-ta pi-riš-ti šamē (an-e) u erṣetim (ki-tim)

iddinšuni₃ (sum-šu₃-nu₃-ti)

10

erēna (ʰšgerēn) na-ra-am ili (dingirᵐēš) rabûti (galᵐēš) qat-su-nu u₃,-še-eš-ši-

ṭup-pi ili (dingirᵐēš) takalta (₃₄stu₃) niširi (₃₄min₃ur₃₃u₃) šamē (an-e)

u erṣetim[m] (ki-t₁₂im )

šamma (i₃⁺gi₃mēš) ina mé (aᵐēš) na-ṭa-šum niširštii (ad-ḥal) ʰA-nim

²²En₂-lil, u ²²E₂₁₃a₁
ša, itti (ki) ša-a-ti Enûma (ud) Anu (an) 4En-lil, u a-ra,-a šu-ta-bu-šu
ummanu (lu)um-me-a) mu-du-u, na-šir pirišti (ad-šal) ili (dingiršu)
       rabûti (gašu)
20    a-pil,-šu ša, i-ram-mu ina ṭup-pi u qan-ṭup-pi
    ina ma-ḥar Šamaš (4utu) u Adad (iškur) u,-tam-ma-šu-ma
    u,-šaḥ-ḥa-su e-nu-ma már (dumu) bâri (lušal)
    apkal (abgal) šamni (iš+giš) zēru (numun) da-ru-u, per'i (nunuz)
    En-me-dur-an-ki šar, Sippāri (zimbiršu)
    mu-kin mākalti (ššilim,-gal) ellete (ku,-te) na-šu-u, erēni (ššeren)
25    ka-rib šarri (ugal) sigbarrē (sig,-bar-e) Šamaš (4utu)
    bu-un-na-ne,-e 4Nin-ḫur-sag-gaš
tre-ḫu-ut nešakki (lu)-nu-eššu, ša, za-ru-šu ellu (kuš)
    u,-šu,-u, ina gat-ti u ina minātišu (šidšušu) šuk-lu-lu
29    ana ma-ḥar Šamaš (4utu) u Adad (iškur) a-šarr bi-ra u purussē (es-bar)
    ḫiḫḫiš (te-ḫi)


Notes

L. 24: Lambert’s translation of this sentence (p. 152) is ungrammatical, as the
dependent clause beginning with “When…” has no verb. I take the dependent
clause to be a list of criteria the diviner’s son must fulfill if he is to enter the
temple of Shamash and Adad and translate accordingly.
2.1 The Catalogue of Texts and Authors

Perhaps the most important of all documents relating to cuneiform authorship, The Catalogue of Texts and Authors is known from three manuscripts from Nineveh. They are all one-column tablets and they display a minimum of textual variation: the name Sin-leqi-unnenni is written with the sign NIN in K 9717+ and NI in Sm 669, and section 7, l. 5, is divided into two lines in K 10797, but they are otherwise identical.

The text comprises works of scholarship and literature, attributing each of them to an author, with some authors having more than one work attributed to them. The entries in the Catalogue are of three types: (1) entries where the titles of the work(s) and the name of the author are given in different lines, separated by a horizontal ruling; (2) entries where the title and author are given in the same line, separated by a Trennungszeichen; and (3) some entries towards the end that follow a different pattern, but which are poorly preserved.

The first author of the Catalogue is Ea, the second is the semi-divine sage Oannes-Adapa, and the rest are human beings, but apart from that, no meaningful order can be discerned in the text. However, note the sequence in section 5+6, l. 13–17, where The Series of Gilgamesh, The Series of Etana, The Series of the Fox, The Series of Sidu, and The Series of the Poplar are grouped together, despite the fact that they belong to different genres. The grouping of entries according to similar beginnings rather than semantic content is a common feature of cuneiform lists.

Despite carrying out extensive collations of the manuscripts, I have made only a few amendments to Lambert’s text edition, as reflected in the notes. Further, though some of the incipits that were unknown in 1962 can now be identified (see again the notes), a sizeable portion of the texts listed in the Catalogue remain unknown. As shown in the table below (table 1), the titles of 45 texts are preserved at least in part: 20 can be identified, 9 are too fragmentary to allow for identification, 3 are uncertain cases, and 13 remain unknown. Intriguingly, almost all of the unidentified works appear to be hymns or incantation prayers.
Translation

Section 1

1 [The corpus of the incantation priest; the corpus of the lamentation priest; Enuma Anu Enlil;
Alamdī]mmû; “Not Completing the Months” (Shumma Izbu?); Sagig,
Katadu]ggû; “King, storm of majestic splendor” (Lugal-e); “Shaped like An’ (Angim).

[These] are by Ea.

5 [ of Enl]il; “I am Enlil.”

[These are what] Oannes-Adapa recited [before (?)] him.

[ Babylon [ ]
[ taboo of [ ]]
[ triangle (?) [ ]]
[ ... [ ]]
[ Naram-[Sin (?) ]]

(traces, break)

Section 2

1’ [ ... [ ]
[ ... Inana [ ]]

[These] are by [ ]
Section 3

1’ “[King of all abodes, creator of] everything” (Erra).

[This is what he] revealed to [Kabti-ili-Marduk], and he recited it.

[... the date palm, sweet tree of Dilmun” ;
[... its scent is sweet.”

5’ [These are by] king Enmekar.

[“Lord Marduk, son of Ea, sage] of gods, the prince” (prayer to Marduk P11).

[This is by... ], the sage.

9’ [This is by ..., the sage of Babylon.

(break)

Section 4

1’ ... [ ...]

This is by [ ...]

“Sired by a furious semen” (bilingual hymn to Nergal) [ ...]
“Fierce god, first-born of [”

These are by Pappatum, the [ ]

“The exalted lady who alone is mighty” (The Elevation of Ishtar);

“Of Enlil [”

“Epilepsy (?) was renewed”; “Life [”;

“Marduk, the great lord, looked steadily [”.

These are by Taqisha-Gula, the lamentation [priest.]

“Lion … from his battle (?)” ; “[Gr]eat lord [”

These are by Enmedugga, [ ]

“Hero, wisdom [”

[This] is by Enlil-[ ]

14’ [ ] … [ ]
(break)

Section 5+6
1’ [“Sage, … ..., come, let me] tell you” (The Babylonian Theodicy).

[This is by Saggig-kin-ubbib, son of ...-man]si, the incantation priest, scholar of Babylon.

[“Goddess! Cleverest of ] all enthroned deities” (The Great Gula Hymn);
[ ] mightiest of the Igigi” (Queen of Nippur?).

[These are] by Bullussa-rabi, the incantation priest, scholar of Babylon.
[ ] of the gods": this is by Mushe-[ ]

[“Aeg]is of Esharra”; “Great ... of lordship (?) [”]

[These] are by Andullu, son of [ ].

[“Son of the] prince”: by Enlil-ban-kudurri, son of Humeme, the incantation priest, scholar of [ ].

10’ “[ ] of Marduk, formidable lord, flourishing in heaven, who [ ]”

This is by Gimil-Gula, son of Ashgandu, the incantation priest, scholar of Babyl[on].

“Since many days, since long-off days, since distant days” : by

Ekur-dumu-nuna, son of [ ]

The Series of Gilgamesh : by Sin-leqi-unnenni, the incantation priest.

The Series of Etana : by Lu-Nanna, the sage.


[The Series] of Sidu : by the old Sidu, the lamentation priest, scholar of Nippur.

[The Series of the Pop]lar : by Ur-Nanna, the incantation priest, scholar of Babylon.

[ ] ... [ ] from before the Flood.

[ ] Ada]pa (?) wrote at this dictation (?).
20′ [ ] ... wrote at the dictation (?) of a horse (?).

[ ] ... honey ....

[ ] was seen.

[ ] ...

24′ [ ] ...

(break)

Section 7

1′ [ ] ... [ ]

... the lamentation priest, scholar of Eridu.

[ ] : The Series of the Spider.

[These] are by [ ... the son (?)] of Shumu-libshi, the lamentation priest, scholar of Eridu.

5′ “[ ] the wise, the king [ ...” : these are by] Rimut-Gula, the Nippurian, the lamentation priest of Enlil.

[“Na]bû, great minister of [ ] ...”

7′ [By] Gimil-Nanaya, [son of ... -man]si, the divination priest, scholar of Babylon.
Colophon: Type Ashurbanipal d

8' [Palace of Ashurbani]pal, king of the world, king of Assyria,
[whom Nabû and Tashmetu endowed with a broad mind], who has
sharp eyes:
10' [the highest level of scholarship,] an art that none [among the kings
who went before] me ever achieved,
[the wisdom of Nabû, all of cuneiform writing,] this I have
written on tablets, checked,
[and collated.] So as to see and read it, I have placed it inside my palace.
13' [He who trusts in you will not be put to shame], oh Ashur, king of the
gods!

Composite text

Section 1

[a-ši-pu-u₄-tu]m : kalītu (₃₉₅-gala-₄₃₅-tum) : enûma (₃₅₅) Anu (₃₅₅) En-lil₄₅₅
[alam-dim₄₅₅-mu-₄₅₅-u₄₅₅-sag iti ḫ₄₅₅-til₄₅₅-la : sa-gig₄₅₅-ga₄₅₅
[ka-ta-du₄₅₅-ga₄₅₅-lugal-e u₄₅₅-me-lam₄₅₅-bi nir-gal₄₅₅ : an-gim₄₅₅-dim₄₅₅-[ma]

[an-nu-tum] ša₄₅₅-pî-i₅₄₅-[a]

[ x x ₄₅₅-En-lil₄₅₅-l₄₅₅-a₄₅₅- parcel-e me-en-nam ₄₅₅-En-lil₄₅₅-l₄₅₅-a₄₅₅]

[an-nu-tum ša₄₅₅]¹₄₅₅-an-na₄₅₅-da₄₅₅-p[a₄₅₅]

[ina maḥ-ri-š]₄₅₅-id-bu₄₅₅-b[u]

[ x₁₃ Bābili (₃₃₅-ka₄₅₅-₃₃₅-dingir-ra) ]

[ x₁₃ ikkib (₃₃₅-nig₃₃₅-gig) ]

[ x₁₃ santakku (₃₃₅-sag₃₃₅-du₃₃₅) ] u₄₅₅- x₁₃ [ ]
Section 2

1' [ ] x [ ]
[ ] x $^{\text{i}}$Innin [ ]

[an-nu-tu]m ša₂, pi-i [ ]

[ ] x Ni $^{\text{lu}}$ummânu ($^{\text{lu}}$um-me-a) [ ]

5' [ ] ŠI DU RU x [ ]
[ Bab]ili ([tin]-tir) $^{\text{ki}}$ ma [ ]

Section 3

1' [šarru (lugal) gi-mir da-ad, me ba-nu-u₂, ki] $^{\text{b-}}$ra-a₁-t[i]

[an-nu-u₂, ša₂, Kabti-ilî-Marduk (Kab-ti-dingir$^{\text{med}}$, d'amar-utu)
$^{u₂}$]-šab-ri-šu-ma id-bu-bu

[ ] x zu₂-lum giš zag-ga dilmun$^{\text{ki}}$
[ ] x ir-si-im-bi dug₃₂-ga

5' [an-nu-tum ša₂, pi-i] En-me-kar₂, šarri (lugal)

[Marduk (amar-utu) e-tel-lum mār (dumu) $^{d}$E₂-a apkal (abgal)]
ili (dingir$^{\text{med}}$) mut-tal-lum
Section 4

1'  i-nu [ ]

\[an-nu-u, ša, pi-i \] [š]a, pi-t [\]

a huš ba-ri-a [ ]

\(i lu\) (dingir) gaš-su bu-kur [ ]

5'  an-nu-tum ša, pi-i 'Pap-pa-tum' [\]

nin maḫ ušu-ni ĝir-ra : En-lil, la, x [ ]

ut-te-ed-di-iš be-en-ni : ti-la [ ]

Marduk (\(\text{amar-utu}\) belu (en) rabû (gal-uš) ki-niš lip-pa-[\(\text{lis}\]

\(\text{an-nu-tum ša, pi-i Taqiša-Gula}\) (\(\text{ba-ša}, \text{Gal-la}\) ka[lù (\(\text{gala}\)]

10'  pirig, AŠ UR, šen-bi-ta : en g[al [ ]

\(\text{an-nu-tum ša, pi-i 'En-me-du\(\text{la}\)}\) ga [ ]

\(\text{[ur]-sağ nam-ku}z\) zu [ ]

\(\text{[an-nu]-u, ša, pi-t}^\text{\(\text{lil}\)}\) [ ]

14'  \[ \] x be [ ]

(break)
Section 5+6

1'  

[a-šiš]  
[lu]-uq-bi-ka

[an-nu-u, ša, pi-i Saggig-kīn-ubbib (\'Sag-il₂-gi-na-dadag) mār (dumu)  
... ma-an]-si, ašīpu (\(\)maš-maš) ummān (\(\)um-me-a) Babīlī (tin-tir\(\)kī)

[il₂-tum lē-\(\)a-tu-g] i-mir ili (dingir\(\)meₗ) a-šib parakkī (baraₗ,meₗ)

[ ] x x [ ]-ti ga-šī-rat \(\)iₗ-g[\(\)iₗ,iₗ]

5'

[an-nu-tum šaₜₜ] \(\)pi-i₁\(\)Bul-luṭ-sa-ra-bi ašīpu (\(\)maš-maš) um[mān]  
(\(\)um-[me-a]) Babīlī (tin-tir\(\)kī)

[ ] dingir-re-e-ne-keₜₜ: an-nu-u, šaₜₜ pi-i¹\(\)Mu-šē-f x x \(\)1 Uₜ DI [ ]

[ṣu-ul-lu]-ul Eₜ₂-sarₜ-ra : SAR gal nam-en-na [ ]

[an-nu-tuₜₜ]m šaₜₜ, pi-i¹\(\)An-dulₜₜ-lu mār (dumu) [ ]

mār (dumu) Hū-me-me ašīpu (\(\)maš-maš) um[mān]  
(\(\)um-me-a) ... \(\)kī]

10'

[ ] Marduk (\(\)tₜₜ-amar¹-utu) bēli (en) kab-ti šaₜₜ-muḥ šamē (an-e) šaₜₜ [ ]

an-nu-u, šaₜₜ, pi-i Gimiₜₜ-Gula (\(\)šuₗ-Gu-la) mār (dumu) Ašₗₗ-gan-duₗₗ, ašīpu  
(\(\)maš-maš) ummān (\(\)um-me-a) Bābī[li (tin-tir\(\)kī)]

uₜₜ-me-da uₜₜ-suₜₜ-uₜₜ-da uₜₜ-re-a-ta : šaₜₜ, pi-i¹\(\)Eₜ₂-kur-dumu-nun-na mār  
(dumu) [ ]

iškār (eₜₜ-garₜₗₗₗ) Gilgāmeš (\(\)giš-ginₗₗₗ-maš) : šaₜₜ, pi-i Sinₗₗₗₗ-leqi-unnenni  
(\(\)3₀-le-qiₜₜ-un-ninₜₜₗₗ) ašīpu (\(\)mₗₗₗₗₗ[\(\)a]ₗₗₗₗₗ[\(\)aₗₗₗₗₗ])
iškār (eš,-gar,š) 'E-ta-na : ša, pi-i' Lu,Š-Nanna apkallu (abgal)

15' [iškā]r ([eš,-gar,š] r,š) šelēbi (ka,-a) : ša, pi-i Iblī-Mardak ('du,-ama-ru-tu)

mār (dumu) Lu,Š-dumu-nun-na ummān (šum-me-a) Nippūrī (nībrušī)

[iškār (eš,-gar,š)] Ši-du, : ša, pi-i Ši-du, la-bi-ri kalū (šum-gala) ummān

(šum-me-a) Nippūrī (nībrušī)

[iškār (eš,-gar,š) šar]batī ([ša,š]-sal,š) : ša, pi-i 'Ur,-Nann[a] āšipu

(šum-maš-maš) ummān (šum-me-a) Bābilī (tin-tiršī)

[ ] x x x [ ] ša, la-am-a-šu-bu

[ ] a-da]-pa, ina pi-i-šu, iš-tu-ru

20' [ ] x a-na pi-i šīši (anše-kur-ra) iš-tur

[ ] x diš-pi lam-di

[ ] il]-nam-ru

[ ] guš[a]maš[

24' [ ] ša, ša, ša kalū (šum-gala) ummān (šum-me-a) Eri,š-du,š

(iškār (eš,š-gar,š) et-tu-tum

Section 7

1' [ ] x [ ]

' x x x kalū (šum-gala) ummān (šum-me-a) Eri,š-du,š

[ ] iškār (eš,š-gar,š) et-tu-tum
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[an-nu-t]um ša₂, pi-³ [mār (dumu)²] Šumu-libši (³³mu-lib₂-ši) kalû (₃₃gala) um màn (₃₃um-me-a) Eri₃-du₂,

5' [er-ši šar[ri (lugal) ... : an-nu-u, ša₂, pi]-³¹ Ri-mut₄Gu-la nippurû (nibrû⁸⁻u) kalû (₃₃gala) ⁴⁻En-lî₃,

[Na]bû ([³³a]g) sukkallu (sukkal) šîr[u (mah)] KU nir-da ki-si-ba

7' [ša₂, pi]-³¹ Gimil-Nanaya (³šu⁻⁴⁻na-na-a) [mār (dumu) ... -ma₂]n-si₃ bârû (₃₃ḥal) um màn (₃₃um-me-a) Babili (tin-ti₅¹)

Colophon: Type Ashurbanipal d

8' [ekal (e₂-gal) Aššur-bâni]-³³apli (³³⁻³⁻An-šar₂-du₂⁻)ibila) šar₂, kištati (šu₃) šar₃ māt (kur) aš-šur[³³]

[ša Nabû (⁴ᵃ) u⁻³⁻Taš-me-tu₄⁻uz-nu ra-pa-aš₂⁻tu₄⁻iš-ru-ku]⁻šu i-hu-zu ḫa (igi²⁻) na-mîr[tu]

10' [ni-siq ṭup-šar-ru-ti ša₂, ina šarrâni (lugal₉⁻⁻nî) a-lik mah-ri⁻⁻ia mam-ma ši₄-ru šu-a-tu₄⁻la³⁻i-hu⁻⁻uz-zu]

[ne₂-m-eq Nabû (⁴ᵃ) ti⁻⁻kip sa-an-tak-ki m]a-la ba-aš₂⁻mu ina ṭup-pa-ni aš₂⁻ṭur as-niq

[ab-re₄⁻ma a-na ta-mar-ti ši-ta-as⁻⁻s]i⁻⁻ia qe⁻⁻reb ekalliya (e₂-gal⁻ia) u₂⁻kin

13' [tâkilka (mir-gal₂⁻zu) ul₂⁻ibâš (ur)] šar (lugal) îlānî (dingir₉⁻⁻) an-šar₃

Text edition: Lambert, "Catalogue of Texts and Authors"; Jiménez, Babylonian

Notes

Section 1, l. 1–5: Two aspects of the works attributed to Ea are noteworthy. First, no other text included in the Catalogue can safely be identified as “scholarly,” “scientific,” or “divinatory”: Ea is the only author of such texts in the Catalogue. The works attributed to human and semi-human authors seem to be “literary” in a far more conventional sense of the word (though conversely Ea is also attributed two poetic works, Lugal-e and Angim). As argued by Rochberg, “Canonicity in Cuneiform Texts,” 135, this is because omens were understood “as a kind of divine language,” and the same could be said of the prayers and incantations by which lamentation priest and incantation priests addressed the gods. Ea’s authorship of these composition thus establishes them as a legitimate medium for human-divine communication.

Second, by attributing all scholarly texts to Ea, the Catalogue creates a number of inconsistencies with respect to other cuneiform sources. Most importantly, the Catalogues leaves out Esagil-kin-apli, who is elsewhere said to have authored Sagig and Alamdimmû, which the Catalogue assigns to Ea. Heeßel, “Neues von Esagil-kin-apli,” 161–62, argues that this exclusion reflects an Assyrian tradition where Esagil-kin-apli’s intervention in the medical tradition was rejected. Taking the complete opposite standpoint, Mark Geller, “Babylonian Hippocrates,” 44–45, argues that the name $^4E_a$ in l. 4 is in fact a cryptographic writing for Esagil-kin-apli, but this seems to me rather unlikely—apart from anything else, it would place Esagil-kin-apli ahead of the semi-divine founder of Babylonian culture, Adapa. Either way, Esagil-kin-apli is not the only author left out by the attribution of the scholarly series to Ea: the same goes for Enmeduranki, who is depicted as the founder of the divinatory tradition in The Legend of Enmeduranki (no. 1.9), and Nungal-pirigal, who is said to have founded the practice of singing lamentations in the Uruk List (no. 5.1).
There are also other points of divergence between the Catalogue’s treatment of scholarly series and that found in other texts. Whereas “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto” (no. 2.2) establishes a close connection between Sagig and Alamdimmû, the Catalogue separates them, interposing Shumma Izbu between them (see the next note). Likewise, Kataduggû is sometimes treated as a subsection of Alamdimmû and sometimes, like here, as an independent series (on this inconsistency see Schmidtchen, “Esagil-kin-apli’s Catalogue,” 144–45, 155 fn. 133).

Section 1, l. 2: I follow Lambert, 70, in identifying the phrase sag iti ṣu til-ša, “One That Did Not Complete the Months,” as an evocative reference to the series more commonly known as Shumma Izbu, a Babylonian collection of teratological omens (meaning omens found in malformed or otherwise anomalous births). As noted by Lambert, two bilingual texts translate the Sumerian phrase sag iti nu til-la with Akkadian izbu, and the inclusion of the series among divinatory texts, especially those concerned with the body, would make good sense.

Section 1, l. 5: The question of what [...] ṣu li-la might be has attracted debate. Lambert, 70, originally proposed that it could be Uskar Anu Enlil, which is attributed to Oannes-Adapa in The Verse Account of Nabonidus, but this later turned out to be nothing more than a pun, since no such series exists (see the note to no. 5.7, V 12’). But what did Oannes-Adapa then write? It has been argued that he was depicted as the author of Enuma Elish, because in Berossus’s account, Oannes-Adapa relates a story very similar to that epic (Verbrugghe and Wickersham, Berossos and Manetho, 44–46, see also Wiggermann, “Agriculture as Civilization,” 671). However, a collation of the manuscript does not support emending Lambert’s [L]A to [L]S, which would have been a pleasant solution (one might then have restored l. 7 as [pa-nu-uš]-šu, id-bu-b[u] to match the text in Enuma Elish, no. 1.8, VII 157). However, it would also have been strange that Oannes-Adapa was attributed both “I am
Enlil,” a text that seems to celebrate Enlil, and *Enuma Elish*, a notoriously anti-Enlil text.

**Section 3, l. 6’**: This text is no. 11 in the collection of prayers to Marduk compiled by Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 92–93 and 305–310.

**Section 4, l. 3’**: This text was identified by Borger, “Keilschrifttexte verschiedenen Inhalts,” 49, as a bilingual hymn to Nergal. As noted by Viano, “Sumerian Hymn from Boğazköy,” 233, the sign copied by Lambert as ME is in fact an A, yielding the stunning incipit: “Sired by a Furious Semen.”

**Section 4, l. 7’**: As noted by Lambert, “Epilepsy Was Renewed” is a strange title, particularly because it appears among hymnic rather than medical works, but no alternative reading suggests itself. See also the note to section 5+6, l. 6’.

**Section 4, l. 10**: The Sumerian phrase pirig AS ŠUR šen-bi-ta is utterly obscure to me, but I have no better reading to offer.

**Section 5+6**: Lambert, “Gula Hymn,” 107, points out that the sections 5 and 6 of the *Catalogue* can be joined by matching the incipit of *The Great Gula Hymn* in l. 3’ with its author in l. 5’. For the sake of consistency with Lambert’s edition, I refer to this conjoined section as “section 5+6.”

**Section 5+6, l. 2’**: Lambert suggested that the SI in l. 2’ could be read iddina, yielding “[This is by Saggil-kin-ubbib, in the time of Adad-apla]-iddina,” a restoration based on Saggil-kin-ubbib’s appearance in the *Uruk List* (no. 5.1, l. 17’), where he is placed in the reign of Adad-apla-iddina. However, the suggestion is untenable, since the kings under whom the authors served are otherwise never mentioned in the *Catalogue*. Lambert himself is inconsistent in this regard, reading the SI in section 7, l. 7’, as the end of a personal name of the format DN-mansi. I therefore assume that Saggig-kin-ubbib was also identified by his patronymic, as is the trend throughout the *Catalogue*, and that his father’s name ended in -mansi.

**Section 5+6, l. 4’**: I have taken a chance here to suggest that the other text attributed to Bullussa-rabi—whose incipit is [...] gāširat Igigi, “[...] mightiest of the Igigi”—
might be *The Queen of Nippur* (edited in Lambert, “Hymn to the Queen of Nippur”), a Standard Babylonian hymn addressed to Ishtar. The incipit of that hymn is missing, so it possible that it is the text from the *Catalogue*. The proposed identification rests on the close similarities between *The Great Gula Hymn* and *The Queen of Nippur*: both are long hymns addressed to a female deity, both have a “composite” structure where heterogeneous strands of theological material and poetical devices are brought together, and both end by referencing their author (for *The Great Gula Hymn* see no. 1.3, l. 199).

Unfortunately, in *The Queen of Nippur*, the only preserved part of that reference reads: [z]i-ki r šu-mi-šu [ ... ] da-riš, “The mention of his name [...]

forever” (section 4, l. 93), so we cannot know for sure whether it was authored by Bullussa-rabi (ironically, it is precisely the name of the author that did not survive “forever”).

Section 5+6, l. 6': One is tempted to emend “SAR gal nam-en-a” to “Lugal-nam-en-a,” the Sumerian name of the god of epilepsy known in Akkadian as *Bennu*, who also appears in section 4, l. 7'.

Section 5+6, l. 12': The title of Ekur-dumu-nuna’s composition (u₄-me-da u₄-su₃-u₄-da u₄-re-a-ta), resembles the structure of many Sumerian incipits, such as *The Instructions of Shuruppak; Enki and Ninmah;* and *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*—but without matching any of them precisely.

Section 5+6, l. 13’–16': The miniature fragment felicitously joined to the *Catalogue* by Jiménez, *Babylonian Disputation Poems*, 111–13, gives us the previously missing professions of Sîn-leqi-unnenni and Lu-Nanna, as well as the cities of Ibni-Marduk and Sidu.

Section 5+6, l. 20': The horse is an unexpected entry in this list of mainly human authors. Annus, *Overturned Boat*, 13, proposes to read the logogram anše-kur-ra, “horse,” as an unusual rendering of the Sumerian phrase an-še₃ ku₄-ra, “he who entered heaven”—a reference to Adapa. While Sumerian puns and graphic games are only too common among first-millennium texts, and while
Adapa does seem to be mentioned in the immediately preceding line, the context is too fragmentary to support so bold a reading. For the time being, the horse stays.

Section 7, l. 6': The signs sukkal maḫ can be read either sukkallu širu, “exalted minister,” or sukkalmahḫu, “vizier.” I opt for the former, since there is another hymn to Nabû that begins ḌNa-bi-um aplu (ibila) ki-i-nim su-uk-ka-lam ši-i-ri, with the same epithet spelled syllabically (Langdon, Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften, no. 11, p. 99–101, l. ii 16). However, despite the similarity to the incipit, this is unlikely to be the same hymn as the one listed in the Catalogue, since it is part of a royal inscription, appearing on a cylinder of Nebuchadnezzar II.
Table 3. Tabular view of the Catalogue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>The corpus of the incantation priest</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>The corpus of the lamentation priest</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Enuma Anu Enlil</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Alamdimmû</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Shumma Izbu?</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Sagig</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Kataduggû</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Lugal-e</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ea</td>
<td>Angim</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Oannes-Adapa</td>
<td>“[…] of Enlil”</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Oannes-Adapa</td>
<td>“I am Enlil”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>“[…] Babylon […]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>“[…] Taboo […]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>“[…] Inana […]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kabti-ili-Marduk</td>
<td>Erra</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Enmekar</td>
<td>“[…] the date palm, sweet tree of Dilmun”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Enmekar</td>
<td>“[…] its smell is sweet”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td>Prayer to Marduk no. 11</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pappatum</td>
<td>Bilingual hymn to Nergal</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pappatum</td>
<td>“Fierce god, first-born of […]”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>The Elevation of Ishtar</td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>“Of Enlil […]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>“Epilepsy (?) was renewed”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>“Life [...]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Taqisha-Gula</td>
<td>“Marduk, the great lord, looked steadily”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Enmedugga</td>
<td>“Lion ... from his battle (?)”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Enmedugga</td>
<td>“[Gr]eat lord [...]]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Enlil- [...]</td>
<td>“Hero, wisdom [...]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>[Saggig-kin-ubbib]</td>
<td><em>The Babylonian Theodicy</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Bullussa-rabi</td>
<td><em>The Great Gula Hymn</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Bullussa-rabi</td>
<td><em>The Queen of Nippur?</em></td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Mushe- [...]</td>
<td>“[... of the gods”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Andullu</td>
<td>“[Aeg]is of Esharra”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Andullu</td>
<td>“Great ... of lordship (?)”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Enlil-ban-kudurri</td>
<td>“[Son of the] prince”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Gimil-Gula</td>
<td>“[...] of Marduk, formidable lord, flourishing in heaven, who [...]”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Ekur-dumu-nuna</td>
<td>“Since many days, since long-off days, since distant days”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Sin-leqi-unnenni</td>
<td><em>Gilgamesh</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Lu-Nanna</td>
<td><em>Etana</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ibni-Marduk</td>
<td><em>The Series of the Fox</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Sidu</td>
<td><em>The Series of Sidu</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Ur-Nanna</td>
<td><em>The Series of the Poplar</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>[...]</td>
<td><em>The Series of the Spider</em></td>
<td>Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Rimut-Gula</td>
<td>“[...] the wise, the king [...]”</td>
<td>Fragmentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Gimil-Nanaya</td>
<td>“[Na]bû, exalted minister of [...]”</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto”

This passage, which John Wee has dubbed “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto,” describes why and how Esagil-kin-apli compiled *Sagig* and *Alamdimmû*. It is part of a catalogue that lists the tablets and subsections of the two series, with the “Manifesto” placed between the catalogue of *Sagig* and that of *Alamdimmû*. It is known from two manuscripts, a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Nimrud and a Neo-Babylonian tablet from Babylon. The text is quite challenging and employs a number of unusual and cryptographic spellings.

**Translation**

51 Regarding (the medical entries) that had not been bound in a new edition since days of old but were tangled like threads, and for which there was no duplicate:

During the reign of Adad-apla-iddina, king of Babylon, [in order to shape them (?)] anew, Esagil-kin-apli—son of Asalluhi-mansum,

sa[ge] of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, member of the cult of Sin, Lisi (i.e. Nabû?)

and Nanaya, a prominent citizen of Borsippa, chamberlain of the Ezida, anointed priest of Nabû, who holds the divine tablet of destinies, who investigates conflicts, the purification priest and ablution priest of Ninzilzil (i.e. Nanaya?), the caring lady, darling of his (Esagil-kin-apli’s) beloved (i.e. Nabû), scholar of the land of Sumer and Akkad—with the ingenious intellect that Ea and Gula (?) had granted him, he contemplated (it) in his mind, and so bound *Sagig* from skull to feet in a new edition, establishing (it for the advancement of) knowledge.
Be mindful! Take care!
Do not neglect your knowledge.
The uneducated shall not talk about Sagig
or discuss Alamdimmû. Sagig is a compilation concerning
depression, disease, and anxiety.

*Alamdimmû* (consists of bodily) features and forms,
(reflecting) the destiny of humanity that Ea and Gula (?)
have decreed. Regarding both series, their arrangement (lit., binding) is
the same.

[The incantation priest] who makes decision and observes the lives of
the people,

who fully knows *Sagig* and *Alamdimmû*,

will observe, inspect, [consider,] and present the results to the king.

**Composite text**

ṣa uš-tu ul-la zarâ ({textual symbol}sur) la ṣab-tum
u₃ kīma (gin₃) qē (gu₃) i etgur₃ (gil₃) ṣa₃ gabarē (gaba-ri)₁ lā (nu)
ibašši (tuku)
inā palē (bal-e) Adad-apla-iddina (idškur-ibila-sum₂-na) šar (lugal)

Bābili (ka₃-dingir-ra)
eššiš (gibil-bi-še₃) ana epēši ([du₃₃]-am₃) Esagil-kīn-apli (eks₂-gu₂-zi-gin-a)
mār (a) ṬAsal-lat-hi-ma-an-sum

apkal (abgal)] ṬHa-₂-am₃₃-mu-ra-bi šar (lugal) um-mat Sîn (₃)[a₃] ṬLi₃-si₃
Na-na-a Bar-sipa₃-i ṭre₃-ti-i
zabardabbû (zarar-dab-ba) E₃-zi-da pa-šiš Nabû (i₃-zu-zu)
na-aš₃ tuppi (dub) ši-mat ili₃ (dingir₃) sa-niq₃ mit-ḥur-tam₃
i-šip-pu ram-ku ša₃ Nîn-zîl-zîl₃-le be-lēt tak-ne₃-e ta-li-mat

nar-mi-šu₃
ummān (um-me-a) māt (kur) Šumeri (eme-gi.) u Akkadī (uri⁵) ina uznā
(geshu⁴) ni-kil-ti ša, Ea (40⁵) u Ba₅-ra₄
iš-ru-ku¹-su,¹ ina ka-bat-ti-šu, uš-ta-bil-ma Sakkkā (sa-gig₆) ulta (ta)
muhhi (ugu-ḥi) adı (en) gir₃₅ₑ (šēpēti)
zarā (¹sur¹-gibil) usabbitu-ma (dabi₅₄ ma) ana ıhzı (nig₅-zu) ukin (du-in)
it-id ¹piṭ¹-[qad]
[ana iy]žika ([nig₅]-zu¹-zu-še₃) lā teggi (nam-ba³-še-be₂-da)
ša, ıhzı (nig₅-zu) lā (nu) kaš:du sa-kik-ka ul iqabbi-ma (du₅-ga¹-[ma])


Notes
L. 51–52: On the meaning of the word zarā and the textile metaphors employed here,
see p. 109–12 and 118–19 above. In short, the lines describe a situation where the
individual entries compiled in Sagig and Alamdimmû did exist, but were found
in a number of conflicting variants and had no set order, so that no one version
of the text matched any other (i.e. the text “had not duplicate”)—a chaotic
situation that was remedied by Esagil-kin-apli. Note the textual parallels between this passage and the colophon to *Uruana* (no. 3.15, l. 3).

L. 54: The restoration [du₃]-am₃, while uncertain, has now been generally accepted—see Schmidtchen, 317. But its meaning is more uncertain still, so the transcription *ana epēši* is only tentative.

L. 55: The word *ummatu* literally means “main body, bulk, pack, contingent” (see the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* vol. U/W, 117–18 and the *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 1414–15), here perhaps in the sense “(part of) the main body (of cultic personnel)” of the gods in question. This interpretation finds a supporting parallel in an inscription by Nebuchadnezzar I (Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia*, no. B.2.4.8, p. 25, l. 12, cited by von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 1415), which describes the king as *um-mat Adad* (*iškur u *Gu-la*.

L. 55–62: This section shares a number of similarities with the *Exorcist’s Manual* (no. 2.3, l. 27–28), where Esagil-kin-apli is also linked to the god Lisi, identified as an *ishippu* or “purification priest” of the Ezida, and said to have composed his text “for (the advancement of) knowledge” (*ana iḫzi*).

L. 60 and 67: It is unclear which god is mentioned alongside Ea in these two lines, since *dPAB-PAB* is a cryptographic spelling. A natural possibility would be Marduk, who is often mentioned alongside Ea in matters of incantation, but Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 327, fn. 1561, argues that it refers to Gula, since *dPAB-PAB* is elsewhere equated with *dME-ME*. I therefore follow Schmidtchen’s suggestion to read it as *Ba₄-ba₄*, Baba having been syncretized with Gula in the late second millennium (though Schmidtchen himself opts for Marduk).

L. 64: Schmidtchen, 326, offers an ingenious solution to the problematic *GUB BI* of this line, reading it as a cryptographic spelling of the word *kašdu*, “attained,” with the order of the signs reversed.
L. 67: A small matter, perhaps, but an ontologically important one: in my translation I follow Schmidtchen, 318 in inserting a parenthetical “(reflecting)” between the bodily forms and the destinies they reveal, implying that the features listed in Alamdimmû are to be taken as signs that represent a divinatory outcome—for example, according to Alamdimmû, II 1, a rightwards cowlick is a sign of a short life. But this translation is only a matter of convenience. According to Babylonian ontology as I understand it, the omens on the body are not signs in the strict sense of the word: they are the destiny of the human subject in one of its physical manifestations, the other of which will be the subject’s future. That is, the cowlick is not a secondary representation of the primary reality, which is the destiny of a short life, rather, the destiny decreed by the gods is made simultaneously and equally manifest in a physical feature and a particular future. See Zainab Bahrani, Graven Image, chaps. 4 and 5.

L. 68: The phrase, “their binding is one,” is generally taken to mean that the structure of the series is the same, meaning that the entries in both Sagig and Alamdimmû are arranged from head to foot, as explicated in l. 61.
2.3 The Exorcist’s Manual

The Exorcist’s Manual is a catalogue of texts belonging to the realm of āšipūtu, “the corpus of the incantation priests,” including Sagig, Alamdimmû, Udughul, Bit Rimki, Bit Meseri, Mis Pî, Maqlû, Shurpu, and so on (though notably neither Enuma Anu Enlil or Shumma Alu). This catalogue is followed by two obscure sections, which seem to be, respectively, a list of supplementary texts and tools to be used by the incantation priest, and a cryptographic blessing for successful scholars (Frahm, “Exorcist’s Manual,” 23–24). At the end of the first section there is a rubric that attributes “the series of the incantation priest” to Esagil-kin-apli.

The Exorcist’s Manual is preserved in six manuscripts, two of which are Assyrian and four Babylonian. Of the Assyrian manuscripts, one was written towards the end of the 7th century BCE and found in Assur, while the other is a small fragment from Nineveh. The remaining manuscripts are Late Babylonian tablets from Sippar, Uruk, and Babylon (see Frahm, “Exorcist’s Manual,” 10–17, for their precise dating and context). The Assur text has an abbreviated version of the attribution to Esagil-kin-apli, while the Babylonian manuscripts include an extended titulary and a description of his purpose in composing the text that parallel those found in “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto” (no. 2.2).

Translation

Assyrian version

27 The incipits of Esagil-kin-apli’s series of the incantation priest.

Babylonian version

27 The entire series of the incantation priest, which Esagil-kin-apli—son of Asalluhi-mansum, sage of Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, descendent of Lisi (i.e. Nabû?), purification priest of the Ezida—

28 established for (the advancement of) knowledge and study.
Composite text

Assyrian version

27  
řēšū (sagmeš) iškār (eš-garš) ašipūti (maš-maš-ti) ša, Esagil-kin-apli

(šeš-sag-ilš-gin-a)

Babylonian version

27  
naphare (šu-nigin-e) iškār (eš-garš) ašipūti (maš-maš-ti) ša, Esagil-kin-
apli (šeš-guš-zi-da-ibila) mār (dumu) hu Asal-lu-ḫi-ma-an-sum

28  
apkal (abgal) ḫa-am-mu-ra-bi šar (lugal) Bābili (tin-tirš) liblibbi

(šaš-bal-bal) 2Liš-siš-ša i-šip-pu Eš-zi-da

29  
anahzi (nigš-zu-šēš) tämarti (igi-duš-a) ikūn (gub-ba)


Notes

L. 27–28: A central question regarding Esagil-kin-apli’s authorship is whether the lines quoted here are to be understood as a subscript summarizing the contents of the first section of the catalogue, or as a heading introducing its second section (see the overview of this discussion in Frahm, “Exorcist’s Manual,” 19–20, with references to previous literature). In short, was Esagil-kin-apli said to have authored the main bulk of the “series of the incantation priest” or only its supplementary material? The series Sagig and Alamdimmû are included in the first section, supporting the view that the quoted passage is a subscript, since they are also attributed to Esagil-kin-apli in the catalogue of those two series (no. 2.2). However, in The Catalogue of Texts and Authors (no. 2.1, l. 2), those series are attributed to Ea, so the tradition is inconsistent anyway. Nonetheless, I am inclined to side with Frahm in taking the passage as a subscript, because the close textual parallels between the “Exorcist’s Manual” and “Esagil-kin-
apli’s Manifesto” make it likely that they belong to the same tradition (see the
note to l. 55–62 in that text). However, note that if the passage is a subscript, it attributes an outrageous amount of texts to Esagil-kin-apli, far surpassing any other author in the cuneiform world.
2.4 The catalogue of *The Series of Sidu*

According to its colophon, this catalogue lists the tablets that make up *The Series of Sidu*. It is preserved on a small one-column tablet from Nineveh and comprised 35 incipits, of which 15 have been preserved well enough to allow for identification. As shown in the table below, 10 can be identified at least in part. Even if not all can be linked to a specific composition, they do give us a clear impression of the series, which consisted of bilingual compositions relating to proverbial wisdom and agriculture. Often, the compositions have their roots in a Sumerian text from the Old Babylonian period to which an Akkadian translation was added later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obverse</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reverse

(break)

“..."

“Plans are made with Enki”

(large gap)

All 35 tablets of the Series of Sidu.

Text

Obverse

\[ \text{[\ ]-am}_3 \]

\[ [x\ ] \times [x\ ] \text{DU RU} \]

\[ ^4\text{En-l}il, \text{šer-}da \text{gu-la}^{-f}\text{ni}^1 \]

\[ [\text{ki}] \text{gul-la-ba} \]

\[ ^1\text{a}\text{nundum-ma-ke}_4 \]

\[ \text{a sag-še}_5, \text{du}_7-a \]
\[ \text{e-el-}lu \text{ma-al-}lu \]
\[ \text{šu-i ku}_9-\text{zu-gin}_7 \]
\[ \text{dub-sar pe-}el-\text{la}_8 \]

\[ ^4\text{Utu nam-lugal-la} \]

\[ \text{mušen}^{-1}\text{-du}_3, u_4 \text{2-}\text{kam} \]

\[ ^4\text{Ku}_7-\text{su}_8, \text{lu}_5 \text{GI AL GI} \text{fRA}^1 \]

\[ \text{en-nun u}_7-\text{zal-la} \]

\[ u_6, \text{u}[l-l]i,-a \text{engar-ra dumu-a}^{-f}\text{ni}^1 \]
The First Authors

L. 15  \[e\textsubscript{1}-gal du\textsubscript{u}-ga-a-ni\]

L. 16 \[\quad x \quad \]

(break)

**Reverse**

L. 34 \[D\textsuperscript{?}U G\textsuperscript{?} BU UB DA ŠU \[

L. 35  \[k\textsuperscript{i} \textsuperscript{?}En-ki giš-ḫur-ḫur-\textsuperscript{?}ra\textsuperscript{1}\]

(large gap)

L. 36 \[nap\textsubscript{?}aru (\textsuperscript{[pa]}p) 35 \textsuperscript{?}tuppi (\textsuperscript{dub\textsuperscript{met}}) iškār (eš-gar\textsubscript{3}) Si-du\textsubscript{3}\]

L. 37 \[\quad x \quad SAG RU ina UGU DIŠ PAP\textsuperscript{?} LUM\textsuperscript{?} ḫI\]

**Text edition:** K 1870; Finkel, “On the Series of Sidu.”
Table 4. Tabular view of *The Series of Sidu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L.</th>
<th>Incipit</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Text edition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“In those palaces”</td>
<td><em>Collection 2.</em></td>
<td>Alster, <em>Proverbs</em>, 44.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Water created for the head (?)”</td>
<td>Unidentified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Giddy up!”</td>
<td><em>Song of the Plowing Oxen.</em></td>
<td>Civil, “The Song of the Plowing Oxen.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Like the wise barber”</td>
<td>Unidentified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“(When) the sun (rises), kingship”</td>
<td>Resembles l. 83 of <em>Collection 3.</em></td>
<td>Alster, <em>Proverbs</em>, 95.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“The fowler on the twentieth day”</td>
<td>Akkadian version preserved on BM 53309 and 53555.</td>
<td>Lambert, <em>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</em>, 221.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>“The god Kusu ...”</td>
<td>Unidentified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>“The watchman in the morning.”</td>
<td>Unidentified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Old-Man-Tiller (instructed) his son”</td>
<td><em>The Farmer’s Instructions.</em></td>
<td>Civil, <em>The Farmer’s Instructions.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>“…“</td>
<td>Unidentified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>“Plans are made with Enki”</td>
<td><em>The Ballad of Early Rulers.</em></td>
<td>Alster, “The Sumerian Poem of Early Rulers.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 The Temple Hymns

*The Temple Hymns* is a collection of 42 hymns to various Sumerian temples known primarily from Old Babylonian manuscripts. The passage quoted here, attributing the collection to Enheduana, is appended to the final hymn, which is addressed to Nidaba's temple in Eresh. A new edition of *The Temple Hymns* is being prepared by Monica Phillips.

**Translation**

543 The weaver of tablets was Enheduana.

544 My king! Something has been born which had not been born before.

**Composite text**

543 lu₄ dub zu₂ kešē₂-da en-ḫē₂-du₇-an-na

544 lugal-ĝu₄ niĝ₄ u₅-du₅ na-me lu₄ nam-mu-un-u₇-du₅

**Text edition:** Sjöberg and Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns*, 49.

**Notes**

L. 543–44: In a note entitled “En-ḫedu-ana Not the Composer of *The Temple Hymns*,” Jeremy Black argued that the authorial attribution in this passage concerned not *The Temple Hymns* as a whole but only the last hymn, no. 42. However, there are several problems with this argument. Each hymn in *The Temple Hymns* ends with a line count for that hymn. Four manuscripts preserve the end of hymn no. 42: A, B, O, and Q. In two manuscripts, A and Q, the attribution to Enheduana is placed after the hymn and before the line count, meaning that it is presented not as a final rubric appended to the entire collection but a part of the hymn itself. According to
Black, this shows that the authorial attribution pertains only to that hymn, and he goes on to state that manuscript B, where the authorial attribution is placed after the line count of the last hymn, represents merely a “divergent” variant (p. 3), and therefore cannot support the claim that Enheduana was the author of *The Temple Hymns*.

However, according to Black, manuscript O agrees with A and Q, but it is far from clear that this should be the case, since the line count is not preserved in this fragmentary manuscript. Further, labelling B as “divergent” is misleading, since all four manuscripts differ with respect to the final lines: A gives the line count as 15, B as 13, and Q as 14. All four manuscripts are equally “divergent.”

Further, while Q does place the authorial note before the line count, it also marks it with a ruling above and below, which the other manuscripts do not do. Black argues that the passage cannot be a subscript to the entire text because “[s]uch generic comments are usually clearly distinguished by rulings from the body of the literary composition” (3)—but such rulings are indeed found in one of the manuscripts he refers to in support of his argument.

But more importantly, even if one accepts Black’s textual analysis, it would not make much of a difference. If he is right, the passage quoted here should be understood not as a metatextual rubric describing *The Temple Hymns* from without but a part of *The Temple Hymns* itself: the last lines of its last hymn. Could it not still refer to the entire text? After all, Kabti-ili-Marduk refers to himself as the author of *Erra* in the final passage of the fifth tablet of the epic (no. 1.2), not at the end of every tablet, but his claim to authorship obviously refers to the epic as a whole. Likewise, the final invocation of Enheduana at the end of a long string of hymns could easily be taken to refer to all the hymns that went before, even if it is contained in one of these hymns, rather than being appended to it as a separate statement.

Finally, Black’s argument would mean that, when Enheduana is called a “weaver of tablet(s),” the word “tablet” (Sumerian dub) refers to only one
hymn, not the entire text. This usage of the word dub as a reference to a subsection of a tablet, rather than a whole tablet, would require supporting parallels to be persuasive.
3.2 A hymn by Ahassu-Sherua

A tablet from Assur dated to 733 BCE bears a short hymn to an unnamed goddess—possibly Sherua, the goddess of the dawn—and a longer colophon attributing that hymn to Ahassu-Sherua. It is the earliest known instance of literary authorship being dated to a specific year. Also noteworthy is the parallel between this authorial claim and that found in Erra (no. 1.2).

Translation

Obverse
1 “She is the one who intervened. Eminent in the assembly,
magnificent in the council chamber,
attendant of the Anunnaki-gods: exalted is her power.
Let me praise the heavenly Igigi-gods—let me sing!”

Obverse
5 In the time of Tiglath-pilesar, king of Assyria,
during the night, she let [A]hassu-Sherua
see a vision, and these lines

Reverse
8 [he recited (?)] about it [in the morning (?)].
[Month ..., day ...]4, the eponym of Ashur-da’in[anni],
governor of Mazamua.

Text

Obverse
1 ṣa-bi-ta-at a-bu-tu, e-lat-a-ta ina пухри (уккин)
šur-ba-a-ta ina bit (e₂) mi-il-ki
pa-qi-da-at A-nun-na-ki ša-qa-ta be-lut-sa
$^{d_i-gi}, ša šamē (an-e) lu-na'-id la-az-mur

(large gap)

5  

$^{Ina tar-ši}^1 Tukul-ti-apil (a)-E.s-ar-ra šar (lugal) māt (kur) Aššur$³

$^[^{1}A]-ḫa-as-su^{1}Šer,-u,-a ina šat mu-ši$

7  

$^{[u,-ž]ab-ri-šu,-ma šumī (mu^m^o₆^k) an-nu-ti}$

Reverse

8  

$^{[ina šé-rī]} \, ina muḫ-ḫi id-[bu-ub]$

[  

$^{[4'-kam,-lim-mu Aššur-da'in[anni] (Aššur-kal-in-[an-ni])}$

10  

$^{[lu₁]ša,-kin, māt (kur) Za-mu-a}$


Notes

L. 1: Menzel reads a-šir-tu here, but the traces copied by Ebeling do not allow this. The phrase šābitat abbutu with the meaning “intercessor” finds a parallel in Reynolds, *Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 18), no. 156, l. 6’.

Likewise, in Ebeling’s copy there is no space for the ša, that Menzel reads before ukkin, nor does the text require one.

L. 2: I read e₂ where Menzel has ša₂. The copy could arguably support either sign, but the reading bit milki is supported by a parallel in *Enuma Elish* VII 3.

L. 8: Admittedly, I take ina mulḫḫi to have a very broad meaning in my translation—“about it”—which, apart from anything else, would call for a third-person pronominal suffix. The alternative would be to reconstruct a noun in the genitive instead of id[bub], but I can find no obvious candidate.
3.3 The Lament of Nabû-shuma-ukin

This Late Babylonian manuscript, found in Babylon by Hormuzd Rassam, carries a unique instance of Akkadian prison literature. In a veritable de profundis, the prince Nabû-shuma-ukin laments his unjust imprisonment and appeals to Marduk for help. In a passage at the end of the text, set off by a double ruling to yield an unusual colophon, Nabû-shuma-ukin describes his reason for composing the poem. The lines of the text are cramped in general, but in the colophon they are downright overstuffed, and the two lines are in fact broken into two sets of two, with the second in each pair indented.

Translation

80a A prayer by a weary captive who was bound by an evildoer. He recites it to Marduk:

80b May he be released through the prayer to Marduk, so that the people and the land may witness his greatness!

81a The work of the weary, exhausted Nabû-shuma-ukin, son of Nebuchadnezzar.

81b ⬠ let them witness every one of these afflictions!

Text

80a ut-nin-nu an-ḫu ka-su-u₂ ša₂, bēl (en) lemutti (ḫul-ti) ik-su-šu₂
     u₂-ša₂-an-nu-u₂ a-na Marduk (₄'amar-utu) ina un-nin-nu
     ša₂ Marduk (₄'amar-utu)

80b li-ip-pa-ṭir-ma nišši (un₃-em₂) u mātu (kur) li-mu-ru tar-ba-ti-šu₂

81a i-piš-ti an-ḫu šu-nu-ḫu Nabû-šuma-ukin (₄'pa-mu-gi) mār (a)
      Nabû-kudurrī-uṣ[ur] (₄'pa-nig₂-du-ur[u₃]) [     ]

81b ⬠li-ta₁-am-ma-ru kal maršāti (gig₄-em₂) an-na-a-ti

Notes

L. 81: The phrasing of the authorial claim echoes that found in Gilgamesh (no. 1.6):

Gilgamesh is also said to have been “exhausted” (aniḫ, I 9) when his story was written, and there too the reader is invited to behold “all the afflictions” of the main character (kalu maršāti, I 28). As noted by Finkel, 325, the lament also alludes to Gilgamesh in the main body of the text: line 18 employs the phrase mimmû šēri ina namārī, “at the very first light of dawn,” which is a key line in the second half of Gilgamesh.
3.4 Zu-buru-dabbeba

Zu-buru-dabbeba is an incantation series aimed at preventing the ravages of field pests. Its length cannot be reconstructed at present, but this rubric must be from its last tablet. It gives the name and titles of the series’s author, and is followed by further admonitions to the incantation priest and a Geheimwissen formula.

Translation

iii 16’ Zu-buru-dabbeba, up to its conclusion.
Reliable rituals and readings, accurately written] according [to the tablet of] Papsukkal-sha-qbû-ul-inni, scriber of Babylon, chamberlain of Nabû [and Nanaya (?)],

iii 20’ anointed priest of the Esagil and Ezida.

Text

iii 16’ zu₄-buru₂-dab-be₂-da zag-til-[a-bi-še₃]
kikiṭṭê (kid₃-kid₅-da-e) tāmarāṭi (igi-du₄-a₅mei) lat-ku-ti₁ ša₂ p[ī] (k[a])
[tuppi (dub)]
Papsukkal-ša-iqbû-ul-inni (a₅-sukkal-du₅-nu-bal-bal) ṭu[pšar] (d[ub-sar])
šu-an-na₄ zabardab (zarab-dab-ba) ṣa₄-bi-um [u ʾNa-na-a’]

iii 20’ pašiš (gudu₄) E₄-sag-il, u E₄-zi-da ki₁⁻l₁-[niš šat-ru]


Notes

L. iii 18’: As noted by George and Taniguchi, 112, the use of AŠ rather than DIŠ as the determinative for a masculine personal name is a deliberately archaizing feature that relies on an equation between AŠ and amēlu in the lexical lists.
3.5 *Shumma Alu* tablet 26

*Shumma Alu* is the main Babylonian collection of terrestrial omens, especially omens pertaining to the behavior of animals—including humans—in or around a city. Tablet 26 deals with snakes, and in a Middle Assyrian manuscript from Assur, a rubric before the colophon attributes the contents of that tablet (though not, it seems, of the entire series) to the joint authorship of Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula.

**Translation**

Rev. 44  [ ] by Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-(Gula), the scholars.

Rev. 45  [ ] a se]cret of Shulgi, a mystery of the scholar.

**Text**

Rev. 44  [ ] ša, ]  𝑝̅1̅‐i Amēl‐Papsukkal (iłu, 4Pap‐sukkal) u ṭa‐qi‐ša,

ummnû (um‐me‐i a)

Rev. 45  [ ] ni‐ṣir‐ti 1Šul‐gi pirišti (ad‐ḥal) ummâni (um‐me‐a)


**Notes**

The two fragments are numbered incorrectly in Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur*. “KAR 384” is used for the obverse of VAT 10116 as well as both sides of VAT 10145, while “KAR 385” is used for the reverse of VAT 10116 and the reverse of another tablet, VAT 10523.

Rev. 44: Taqisha-Gula’s name is also abbreviated “Taqisha” in “a piece of esoteric Babylonian leaning” (no. 5.6, l. 7). Further, Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula are also mentioned together in the fragmentary colophon K 8177 (no. 3.16, l. 3’).
3.6 Incantations for consecrating urigallu’s

This and the following excerpt have been included because they deal with Ur-Nanna, who is known from the Catalogue (no. 2.1, section 5, l. 17’) as the author of The Series of the Poplar (Jiménez, 212–13). Both are colophons detailing the chain of transmission that led to the present tablet. In both, Ur-Nanna appears as the first link in the chain and the second link is another literary figure: in this excerpt it is Gimil-Gula, attested in the Catalogue as the author of an unidentified hymn to Marduk (section 5, l. 10’–11’). It is not clear whether Ur-Nanna should be understood as the author of these two texts or merely as their first copyist, either way they are relevant because they shed light on a figure otherwise known as an author.

The passage quoted here is the colophon of a Neo-Babylonian tablet from Sippar, containing twenty-one bilingual incantations used to prepare the instrument known as the urigallu (a standard upon which the divine image was placed) for ritual use.

Translation

Rev. 19’ Twenty-one incantations for the urigallu’s. (Sumerian.) Twenty-one incantations for the urigallu’s. (Akkadian.)

Rev. 20’ According to a one-column tablet, the copy of a fired, red, one-column tablet of Gimil-Gula, the incantation priest, the copy of (a tablet by) Ur-Nanna, the scholar of Babylon:

Bel-le’i-kullati,

Rev. 22’ son of Ahu-bani, junior apprentice of an incantation priest, copied and checked it.

Text

Rev. 19’ 21 mu-mu-a 8uri₆₂-gal-e-ne 2[1 š]i-pa-a-at uri₆₂-gal-[li]
The translations by Jiménez and Stadhouders suggest that the chain of transmission is tripartite: a tablet by Ur-Nanna (the original?) was copied by Gimil-Gula, which was then copied the present scribe Bel-le’i-kullati. Both authors accordingly refer to Ur-Nanna’s tablet as the “Vorlage’s Vorlage” (Jiménez, 213; Stadhouders, 169). But as I read the text, the chain actually has four parts: the present tablet was written “according” to a tablet copied by an unnamed scribe (the first \( ^{\text{im}} \text{gid}_2 \text{-} \text{da} \)), which was the copy of a tablet by Gimil-Gula (the second \( ^{\text{im}} \text{gid}_2 \text{-} \text{da} \)), which was in turn the copy of a tablet by Ur-Nanna, making the latter the Vorlage’s Vorlage’s Vorlage.

**Notes**

Rev. 20’–22’: The translations by Jiménez and Stadhouders suggest that the chain of transmission is tripartite: a tablet by Ur-Nanna (the original?) was copied by Gimil-Gula, which was then copied the present scribe Bel-le’i-kullati. Both authors accordingly refer to Ur-Nanna’s tablet as the “Vorlage’s Vorlage” (Jiménez, 213; Stadhouders, 169). But as I read the text, the chain actually has four parts: the present tablet was written “according” to a tablet copied by an unnamed scribe (the first \( ^{\text{im}} \text{gid}_2 \text{-} \text{da} \)), which was the copy of a tablet by Gimil-Gula (the second \( ^{\text{im}} \text{gid}_2 \text{-} \text{da} \)), which was in turn the copy of a tablet by Ur-Nanna, making the latter the Vorlage’s Vorlage’s Vorlage.

3.7 Recipes against the “seizure-of-the-mountain” disease

For the significance of this tablet, see the previous entry. The passage quoted here is a colophon to a brief Neo-Babylonian collection of recipes designed to cure the “seizure-of-the-mountain” disease (ṣibit šadī).

Translation

Bottom edge
1 Copy of the writing of Ur-Nintinugga.
2 The original was a one-column tablet of Ur-Nanna.

Text

Bottom edge
1 gabarû (gaba-ri) ša-ṭa-ru, Ur-₄Nin-tin-ug₃-ga
2 labûru (libir) giṭṭī (im gid₃-da) Ur-₄Nanna


Notes
L. 1: As noted under the previous entry, it is significant that both “chain colophons” (Stadhouders, 169, refers to the phenomenon as “a mise en abyme of colophons”) connect Ur-Nanna to another literary figure. Gimil-Gula is elsewhere depicted as an author, but Ur-Nintinugga is a more ambiguous figure. He appears in Ludlul Bel Nemeqi (III 39–47) in the main character’s dream as an incantation priest sent by Marduk to announce the sufferer’s impending salvation. As noted on p. 105–106, this passage is actually similar to other cuneiform accounts of authorship, but by no means enough to justify
seeing Ur-Nintinugga as an author, pseudepigraphic or otherwise. Ur-Nintinugga is also included in the bilingual Name Book (no. 5,3, l. ii 9). Finally, there were a number of real individuals named Ur-Nintinugga, but there is nothing to suggest that they shared anything but a name with the character from Ludlul Bel Nemeqi (see the discussion in Oshima, Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers, 286).
3.8 Drugs for undoing witchcraft

This and the following two passages deal with Lu-Nanna. As noted above, it is difficult to establish whether the mention of a given scholar in rubrics and colophon is to be taken as an authorial claim in the strict sense of the word. But Lu-Nanna is also known as the author of *Etana* from the *Catalogue* (no. 2.1, section 5, l. 14'), so either way, the mentions of Lu-Nanna were meant to bolster the authority of the texts by associating them with a famous author, making them relevant for the present study.

The rubric comes from a collection of prescriptions aimed at undoing the effects of witchcraft, which may have been part of the series *Ushburruda* (Abusch and Schwemer, 204). It consists of a list of magical recipes, and this passage concludes one such recipe: a list of 27 plants is followed by a summary, an attribution of the recipe to Lu-Nanna, and a formulaic instruction of what to do with the plants. It is clearly not the entire collection that is attributed to Lu-Nanna, but this one entry. The rubric is preserved in two manuscripts, both from Nineveh.

**Translation**

86' Twenty-seven drugs for undoing witchcraft. A copy of Lu-Nanna.
87' (The patient) will drink (them) either in beer or in wine, and recover.

**Composite text**

86' 27 šammû (u₃) ušburrudê (uš₃-bur₂-ru-da) gabarê (gaba-ri) ^1^Lu₄-Nanna
87' lu ina šikari (kaš₃) lu ina karāni (geštin) išatti-ma (nag-₃-ma) iballuṭ (ti)

3.9 Recipes for poultices against epilepsy

The excerpt is a one-line rubric from a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Nineveh, which contains various recipes for “poultices” (mēlu’s) that were meant to cure the “fallen from the heavens” disease, which is generally identified as epilepsy (Stol, Epilepsy in Babylonia, 7–9). Lu-Nanna is credited as the source of one such recipe.

Translation

Rev. 11’ [ ] epilepsy. A secret of Lu-Nanna, sage of Ur.

Text

Rev. 11’ [ ] x DU miqit šamē (an-ta-šub-ba) ni-šir-ti Lu₄ Nanna

apkal (abgal) Uri (uri₄)


Notes

There is a ruling just before this line that is not included in Köcher's hand copy (or BabMed’s edition), which separates the rubric from the previous section, whose contents it summarizes.
3.10 Six astral rituals

The quoted passage is from a Late Babylonian tablet from either Babylon or Borsippa, containing six incantations that were performed at night, addressed to stars and planets and designed to restore the client’s well-being. The colophon attributes the text to Lu-Nanna and ends with a Geheimwissen formula.

Translation

Rev. 17 Secret of the Apsû, mystery of the scholar. The copy of an original by Lu-Nanna, sage of Ur. A learned man may show it to (another) learned man,

Rev. 18 but a man who is not learned may not see it: it is a taboo of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, the great gods.

Text

Rev. 17 \( \text{nîṣriti (\text{\textit{mmummuru}})} \) A\( \text{pși} \) (abzu) p\( \text{iristi (ad-\text{\textit{\text{\text{hal}}}) ummâni (um-me-a}} \)
\( \text{gabarê (\text{\textit{{\	ext{gaba-ri}}}})} \) lab\( \text{iri (\text{\textit{\text{libir-ra}}}) Lu}_{\text{\textit{4}}} \) Nanna apkal
(\text{\textit{\text{abgal}}}) [\text{\textit{Ur}}]i ([\text{\textit{ur}}]i_{\text{\textit{4}}}) m\( \text{üdâ (zu-a) mùdâ (zu-a)} \) [\text{\textit{i-kal-lim}}]

Rev. 18 \( \text{lâ (nu) mùdû (zu-u) a-a imur (igi) ikkib (nig-gig)} \) \( ^{4} \) \( \text{A-nîm} \) \( ^{4} \) \( \text{E}_{\text{\textit{c}}}-\text{a} \)
\( \text{ilî (dingir}^{m[es]} \) \text{) rabûti (gal}^{\text{meî}} \)

3.11 The “old” Alamdimmû

Alamdimmû is one of the two cuneiform series that deal with signs on the human body, the other being Sagig. While Sagig mainly deals with symptoms of diseases, Alamdimmû is a form of somatomancy, deriving omens of a person’s future from their physiognomy. This manuscript is a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Assur, which states in a rubric that it contains a version of Alamdimmû dating to before Esagil-kin-apli’s authorial intervention.

Translation

iii 6 The old “If a Form,” which Esagil-kin-apli did not untangle.

iii 7 First tablet of Alamdimmû.

Text

iii 6 šumma (diš) ʿalam1-dim₂-mu-u labîru (libir-ra) ša₂ Esagil-kin-apli
          (E₂-sag-gil₂-gin-a) lâ (nu) upaṭṭirušu (du₂ meš-šu₂)

iii 7 dub 1-kam₂ (empty) ʿalam₂-dim₂-mu-u₂


Notes

L. iii 6–7: The series was known by two titles, both of which are used here: its incipit, šumma alamdimmû, meaning “If (the patient’s bodily) form (is as follows...),” and the abbreviated form Alamdimmû, “Form.”
3.12 **UGU tablet 3**

*UGU* is the abbreviated name of a therapeutic series whose full title was *šumma amēlu muḫḫašu umma ukāl*, "If a man: His skull holds heat." This rubric is from a manuscript of its third tablet that was found in Nineveh. It attributes the contents of that tablet to the antediluvian sages and Enlil-muballit, and ends with a *Geheimwissen* formula.

**Translation**

iv 21  
Salves and bandages—tried, checked, and presented for use—
by the old sages from before the Flood,
which, in the second year of Enlil-bani, king of Isin, in Shuruppak,
Enlil-muballit, the sage of Nippur, left (for posterity). A man who is not learned may show it to a learned man,

iv 25  
but a learned man shall not show it to a man who is not learned: it is a taboo of Marduk.

**Text**

iv 21  

\[na\]-ša₂-la-tu₃, tak-si-ra-nu lat-ku-tum ba-ru-ti ša₂, ana [qā]tī ([š]u
šu-šu₂-u₄,
ša₂ pī (ka) apkallē (abgalme₄-e) la-bi-ru-ti ša₂, la-am abūbi (a-ma₄-uru₅)
ša i-na Šuruppak (LAM₄KUR-RU⁵) mu₂-kam₄ En-lī₄-l₃-ba₄-ni šar (lugal)
\[n]₃-I₃-ši-in₄\]²

¹En₃-lī₄₃-mu₃-ba₄₃-li₃₃-ḥ apkal (abgal) Nippuri (nibru⁴) [ez]-bu la mu-du-u mu-da-a li₃₃-kal₃₃-lim

iv 25  
mu-du-u la mu-da-a la [i₃₃-kal₃₃]-lam ıkki₃₃ (nig₃₃₃-gig) Marduk (₃₄₅-amar-utu)

3.13 The Hemerology of Nazimaruttash

While not directly related to authorship, this passage is an important source for cuneiform notions of textuality and literary production. It is a rubric from a bilingual hemerological text, meaning a list of favorable and unfavorable days. The rubric is found on Neo-Assyrian tablets from Assur, Kalhu, and Nineveh, and on a Late Babylonian tablet from Uruk. It states that this particular hemerology was compiled from seven different tablets, each from a different city, during the reign of the Kassite king Nazimaruttash (1307–1282 BCE).

Translation

*Obverse*

iv 25 Favorable days, according to seven tablets:
copies from Sippar, Nippur,
Babylon, Larsa,
Ur, Uruk, and Eridu.
The scholars excerpted and
iv 30 chose (the passages of the text), and gave (it)
to Nazimaruttash,
king of the world.
iv 33 It is good for checking losses,

*Reverse*

i 1 sowing furrows,
gathering heaps
i 3 and whatever one wishes.
Composite text

**Obverse**

iv 25  
ūmū (u₄ᵐᵉš) ṭāḇūtu (du₄⁻⁵ᵍᵃᵐᵉš) pī (ka) 7 ṝ[up-pa-a-n]ī

gabarē (gaba-ri) Sippar (zimbiƙi) Nippuri (nibruƙi)

Bābili (ka₃-dingir-raƙi) Larsa (UD-UNUGƙi)

Uri (uriƙi) Uruk (unugƙi) u Eri-duƙi

um-ma-a-nī u₄⁻⁵ᵍᵃ-na-as-si-[₄][₄]su-[₄][₄]-ma

iv 30  
u₄⁻⁵ᵍᵃ-na-as-si-qu-ma

anaᵘ⁻¹-na-zu-muru˒-¹-tašˡ

šarri (lugal) kiššati (šu₄) iddinū (sum-nu)

iv 33  
ana şu-bu bu-tu˒⁻⁵ᵍᵃ-ke-e

**Reverse**

i 1  
za-re-e šer˒⁻⁴-re-e

ša-ba-aš, ka-re-e

i 3  
u₄⁻⁵ᵍᵃ⁻¹-mim-ma še-bu-tu˒, ṭāb (du₄⁻⁵ᵍᵃ)

**Text edition:** Livingstone, Hemerologies, 179.

**Notes**

Obv. iv 25: A crux in the history of the text has been the restoration of the final word in this line: was the hemerology compiled according to seven tablets (ṭ[up-pa-a-n]ī), seven scholars (u[m-ma-a-n]ī), or seven sages (a[p-kal-l]ī)? The question was settled by Heeßel’s discovery of a parallel text, VAT 11609, in which the word is clearly “tablets,” t[u-p-a-a-n]ī (for this text, as well as references to previous discussions and their wider implications, see Heeßel, “Sieben Tafeln.”)

Obv. iv 33–rev. i 2: These lines are rather mysterious, as it is by no means clear that the list of favorable and unfavorable days should pertain only to the activities listed here. “Sowing furrows” and “gathering heaps” seem to be agricultural
activities, but the hemerology itself is mainly concerned with establishing which days are propitious for the performance of the apotropaic ritual *Bit Rimki*—hardly an agricultural matter at all. Livingstone takes “sowing furrows” to be a euphemistic expression, translating it as “begetting children” (which, I note in passing, is tantamount to translating one euphemism with one another. That seems to me unnecessarily prudish: surely, Livingstone means “having sex”). But this hardly clarifies the matter, and the question remains: why these activities and not others? In my analysis on p. 120–21, I follow an admittedly tentative suggestion by Geller, “Babylonian Hippocrates,” 46, who takes the list of activities to be a series of puns relating to the editorial composition of the text itself: “checking losses” would refer to the collation of lacunae, “sowing furrows” to the interlacing of lines, and “gathering heaps” to the assembling of a series, with the phrase šabāš karē echoing the word for “series,” iškāru.
3.14 A *shu’ila* prayer to Ninlil

This passage is from a miniature fragment from Nineveh. Little of it is preserved except the colophon cited here, which states that the tablet contained a *shu’ila* (that is, a liturgical prayer accompanied by the raising of one’s hands), and, intriguingly, that it belonged to the house (or family) of Aba-Enlil-dari. This may not be an instance of authorship as such, but the text does shed light on Aba-Enlil-dari, who is equated with Ahiqar in the *Uruk List* (no. 5.1, l. 19) and juxtaposed with other authors in the bilingual *Name Book* (no. 5.3, l. iii 42).

Translation

Rev. 5’    [   ] *shu’ila* prayer to Ninlil [   ]

Rev. 6’    [   ] Nip]pur, the house of Aba-Enlil-dari [   ]

Text

Rev. 5’    [   ] *n]*iš qa-a-ti ša *Nin-lil* [   ]

Rev. 6’    [   ] Nip]pur ([nib]ru)* bit (es) Aba-Enlil-dar[a (‘A-ba-50-da-r[a)]...

3.15 Uruana

*Uruana* is a bilingual lexical list compiling the various names of plants used for medical purposes—or, as the text quaintly puts it, “plants and matching plants.” Three colophons of *Uruana* on Nineveh manuscripts attribute an edition of the series to king Ashurbanipal. According to Barbara Böck, who is preparing an edition of *Uruana*, the series existed in various versions, of which the longest, consisting of twelve sections, was supposedly authored by Ashurbanipal. The colophon is included here not because Ashurbanipal is likely to have been the actual author or even co-editor of *Uruana*, but because the terminology of the text closely overlaps with other authorial claims, most notably that of “Esaqil-kin-apli’s Manifesto” (no. 2.2). The colophon consists of two parts, of which I only quote the first, as the second is highly fragmentary and contains a number of textual difficulties that await Böck’s edition.

Translation

1 First section of “Uruana = Mashtakal,” (containing)
plant (names) that had been explained in bilingual and monolingual lexical lists
but which since days of old had not been bound in a new edition.
(The list of) plant (names and their) matching plant (names), which had grown (in number)
but had no established order (?),
6 was organized by Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria.

Composite text

1

*nis₃-hu ma₃ḥ₃u (1-u₃)₅uru-an-na = ᵃmal-ta-kal
šamm₃u (šam₃₃₁) ša ina š[a]-a-ti u lišānāti (eme) paš₃u (bur₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₃₀
šammū (šam₃) gaba-re-e šammē (šam₃) ina libbi (ša₂-bi) šam-ḫu-ma
la i-šu-u, sa-di-ru

Aššur-bani-apli (Aš-ṣur-du₂-a) ša[r (2ɔ) kiššati (šu₂) šar (2ɔ)] māt (kur)
Aššur (an-šar₂) is-niq


Notes
L. 1: The colophon is found on different tablets, which contain different sections of
Uruana. Here I quote the colophon of the first section, but much the same
colophon is also found on the tenth and twelfth section.
L. 2: Following Frahm, Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries, 48–49, I take ṣātu
and lišānu to refer to bilingual and monolingual lexical lists respectively, but
note that the words are obscure.
L. 3: On the meaning of zarā šabtū, see p. 118–19 above.
L. 4: It is worth noting that the text uses a botanical metaphor to describe the
development of a botanical text: šamāḫu literally means “to flourish” and is
often used of plants, though here it denotes the uncontrolled growth of the
series through a chaotic accretion of names.
L. 5: The phrase literally means that the text “had no sections (sadīru),” but as noted by
Steinert, “Catalogues, Texts and Specialists,” 167, here it seems “to refer
primarily to the existence or non-existence of a consistent organisation of the
textual material in thematic sections,” and thus to textual order in general.
3.16 A fragmentary colophon

Only the colophon of this Neo-Assyrian tablet is preserved, and even that is rubbed to the point of illegibility. The third line mentions Taqisha-Gula and Amel-Papsukkal, both of whom are known as authors from other sources, but that is the only clear line of the text. The surface of the fragment is badly damaged, and Lambert could make little sense of it in his edition in 1962. Despite a stubborn collation of the text, I have been unable to improve much on Lambert’s reading.

Translation

1’ (traces)

__________________________________________
[ ] ... tablet ... which was opened (?) they crushed (?) ... [ ]
[ ] Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula, scholars of Nippur [ ]
[ ] ... these ... for these nights (?) ... [ ]
5’ [ ] ... they approached (?) their land ... [ ]
[ ] ... he piled up (?) for Enlil, the king of humanity ... [ ]

[A learned man may show it to (another) learned man, but] a man who is not learned may not see it: it is a mystery of the great gods.

__________________________________________

8’ [ ] 73 [are its li]nes.

Text

1’ (traces)

__________________________________________
[ ] x tup-pi x x ša₂ pa-tu’-u₂ ili-šu-lu ba x [ ]
[ ]¹Amel[Pap-suk]kal u₂ Ta-qi-ša₂ Gü-la ummâni (um-me-a)

Nippurî (dur-an-ki) u₂-x-
b)i-xımēt an-nu-tim ana mušši (gešımēt) an-nu-tim ul-te-te-

\[5^{'\prime}\]

\[\begin{align*}
&x \ bu \ x \ u_2 \ x \ x \ kur-šu,-nu \ itḫu' (te'-u) \ lu_2 \ x \ x \ u_2 \\
&x \ x \ x \ 3\text{en-lil,it-bu-uk šar} (\text{lugal}) \ amēlūti (lu₂-tim) \ x \\
&\text{[mu-du-u, mu-da-a li-kal-lim l}a \ mu-du-u, la im-mar pirišti (ad-ḫal)} \\
&\text{ili (dingiršimēt) rabū[ti (\text{galšimēt})]}
\end{align*}\]

\[8^{'}\]

\[\begin{align*}
&u\text{š}13\text{-ta-am₃ m[u-šid-bi-im]}
\end{align*}\]

**Text edition:** K 8177; Lambert, “Catalogue of Texts and Authors,” 63 and 75.

**Notes**

L. 3’: Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula are also mentioned together in the colophon to *Shumma Alu* tablet 26 (no. 3-5, l. rev. 44).
4.1 The Babylonian Theodicy

The Babylonian Theodicy is a discussion between two friends, one of whom viciously attacks the social order of his time, claiming that there is no justice to be found in the world, while his friend urges him to accept that the ways of the gods are inscrutable and that the wicked will eventually be punished and the righteous rewarded. The text alternates between their speeches, each of which is eleven lines long. In every stanza, all eleven lines begin with the same cuneiform sign, though the polyvalence of the writing system means that each sign can be read differently in each line: in stanza 13, for example, the sign BI can be read bi (l. 134), pi (l. 135), or be (l. 136). Together, the repeated signs form a sentence spelling out the name, occupation, and moral convictions of the author of this remarkable poem.

Translation

I, Saggil-kin-ubbib, the incantation priest, venerate god and king.

Composite text

a-na-ku Sa-ag-gi-il-ki-[i-na-am-u]b-bi-[i]b ma-ašša-ŠU Ša-ri-bu ša i-li u, šar-ri

4.2 Two prayers by Nabû-ushebshi

This tablet from Khorsabad, written in a Neo-Babylonian script, carries two prayers: one to Marduk on the obverse and one to Nabû on the reverse. In both prayers there is a double acrostic, so that the first and the last signs of the lines each spell out a phrase, stating the name and occupation of the author. As with the Theodicy (no. 4.1), the polyvalence of cuneiform means that the signs can carry different meanings in their vertical and horizontal reading: the last sign of obv. 7 is to be read ū in the acrostic and šam in prayer, while the last sign of rev. 9 is to be read liḫ in the acrostic and tu, in the prayer. A rubric after each prayer explicitly states that they are to be read as double acrostics. The author, Nabû-ushebshi, also refers to himself in the text of the prayers themselves, asking for a long life for himself and his descendants. Here, only the text of the acrostics and the two rubrics is included.

Translation

First initial acrostic

By Nabû-ushebshi, the incantation priest.

First terminal acrostic

The servant who makes your lordship apparent.

First rubric

Obv. 12 Eleven lines. Above, they have not been set into the arrangement (?).

The beginning of the lines

Obv. 13 and the end of the lines are to be read twice.

Second initial acrostic

By Nabû-ushebshi, the incantation priest.

Second terminal acrostic

The worshipful servant who reveres you.
Second rubric and colophon

Rev. 11  [Ten lines. Above,] they have not been set [into the arrangement (?)].

The beginning of the lines and the end
of the lines are to be read twice.

Rev. 13  [ ] Nabû-shum-iddina, son of a doorman.

Text

Obverse

1  ša₂  
   na  
   bu  
   u₂  

5  u₂  
   [še]  
   e[b]  
   ši  
   a  

10  ši  
   pi  

Reverse

1  ša₂  
   na  
   bu  
   u₂  

11  šumāti (mu₄m₃) e-liš za-ra-a lā (nu) šaknā (gar) re-eš mi-ḫi-il-ti

13  u₂ qa₂-it mi-ḫi-il-ti a-na šinīšu (II-šu₂) iš-ša₂-as-su-u₂
5 $u_{5}$ (...)$ne_{5}$
$š_{eb}$ (...)$nu$
$š_{i}$ (...)$u_{2}$
[a] (...)$pa$
[ši] (...)$liḥ$
[pu / pî] (...)$ka$

\[ 10 \ šumāti (mu^{mēš}) ē-liš za-r]a-a lā (nu) šaknā (gar) re-eš mi-ḥi-il-ti u_{5} \]
\[ qî-it mi-ḥi-il-tu_{2} \]
\[ a-na šinīšu (II-šu₄) iš-ša₃] as-su-u_{5} \]

13

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Nabû-šum-iddina (I₄ag¹-mu-sî₂-na) mār (a)} \\
\text{ba-} \text{ka-ni} \text{kābī (ka₂)} \\
\end{array}
\]

**Text edition:** Khorsabad 1932, 26; Lambert, “Literary Style”; Sweet, “Pair of Double Acrostics.”

**Notes**

Obv. 11: The phrase eliš zarā lā šaknā is problematic, and its translation is only tentative. As discussed on p. 118–19, other occurrences of zarā indicate that the word means something like “edition (lit., weaving) of a text”—that is, a new arrangement of pre-existing words. In this case, it is unlikely to denote an edition of an older text, as it does in *Sagig, Alamdimmû,* and *Uruana* (no. 2.2, l. 51 and 62, and no. 3.15, l. 3), since the poems were clearly composed by Nabû-ushebshi himself. However, zarā might still refer to a textual arrangement of some kind. The same word is used in the colophon of Ashurbanipal’s acrostic hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu, where it is said that the hymn does have a zarā (no. 4.3, l. 67). So if both poems have acrostics, what is the “textual arrangement” of Ashurbanipal’s hymn that is missing from Nabû-ushebshi’s
prayers? As noted by Sweet, 460, Nabû-ushebshi's poems are unusual among Akkadian acrostics in that the initial signs are not highlighted by the layout of the tablet. In acrostics like Ashurbanipal’s, the first sign of each stanza, which typically consists of two or three lines, are used to spell out the vertical phrase. The second and third lines of the stanzas are therefore indented, leaving the first sign isolated and thus more visually prominent. It would not have been possible to use this standard “acrostic layout” for Nabû-ushebshi’s text, where the acrostic employs every line, not just each second or third line, and even both ends of the lines. So the scribe may have felt called to note that the text was not set in the “arrangement” (zarû) conventionally used for acrostics.
4.3 Ashurbanipal’s hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu

The hymn, preserved on a single Neo-Assyrian tablet, praises the might of Marduk and his spouse Zarpanitu, entreatning the two gods to look favorably upon the supplicant, Ashurbanipal. The lines of the hymn, which are exceptionally long, are arranged into couplets or triplets separated by rulings. The first sign of each stanza spells out an acrostic, giving the name of Ashurbanipal and again entreatning the favor of Marduk. As usual, the signs can have different meanings when read vertically and horizontally. A noteworthy example is the first sign of l. 50, which is du in the acrostic but kub in the hymn, an unusual reading that had to be spelled out with the addition of a phonemic supplement: kub₃₄. Ashurbanipal’s literary authorship is a matter of debate: a number of hymns purport to be written by the king himself, but this is unlikely to be the case (see p. 162 and 216). This hymn has been included because it is an example of the connection between acrostics and authorship.

Translation

Acrostic

"I am Ashurbanipal, the one who calls on you: revive me, Marduk, and I will praise you!"

Colophon

A total of 30 lines, arranged. A hymn to M[arduk ... ]

and to the greatness of Zarpanitu, the great lady, be[loved of Marduk ]

Text

Acrostic

a-na-kU aš-[šur-ba-ni]-ap-li ša, il·su·ka [b]u·u[l·l]i·ṭ[a·n]e·ma

M[a·l]ru³·du·uk da-li-li·ka lu·ud-lul
Colophon

67  \( naphar \ (šu-nigin) \ za-ta-am, \ šumū \ ([mu]-šid-bi-im) \ za-ra-a \ ta-ni-ti \ M[arduk \ (\text{\`a}[\text{mar-utu}]) ... ] \)

68  \( nar-bi \ \text{\`a}\text{ntu-ni-tum be} \ \text{-el-tu}[\text{\`a]} \ \text{\`a}\text{ntu} \ \text{\`a}\text{-um} \ \text{-\`a}\text{ntu} \ M[arduk \ (\text{\`a}\text{mar-utu}) ... ] \)

Text edition: K 7592+K 8717+DT 363+BM 99173; Livingstone, Court Poetry, 6–10.

Notes

L. 67: On zarû in this context, see the notes to obv. 11 in the previous text.
5.1 The Uruk List of Kings and Sages

The Uruk List of Kings and Sages is a brief historical sketch of cuneiform scholarship, told through a list of ancient kings and scholars—a significant number of whom are known from other sources as authors (for a full description and analysis of the text, see chap. 11). The list consists of four parts, which are separated by rulings: a section of antediluvian kings and sages (apkallu’s); a narrative section telling of how the sage Nungal-pirigal angered Anu by bringing Isthar into the temple in Uruk, but then soothed him by inventing the art of singing lamentations; a section of postdiluvian kings and scholars (ummānu’s); and a colophon. There is a double ruling between the second and third section, establishing a symmetry in the text with eight kings in each half. The text contains a number of odd writings (LU for LU, in l. 18, an erroneous MI in l. 29, etc.), as well as highly learned ones (‘idim-il-ŠU, for Kabti-ili-Marduk in l. 13). Its word choice is occasionally archaic, such as balaggu for the lilissu drum (see the note to l. 9) and ahlamû for the Arameans (Beaulieu, “Afterlife of Assyrian Scholarship,” 16).

Previously, the Uruk List was known from only one manuscript (W 20030,7), copied by Anu-belshunu in 165 BCE and uncovered in the archive of the Bit Resh temple in Uruk. Recently, however, Enrique Jiménez discovered a new manuscript, also from Late Babylonian Uruk, which will be appear in a forthcoming article. The new text clarifies some readings in the narrative section and in the first entry of the postdiluvian section (l. 9–12) but does not change the interpretation presented in chap. 11. Intriguingly, the new manuscript was found next to another tablet, an exemplar of The Legend of Enmeduranki (no. 1.9), which was written with a similar ductus and layout. The Uruk List and the Legend both tell the story of how a major genre of cuneiform scholarship (lamentation and divination, respectively) came into being, so it is interesting to find them so closely associated. Further, the new exemplar of The Legend of Enmeduranki states in the colophon that it was copied by “the junior lamentation priest Anu-belshunu” (l. 15–17) on April 19, 229 BCE—64 years before the other manuscript of the Uruk List. The name Anu-belshunu was common in Seleucid
Uruk (Pearce and Doty, “Activities of Anu-belšunu”), so it is perfectly plausible that the two manuscripts were written by different individuals. However, it is also possible that Anu-belshunu was made to copy an excerpt from the *Uruk List* as an apprentice scribe and then returned to it at the end of his career, when he was in his 80’s.

The transliteration and notes below reflect my treatment of the text in “The Role of Authors,” 232–34; modified according to the new manuscript, whose preliminary edition Enrique Jiménez kindly made available to me; and updated with references to the other texts in this appendix.

**Translation**

1. [In the time] of king Ayyalu: the sage was Oannes.
   [In the time] of king Alalgar: the sage was Oannes-dugga.
   [In the time] of king Ameluana: the sage was Enmedugga.
   [In the time] of king Amegalana: the sage was Enmegalama.

5. [In the time] of king Enmeushumgalana: the sage was Enmebulugga.
   [In the time] of king Dumuzi, the shepherd: the sage was An-Enlilda.
   [In the time] of king Enmeduranki: the sage was Utu-Apsû.

[After the Flood (?),] in the reign of king Enmekar: the sage was Nungal-pirigal,

who brought Ishtar down from the heavens and into the Eana.

[He built] a *balag* drum of bronze

[with handles of lapis lazuli, according to the instructions of Ninagal.

He set up the *balag*-drum in the “Land of the Pure Lamentation Priest”

(i.e. Uruk?), the seat of Lukar (?), in Anu’s presence.

[In the time of] king Gilgamesh: the scholar was Sin-leqi-unninni.

[In the time of] king [Nara]m-Sin (?): the scholar was Kabti-ili-Marduk.
[In the time of] king [Ishbi]-Erra: the scholar was Sidu, also known as Enlil-ibni.

[In the time of] king [Abi-e]shuh (?): the scholars were Gimil-Gula and Taqisha-Gula.

[In the time of] king [ ]: the scholar was Esagil-kin-apli.

[In the time of] king Adad-apla-iddina: the scholar was Esagil-kin-ubba.

[In the time of] king Nebuchadnezzar: the scholar was Esagil-kin-ubba.

[In the time of] king Esarhaddon the scholar was Aba-Enlil-dari, whom] the Arameans call Ahiqar.

He is [also known] as Achiacharus (?).

________________________________________________________________


Uruk, month Ayyar, day 10, year 147, king Antiochos IV (16 May 165 BC).

He who fears Anu will not remove it!

Composite text

Obverse

1  
[i-na tar-š] i1A-a-lu šarri (lugal) : Uan (i1uš60) apkallu (abgal)

2  
[i-na tar-š] i1A-la-šarri (lugal) : Uan-dugga (i1uš60-dug3-ga)

            apkallu (abgal)

3  
[i-na tar-ši] 1Am-me-lu-an-na šarri (lugal) : 1En-me-dug3-ga

            apkallu (abgal)

4  
[i-na tar-ši] 1Am-me-gal-an-na šarri (lugal) : 1En-me-galam-ma

            apkallu (abgal)

5  
[i-na tar-ši] 1En-me-šumgal-an-na šarri (lugal) : 1En-me-bulug3-ga

            apkallu (abgal)
[i-na tar-ši] ²\textsuperscript{id}Dumu-zi rē'ū (sipa) šarrī (lugal) : An-Enlīlda

(È\textsuperscript{d}60-en-līl-da) apkallu (abgal)

[i-na tar-ši] ¹\textsuperscript{f}En-me\textsuperscript{1} dur-an-ki šarrī (lugal) : ¹U₂-tu-abzu apkallu (abgal)

[arki (egīr)\textsuperscript{1} abūbi (mar-uru₃)] \textsuperscript{1}ina palē (bala-e) ¹En-me-kar šarrī (lugal) :

¹Nun-gal-pirī-gal apkallu (abgal)

ša, Ištar (\textsuperscript{d}innin) ultu (ta) šāmē (an-e) ana E₂-an-na u₂še-ri-du balagga

(balag) siparra (zarār)

[ x x ša₃] uznašū (geštu\textsuperscript{1}šu₃) uq[n₃] (\textsuperscript{wa}za-gin₃-na) \textsuperscript{1}ina ši-pir\textsuperscript{4}Nin-a₂-gal

[i-puš] \textsuperscript{1}ina qaqqar (ki) La-bar-ku₅ \textsuperscript{ki} šu-bat \textsuperscript{d}Lu-karₓ balagga (balag) \textsuperscript{in} mah-ri Anu (\textsuperscript{60} u₂kin-nu

On edge

um-man-nu

Reverse

[i-na tar-ši] Adad-apla-iddina (\textsuperscript{d}im-fibil₃a₄-mu-sum) šarrī (lugal) :

¹E₂-sag-gil₂,ki-i-ni-ub-ba um-man-nu

[i-na tar-ši] Nabû-kudurri-ùṣur (\textsuperscript{1}ag-nig₃-du-uru₃) šarrī (lugal) :

¹E₂-sag-gil₂,ki-i-ni-ub-ba \textsuperscript{³d}um-man-nu

[i-na tar-ši] Aššur-aḫa-iddina (\textsuperscript{an}šar₂-šēš-mu) šarrī (lugal)
Aba-Enlil-dāri (‘A-ba$^d$-da-ri) um-ma-nu

20 $[ša_z]^{1}aβ-la-ni-mu-u_5$ i-qab-bu-u_5 ‘A-ḫu$^c$-qa-a-ri

21 $[ša_z-ni-i]^{1}Ia_s$ qa-ru šu $u_s$

22 $[ doorstep (im)] Anu-bēlšunu (‘Iš-šu-nu) máru (a) ša, Nidinti-Anu$

23 $[kal]^{1}u ([tu]gal)a Anu (‘Iš-šu) u An-tum Urukû (unu$^d$-$u_s$) qāt (šu)$

24 $[unu]^{1}Ii$ gu$u_s$ u$-\alpha$-kam mu-147-kam ‘an-ti‘-i-ku-su

Below $šarru$ (lugal)

25 $pa-lih_{\bar{s}}, Anu (‘Iš-šu) lá (nu) itabbalšu (tum$^z$-$šu_s$)


Notes

L. 9: This surprising passage, whose restoration is confirmed by the new manuscript, has close parallels in the bilingual list of sages from Bit Meseri (no. 5.4, l. 10‘–12‘), where the sage is called Nun-pirigaldim. The drum mentioned in this line refers to the holy instrument of the lamentation priests, and thus pars pro toto to the art of singing laments in general. The nature of the instrument changed over time, and what is meant here is probably an archaizing reference to the lilissu drum (see Gabbay, “The Balağ Instrument,” 137).

L. 10: The new manuscript shows that the lapis lazuli handles of the drum are referred to as “its ears” (geštu$^l$-$šu_s$), not “its hands,” as previously thought.

L. 11: Despite the clarifications provided by the new manuscript, two problems remain in this line: Labarku and Lukar. The new manuscript confirms my proposed restoration [ba$\nu$]r $ku_{\nu}$ but also makes it impossible to read that sequence as
paraki elli. Instead, we are left with La-bar-ku₃ki, which is probably a learned writing for Uruk. Jiménez notes one possible interpretation, suggested to him by Sam Mirelman: la-bar is Emesal for lagar, which was in turn equated with gala, yielding something like “the Land of the Holy Lamentation Priest.” The new manuscript also shows that the sign after LU, which was previously read LUḪ, is in fact a KAR, so my proposed ₄Pap'-sukkal must be dropped. However, I have no suggestions for how to read “Lukar.”

L. 13: Van Dijk restored this name as “[Ilbi]-Sîn,” but the traces indicate that the last sign ended in a vertical wedge. Instead, I cautiously propose to read it [₃na'-ra]m₄-₃₀. The Old Akkadian king may in fact fit rather well in this context. He is listed just after Gilgamesh, and both were regarded as authors of narû literature—the autobiographical account of a tragic king (see p. 165). The association between Naram-Sîn and Kabti-ili-Marduk likewise makes sense, as both dedicated their poem to Erra: see l. 151 in the Cuthean Legend (no. 1.5) and V 39–46 in Erra (no. 1.2). Finally, several sources attest to an antiquarian fascination with Naram-Sîn in the Late Babylonian period (Foster, Age of Agade, chap. 11).

L. 15: The second scholar in this line must be Taqisha-Gula: his name is well-attested as a family ancestor during this period. However, the spelling of his name is strange: ḫTa-AḪ₄-me-me. According to a lexical list, both AḪ-KASKAL and KASKAL-AḪ are equated with ki-ši, yielding kiš₁₃ and kiš₁₅, respectively (Civil, Green, and Lambert, Ea A = nâqu, 400, l. 112–13; Borger, Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon, 103 and 170). One may thus emend <KASKAL> either before or after the AḪ to give a new but not impossible reading, qiš₁₃/₁₅.

L. 16–18: This sequence of kings and scholars has been much discussed (see e.g. van Dijk, 51; Finkel, “Adad-apla-iddina, Esagil-kin-apli”; Heeßel, “Neues von Esagil-kin-apli,” 163; Beaulieu, “Social and Intellectual Setting,” 13–14 with fn. 32). As for the restoration of the king’s name in l. 16, I would highlight van Dijk’s
remark that the break is very short: there is space for no more than two brief signs.

L. 18: For the emendation of LU to the determinative lu, see Lenzi, “Uruk List of Kings and Sages,” 141, fn. 10.

L. 21: Van Dijk proposed to read the somewhat cryptic sequence 'ni-qa-ru-šu-u, as “Nikarchos,” emending ŠU to su’ and leaving the first three signs of the line unrestored. Lenzi, “Uruk List of Kings and Sages,” 163–65, followed this reading and proposed a plausible rationale for how Nikarchos came to be included in the text, though the proposal is, by Lenzi’s own admission, tentative. Here I would like to propose an alternative (though no less tentative) reading. Van Dijk, 52, had originally dismissed the restoration of the first three signs as [ša-r-ni-i]š (in parallel to l. 14) because “das würde bedeuten, daß Ahiqar auch noch einen griechischen Namen hätte.” But in fact, Ahiqar does have a Greek name, as attested in Strabo’s Geography, 16.2.39, where he is called Ἀχαῖκαρος. He bears a similar name in the Book of Tobit, which variously calls him Achicarus, Achorus, Ἀχαῖκαρος, Ἀχαῖχαρος, אָחָיָהוֹר, and so on. How then to harmonize this name with our text? One possibility is to take NI as ia, though such a reading is all but unattested outside of a lexical list (see Civil, Green, and Lambert, Ea A = nâqu, 214, l. 10.) The list in question is the same as the one discussed for l. 15, so it is significant that three fragments of it stem from Seleucid Uruk. The reading is also employed in the writing of the name Haya as ḫa-ia, which is found in a manuscript of Shurpu from Seleucid Uruk (Borger, “Šurpu,” 33, II 176). Note also that the sign NI was known as ia’u, so the association might not have been so far-fetched after all (Gong, Namen der Keilschriftzeichen, 165). However, even if such a reading is possible, it would still leave the question of how it fits with the other writings of Ahiqar’s name. The initial y- may be the result of an Aramaic origin, and the Hebrew form ‘qwqr is intriguingly close to my postulated Yaqaquru. The difficulties involved are many, and so the proposal must remain tentative. Note, however, that the
previous reading of the name as Nikarchos would by no means preclude the interpretation proposed in chap. 11: a reading of the list as a miniature canon of authors does not run counter to the interpretation developed by Lenzi, since both readings view the list as a response to the social and cultural pressures faced by Urukean scholars at the time.

L. 25: The sign LUGAL is written directly beneath 'an-ti·i-ku-su, presumably because the scribe forgot to write it in the previous line and so added it at the end of the text instead.
5.2 “The Writings of Oannes”

This tablet from Seleucid Uruk was found in the Bit Resh temple next to the Uruk List (no. 5.1), and it also deals with authorship. It seems to concern the writings of Oannes-Adapa, but with the state of the text being what it is, it’s difficult to know for sure.

Translation

Obverse

1 [ ] Oannes wrote and [ ]
   [ ] ... wrote [ ]
   [ ] at the head of the gods he wrote [ ]
   [ ] at the head of a heavenly star he wrote [ ]
5 [ ] lines [ ]
   [ ] ... because of Anu [ ]
   [ ] Lamassu: 1260 lines [ ]
8 [ ] lines ... [ ]
   (break)

Reverse

1' [ ] Bel (?) [ ]
2' [ ] Gula [ ]

Text

Obverse

1 [ ] IDI Uan (u₄₅₆) iš-ṭur-ma x [ ]
   [ ] LU₂ iš-ṭur [ ]
   [ ] ina re-eš ili (dingir₅₆₇) iš-ṭur [ ]
   [ ] ina re-eš kakkab (mul) ša₂-ma-mi iš-ṭur [ ]
5 [ ] mi-ḥi-le-e-ti [ ]
[][(3)meš a-na šu-um a-nim][(3)]

Lamassu (lamma): 1 lim 2 me šūsi (šu) miḫ-le-e-t[i]

8[mi]-iḫ-le-e-i-ti AN NU ⌧ x x 1[

(break)

Reverse

1'[Iden 1[[(3)

2'Gula (dme-me)[[(3)

Text edition: W 2003/84; van Dijk and Mayer, Texte aus dem Reš-Heiligtum, no. 93, plate 40; online edition by the “Geography of Knowledge in Assyria and Babylonia” project: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/cams/gkab/P363354.

Notes

Obv. l. 5: The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (vol. M, 54) and the Akkadisches Handwörterbuch (vol. 2, 651) both take miḫiltu to mean “wedge,” that is, a single stroke of the stylus (“stroke” actually being the original meaning of the word).

That it can also denote a whole line is made clear by, among other instances, the colophon to the acrostic poem of Nabû-ushebshi (no. 4.2, l. obv. 12–13), where it is said that the beginning and the end of each miḫiltu can be read vertically as well as horizontally—and there it clearly means the entire line.

Rev. l. 1’: The online edition restores the name as Anu-belshunu, who is also the scribe of the Uruk List (no. 5.1). But that would require emending the sign šu between the divine determinative and EN, which seems unwarranted.
5.3 The Neo-Assyrian Name Book

Also known as VR 44 or by Cooley's florid title, “Onomastic Reflections on the History of the Land,” the text is an unusual Neo-Assyrian exemplar of a composition known as the Name Book. The manuscript, a two-column tablet from Nineveh, arranges the names of the Name Book in a unique order, and Cooley argues that this order reflects the “grammatological” principles of cuneiform scholars: associations at the level of sound, script, and bilingual equivalences. The names of various figures from cuneiform history—famous kings, ancestors, and scholars—are given in two versions, separated by a vertical ruling. Sometimes, the two versions are simply the original Sumerian, Kassite, or Amorite name and its Akkadian translation, or vice versa. But often, the association is not so much a translation as it is a playful reinterpretation of the meaning hidden in its graphic components. In one case, an Akkadian name is even “translated” into Akkadian. Here, only entries related to authors have been included.

Translation

| ii 9 | Ur-Nintinugga       | Amel-Gula       |
|      | Humeme              | Amel-Gula       |
|      | Ashgandu            | Amel-Papsukkal  |
|      | Munatila            | Shumu-libshi    |
|      | (...)               |                |
| iii 35 | Sidu              | Enlil-ibni      |
|      | (...)               |                |
| iii 42 | Aba-Enlil-dari    | Mannu-kima-Enlil-hatin |
|      | Aba-Enlil-sa       | Enlil-mannu-malak |
| iii 44 | Eshguzi-gin-a     | Esagil-kin-apli |
|      | (...)               |                |
| iii 51 | Ninshuburdu-nubalbal | Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni |
Text

ii 9  
1Ur-dnin-tin-ug-ga  Amēl-Gula (Ilu₂.Gula)

ii 10  
1Hu-me-me  Amēl-Gula (Ilu₂.Gula)
1Aš-gan-d₃du₃  Amēl-Papsukkal (Ilu₂.Pap-sukkal)

ii 12  
1Mu-na-ti-la  Šumu-libši (mu-lib-ši)

(...)

iii 35  
1½ Si-du₃  1½ En-lil-ib-ni

(...)  

iii 42  
1½ A-ba-5₀-da-ri  1½ Man-nu-ki-m₃En-lil-ḥa-tin
1½ A-ba-5₀-sa₃  1½ En-lil-m₃nu-m₃a-la-ak

iii 44  
1½ En₂-guzu₂-zu₂-gi₂-in₂-a  1½ Es₂-sag₂-gi₂-in₂-ap₂-li

(...)  

iii 51  
1½ Nin-šubur-du₅nu₂-bal-bal  1½ Papsukkal₂š₂-iq₂-bu₂-ul₂-i-ni

Text edition: K 4426+Rm 617; Rawlinson et al., Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia, vol. 5, no. 44 (VR 44); Cooley, “A Scribalized Past” (forthcoming).

Notes

L. ii 9–12: The passage hints at a wider network of links between cuneiform authors, whose implications I unfortunately did not have time to trace. Humeme and Ashgandu are also listed next to one another in the Catalogue (no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 9’ and 11’), as the fathers of the authors Enlil-ban-kudurri and Gimil-Gula, respectively. Amel-Papsukkal, with whom Ashgandu is equated here, appears as Taqisha-Gula’s co-author in the colophon to Shumma Alu tablet 26 (no. 3.5), and in the colophon of K 8177 (no. 3.16). Meanwhile, in the Uruk List (no. 5.1, l. 15), Taqisha-Gula is said to have shared his term as chief scholar with Gimil-Gula—who, according to the Catalogue, was Ashgandu’s son. Shumu-libši also appears as the father of an author in the Catalogue, but the name of
that author is lost (section 7, l. 4). Further, Humeme and Ur-Nintinugga are both equated with the same Akkadian name, Amel-Gula. Ur-Nintinugga, who is a character from the poem *Ludlul Bēl Nemeqi*, is in turn associated with the author Ur-Nanna in the rubric of a collection of recipes (no. 3.7, see notes to l. 1 for the identity of Ur-Nintinugga). The full significance of this network, which involves at least eight figures of cuneiform literature, certainly merits further study.

L. iii 42: Aba-Enlil-dari/Mannu-kima-Enlil-hatin is known as the ancestor of a scribal family, especially in the abbreviated form Hatin. He also appears as an author, albeit indirectly, in the colophon of a *shu’ila* from Nippur (no. 3.14). Strikingly, the *Uruk List* (no. 5.1, l. 19–20) identifies Aba-Enlil-dari as Ahiqar, the famous Aramaic author.

L. ii 43: Aba-ninnu-sa/Enlil-mannu-malak is an otherwise unknown figure who has been included here because his name is sandwiched between that of two authors.
5.4 A bilingual incantation from Bit Meseri

This passage is from tablet III of the incantation series Bit Meseri, an apotropaic ritual known from several manuscripts from Nineveh and one manuscript from Late Babylonian Uruk. It was first edited by Reiner, who took it to be a self-standing myth about the antediluvian sages (apkallu’s), and later reedited by Borger, who identified it as part of Bit Meseri. Since Borger died before he could complete his edition of Bit Meseri, the transliteration below mainly relies on Reiner’s study.

The incantation is bilingual, with each of its very long lines given in both Sumerian and Akkadian, and it was accompanied by a ritual performed over a set of figurines that represented the sages. The text first lists the seven sages who rose from the seas in primordial times, before moving on to four human sages, in the passage quoted here. Of these, Nungal-pirigal and Lu-Nanna are known as authors from other sources (see, respectively, the Uruk List, no. 5.1, l. 8–11; and the Catalogue, no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 14’).

Translation

10’–12’ Nun-pirigaldim, the sage of Enmekar, who brought Ishtar down from the heavens and into the Eana;
14’–17’ Pirigal-nungal, born in Kish, who angered Adad in the heavens, so that for three years there was no rain or plants in the land;
18’–23’ Pirigal-Apsû, born in Eridu, who hung his seal on the Goat Fish and angered Ea in the Apsû, so a washer-man killed him with his own seal;
24’–27’ and fourth, Lu-Nanna, who was two-thirds of a sage and drove a dragon out of E-Ninkarmuna, Shulgi’s temple to Ishtar:
28’–31’ [four sages] of human descent, whose broad intellect lord Ea brought to perfection.
Composite text

10' Nun-pirig-gal-dim, abgal ṭEn-me-kar, ṭInnin ša, E, an-na-ke, 
an-ta-e, de, [min] ap-kal min ša, ṭIš-tar iš-tu šamē (an-e) ana qि, rib A-a-ak-ki 
u, še-ri-da
Pirig-gal-nun-gal ša, Kiššu-ta u, du, ud-da ṭIškur an-ta

15' šur, ḫuš-a mu-3-kam-ma im-šeg, u, šim kur-ta nu-un-ḫal, la 
min ša, iņa qि, rib Kiš ṭi ib-ba-nu-u, Adad (ṭIškur) ina šamē (an-e) 
u, ša, zî-zu-ma
3 šanāti (mušušu) zu-un-na u ur-qि, tam ina māti (kur) la u, šab-šu-u,

20' ṭIškur-maššu, bi, in-las, ṭEn-ki abzu-ta šur, ḫuš-a 
[hu̯azlag] ṭu̯kšišu zî-pa-aĝ, ba-an-gaz
[min ša, iņa qि, rib Eri-du, du, du, ib-šab-na ] ib-ba-nu-u, kanakšu (mušušu) su̯hurmanša 
(šu̯hur-maššu) uš-qa-lu-la ma

4 E, a iņa Ap-si-i u, ša, zî-zu-ma aš-la-ku
ina ku-nu-uk na-piš-ti-šu, u, ra-si-[u-šu]

1' 4-kam-ma Lu, ṭNanna šanabi-bi abgal-e-ne E, ṭNin-kar-nun-na

25' e, ṭInnin ṭSul-gi-ra ušumgal b[i, e], de, 
ri-bu-u, ṭLu, ṭNanna ši-ni-pat ap-kal-li ša, iš-tu E, ṭNin-kar-nun-na 
ḥIš-tar ša bit (e), ṭSul-gi u, šum-gal-la u, še-šu-u, [4 abgal] u, du, da nam-šu-ulu, lu, ke, 
[4 ṭE]n-ki en geštu, dagal-la šu-du, de

30' [4 ap-kal] li i-li-ti a-me-lu-ti ša, ṭE, a be-lum

31' [u] ṭ2-na ra-pa-aš, ta u, šak-li-ku-šu, nu-ti

Notes

L. 20’–22’: The emendation of Reiner’s aš₂-la-tu to aš₂-la-ku’, and with it the restoration of [lu₃]azlag in the Sumerian line, is based on Borger’s translation of the text.

L. 28’–30’: Likewise, the restoration of [4 abgal] and [4 ap-kal]-li is based on Borger’s translation.
5.5 The Uruk Chronicle of the Kings of Ur

A single-column tablet from Seleucid Uruk copied in 251 BCE carries a brief chronicle of the activities of king Shulgi, particularly as they relate to the cult in Uruk. It is part of an endeavor by Late Babylonian scholars in Uruk to revive the worship of Anu, which involved claiming that it had been impiously suppressed by earlier kings (Beaulieu, “Antiquarian Theology”; Krul, *Revival of the Anu Cult*). The passage quoted here details Shulgi’s collaboration with Lu-Nanna, who is known as an author from other sources (see the *Catalogue*, no. 2.1, section 5+6, l. 14*). The two men are accused of tampering with the worship of Anu and composing fraudulent texts.

Translation

10 Shulgi, the son of the daughter of Utu-hengal, king of Uruk, and the blind Lu-Nanna, the scholar [ (empty?) ], who had evil in their hearts, improperly altered [the rites of Anu and the regulations of Uruk] — a secret of the scholars!

15 They wrote down the instructions of Sîn, lord of Ur. [During his reign, he wrote false steles and shill tablets]

17 [related to the purification rites of the gods, and left (them for posterity)].

Text

10 [⁴Id]Šul-gi mār (dumu) mārti (dumu-munus) ša₄ Utu-ḫe₂-en-gal, šar (lugal) Uruk (unug³)
[¹u₃ Lu₄ Nanna lā nātilu (igi²-nu-tuku) ḫu₄-um-ma-nu ] (empty?]
[ša₂ le₄]nūtim ([ṭ]ul-tim) ina libbišumu (ša₃-bi-šu₂-nu) ib-ba-šu₂-u₂
[par]aš ([gar]za) ḫ An-u₂-tu ušurti (giš-ḫurᵐᵉˡ) ša₂ Uruk (unug³)
[n]i-šir-ti₄₅-[um]-ma-na ša₉ la si-[mat u₆-nak-k[ir-ma]

15 [ši]-pir Sin (₃0) be-[lu Uri₅ i š-ṭur
[ina p]aššu ([b]ala-e-šu₉) nar₃ (na-ru₆-a) sur-ra-at ṭu₈-pi šal₆-lat₄₅mel

17 [ana šu]luḫḫi ([šu]-luḫ-ḫa) ḫi₇ (dingir-ra) iš-ṭur-ma e-zib

Text edition: W 22289; Glassner, Mesopotamian Chronicles, 288–89.

Notes
L. 16: I couldn't resist translating ṭuppı šillāti as “shill tablets”; verbatim it would be
“tablets of impudences.”

L. 17: L. 153: For ezēbu, “to leave,” as referring to textual reception, see UGU tablet 3 (no.
3.12, l. iv 24') and the Cuthean Legend (no. 1.5, l. 153).
5.6 “A piece of Babylonian esoteric learning”

This mysterious text is preserved on a Late Babylonian tablet whose colophon dates it to 553 BCE. The obverse contains three columns of text, separated by vertical rulings. The central column lists various figures from cuneiform history, including two authors. As noted by Reiner, the left and right columns can be read together as sentences interrupted by the names in the center. There are two sentences for each name, separated by horizontal rulings (giving the text a grid-like format). The reverse has much the same structure, except that the central names are replaced by a drawing, whose motif cannot be identified. There is also a drawing of two snakes on the tablet’s upper edge. The significance of this text is at present impossible to determine.

Translation

| [ ]  | be it open, Taqisha, the Nippurian | a breach will not [ ] |
| [ ]  | be it thick,                        | by the root [ ] |
| [ ]  | be it smoky, Old Sidu               | [its hear]th will be bright. |
| [ ]  | be it flaring,                      | [ ] will be cut off. |

5.7 The Verse Account of Nabonidus

Written after the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, the Verse Account is a satirical critique of the last “native” Babylonian king, Nabonidus, depicting him as an ill-informed zealot. In this passage, Nabonidus makes several nonsensical claims about his supposed erudition, thus exposing his lack of learning. The main significance of the passage in the present context is the phraseology it employs to describe Oannes-Adapa’s authorship of the non-existent series Uskar Anu Enlil. But as shown in the notes, there are also a number of other significant parallels to various cuneiform accounts of authorship.

Translation

v 8’ He stood in the assembly, aggrandizing himself:
“I am wise, I am learned, I have seen a hidden matter—

v 10’ I may not know cuneiform, but I have seen a secret matter!
Ilteri let me see (it), he taught me everything.
The series Uskar Anu Enlil, which Adapa composed (lit., wove):

v 13’ I surpass it all in wisdom!”

Text

v 8’ izzazu (gub-zu) ina puḫri (ukkin) u₂-šar-ra-ḫu ra-[man-šu₄]
en-qa₂-ek mu-d₃-a-ka a-ta-mar ka-[tim-tum]
v 10’ mi-ḫi-is qan₂-ṭup-pu ul i-di a-ta-mar ni-[ṣir-tum]
u₂-šab-ra-an₄ Il-te-ri kul-lat u₂-ta-[ad-da-a]
uskar₅ A-num₅ En-lī₃-la₃ ša, ik-šu-ru A-da-pa
v 13’ elišu (ugu-šu₄) šu-tu qa-ak kal ne₂-me-q[u]
**Text edition:** BM 38299; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 569–70 and 576; Machinist and Tadmor, “Heavenly Wisdom.”

**Notes**

V 9’: The juxtaposition of *enqu* and *mūdû*, “wise” and “learned,” brings to mind the epilogue of *Enuma Elish* (no. 1.8, VII 146), which invites the wise and the learned to discuss Marduk’s fifty names with one another (*mithārīš*). By having him claim to be both “wise” and “learned,” could the text be slyly suggesting that Nabonidus is talking to himself?

V 9’–10’: There is also another reference to a canonical cuneiform text here, namely *Gilgamesh*: the motif of “seeing hidden and secret matters” finds close textual parallels in Standard Babylonian *Gilgamesh* (no. 1.6, I 7 and *passim*). However, the parallel is quickly undercut by Nabonidus’s statement that he cannot read cuneiform, flaunting the connection set up in *Gilgamesh* between the discovery of historical secrets and their commemoration in writing (see e.g. Michalowski, “Sailing to Babylon” and “Commemoration, Writing, and Genre”). Nabonidus is shown picking up on just one aspect of *Gilgamesh*, oblivious to its all-important context.

V 11’–12’: As noted by Machinist and Tadmor, 147, the depiction of Adapa’s authorship as an act of weaving can be compared to Kabti-ili-Marduk’s claim in *Erra* (no. 1.2). It should also be noted that both texts juxtapose weaving and revelation (*kašāru* and *šubrû*), though in the *Verse Account* the two actions are associated with different deities.

V 12’: Making Nabonidus claim to know better than the series “Uskar Anu Enlil” is a clever pun, as shown by Machinist and Tadmor. Nabonidus was known for his promotion of the moon god Sin at the expense of Marduk. Later in the *Verse Account* (V 16’–18’), it is said that when Nabonidus saw a symbol of the crescent moon on the Esagil, Marduk’s temple in Babylon, he declared that that the temple in fact belonged to Sin, and there is a similar logic at work in this
passage. The phrase “Uskar Anu Enlil” clearly refers to the title of the main collection of astrological omens, *Enuma Anu Enlil*, whose title literally means “When Anu, Enlil (and Ea, the great gods, established the designs of heaven and earth...).” In this passage, the word *enūma*, “when,” has been replaced by *uskāru*, “moon crescent,” and as noted by Machinist and Tadmor, 148, that makes for a blasphemous pun, in that the symbol of Sîn is placed before the names of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, heretically elevating the moon god to primacy in the pantheon. Machinist and Tadmor also acknowledge a further layer to the pun, following F.R. Kraus: *uskāru* plays on the word *iškāru*, “series,” folding the symbol of the moon into the structure of cuneiform textuality. I would argue that there is yet another layer to the joke. The word *enūma* in *Enuma Anu Enlil* is usually written with the sign u₄, which can also mean “sun.” We are thus led to imagine Nabonidus coming across what he takes to be the word “sun,” instinctively replacing it with his beloved “moon,” and thereby turning the opening line of *Enuma Anu Enlil* into gibberish: “Moon crescent Anu, Enlil, and Ea established the designs...” This, then, is the “text” that Nabonidus claims to surpass with his superior knowledge. As noted by Rasmus Johan Aarslev, “Five Thirty-Nine BCE,” 42, Nabonidus is depicted as a “lunatic in the literal sense of the word”: he sees moons wherever he goes.


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