



UNIVERSITÀ CA' FOSCARI VENEZIA

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## A LITERARY HERITAGE: AUTHORSHIP IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD

Sophus Helle<sup>1</sup>

The question of Neo-Assyrian authorship revolves around one text: the *Catalogue of Texts and Authors*.<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> but the *Catalogue* is a conspicuous exception to that rule. It comprises a list of texts, ranging from scholarly works such as *Enuma Anu Enlil* to literary compositions such as *Gilgamesh*, each of which is attributed to an author. Some authors are likely to be the actual composers of these texts, as with Kabti-ili-Marduk, who identifies himself as the author of *Erra and Ishum* in the poem itself (l. 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 such as Sin-leqi-unnenni, the purported author of *Gilgamesh*, ever existed.<sup>4</sup> What is interesting about the *Catalogue* is thus 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.<sup>5</sup> Another famous author from ancient Iraq is Enheduana, who gained significant fame in the *edubba'a*'s of the

1. I have many people to thank for their help to this paper. It was first presented at the annual meeting of the AOS in Chicago (March 15, 2019) and at the "Advanced Seminar in the Humanities" at Venice International University (April 8, 2019), and I thank the participants of both those conferences for their helpful 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.
2. Lambert 1962.
3. 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, 151-153; and van de Mieroop 2016, 20.
4. See George 2003, 28-33.
5. For previous studies of Akkadian authorship, see Hallo 1962, 14-17; Lambert 1957 and 1962; Machinist 1986, 192-195; Hecker 1977; Geller 1990; Foster 1991 and 2019; Michalowski 1996, 183-188; Zgoll 1997;

Old Babylonian period.<sup>6</sup> 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 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 had ever been the case before. The question is then why this development took place, and why it took place at that moment in time. As noted by Erle Leichty, “[a]uthorship does not seem to have been of particular interest to the ancient Mesopotamian; at least not until the late first millennium”.<sup>7</sup> 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 of the essay, 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”.<sup>8</sup> (Note that I use “Neo-Assyrian” to refer to the period from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, coinciding with the hegemony of the Neo-Assyrian empire. However, some of the sources examined in the following are Babylonian texts written during this period, so the question of “Neo-Assyrian authorship” would include eighth-century Babylonian sources relating to authors.)

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.<sup>9</sup> 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 is often dubious anyway, but because they show a new discourse about literature coming into being: the emergence of the narrative of authorship.<sup>10</sup> 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 passing on a text

Glassner 2001; Beaulieu 2007, 12-16; Lenzi 2008b; Heeßel 2011; Lion 2011, 96-98; Svärd 2013 and 2017; van de Mieroop 2016, 19-25; Cancik-Kirschbaum – Wagensonner 2017; Jiménez 2017, 111-113 and forthcoming; Helle 2018 and 2019b.

6. Zgoll 1997, 40; Helle 2019b.

7. Leichty 1988, 261.

8. Michalowski 1996, 186-187.

9. See e.g. Lambert 1962, 77; Hallo 1962, 15-16; and George 2003, 28-30.

10. This approach to authorship is based on the work of Graziosi 2002 and Beccroft 2010.

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).<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> However, as I have argued at length elsewhere, this objection is invalid. Throughout the pre-modern world and even into the modern period, 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).<sup>13</sup> Far from invalidating their claims to authorship, the depiction of cuneiform figures as transmitters 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 pre-modern authorship in general.

### 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 minimal textual variation. One carries a colophon identifying it as part of Ashurbanipal’s library (type “Asb. d”).<sup>14</sup> 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 Inana* and four other unidentified compositions). The texts are referred to either by their incipit or by their title, such as the *Series of Etana* (ÉŠ-GÀR <sup>m</sup>e-ta-na, section 6, l. 11). The *Catalogue* links texts to authors with the phrase “from the mouth of” (*ša pī*), as in: “[*The Series*] of the Fox, from the mouth of Ibni-Marduk, son of Ludumununna, scholar of Nippur” ([ÉŠ-GÀ]R KA<sub>5</sub>-A : *ša pī-i* mDÛ-DAMAR-UTU DUMU LÛ-dDUMU-NUN-NA <sup>lu</sup>UM-ME-A NIBRU<sup>ki</sup>, section 6 l. 15). The text gives pride of place to Ea and Adapa in its first entries, but otherwise no clear order can be discerned.<sup>15</sup>

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. 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.<sup>16</sup> The other two catalogues are the “Exorcist’s Manual” and a catalogue of the medical series *Sagig* and *Alamdimmû*,<sup>17</sup> both of which attribute the series to Esagil-kin-apli. The

11. For Kabti-ili-Marduk, see *Erra* V 42-44, Cagni 1969, 126-129. For Esagil-kin-apli, see Schmidtchen 2018b.

12. See e.g. Lenzi 2015, 151-153; van der Toorn 2007, 41; Charpin 2010, 179-181; and Glassner 2001, 113.

13. Helle 2019a.

14. Lambert 1962; Hunger 1968, 97-98.

15. Pace van der Toorn 2007, 43, who claims that “[t]he *Catalogue* is arranged chronologically”.

16. K.1870, edited in Finkel 1986. For the figure of Sidu, see the references collected in Frahm 2010, 169-176.

17. KAR 144 and ND 4358 + 4366 / BM 41237 + 46607 + 47163. Both have recently been re-edited in Steinert 2018, by Mark Geller and Eric Schmidtson respectively.

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”.<sup>18</sup>

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 are not placed at the end of the tablet like a colophon. 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 who did not himself compose the text (to take a parallel example, Plato is the author of the *Symposium* even if it presents the teachings of Socrates). I have therefore only included colophons and rubrics that either make the authorial claim explicit by describing the circumstances of the text’s composition, or which reference figures who are known as authors from the *Catalogue*. Based on these criteria, authorial attributions are found in the following texts: tablet 3 of *UGU*, attributed to Enlil-muballit;<sup>19</sup> tablet 26 of *Sbumma Alu*, which deals with snakes and is attributed to Amel-Papsukkal and Taqisha-Gula;<sup>20</sup> *Zu-buru-dabbeba*, a series of incantations against field pests, attributed to Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni;<sup>21</sup> a collection of recipes against witchcraft and one against epilepsy, both attributed to Lu-Nanna;<sup>22</sup> a collection of incantations to consecrate the ritual instrument *urigallu*, and one collection of recipes against the “seizure-of-the-mountain” disease, both attributed to Ur-Nanna;<sup>23</sup> a short hymn to Sherua, attributed to Ahassu-Sherua;<sup>24</sup> and *Uruanna*, a botanical handbook attributed to king Ashurbanipal.<sup>25</sup> Further, a tablet from Assur contains passages from *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.<sup>26</sup>

The third and the fourth groups come from the literary works themselves. The *Gula Hymn* (l. 199) and *Erra and Ishum* (V 42) identify their composers in an epilogue, attributing themselves to Bullutsa-rabi and Kabti-ili-Marduk respectively.<sup>27</sup> In both texts, authorship is presented as a conversation with a god: Bullutsa-rabi’s hymn is a prayer to Gula, while Kabti-ili-Marduk claims that the poem was revealed to him by Erra himself. Two other texts, the *Theodicy* and a pair of

18. Wee 2015, 253. On this passage, see also Wilson 1956, 130-146; Lambert 1957, 6-7; Finkel 1988; Lieberman 1990, 333, fn. 182; Heeßel 2000, 104-105; Böck 2000, 14-15; Beaulieu 2007, 12-15; Frahm 2011, 326-328 and 2018, 24-26; Schmidtchen 2018a; Geller 2018; and Helle 2019a, 123-126.

19. K.4023. See Steinert 2015, 129-130 with references to previous literature.

20. KAR 384 and 385, l. r. 44, edited in Heeßel 2007, 53-58.

21. K.2596, l. iii 17’-20’, edited in George – Taniguchi 2010, 106-113.

22. BAM 434 and 435, edited in Abusch – Schwemer 2011, n. 7.10.11; and BAM 476. For the figure of Lu-Nanna, see Schwemer 2015 and Haul 2000, 37-38.

23. BM 68061+, l. r. 21’, see Jiméncz 2017, 213; and BM 64526, bottom edge, l. 2, edited in Stadhouders 2018, 164-170.

24. LKA 36, l. 5-7, edited in Menzel 1981, 62’-63’, n. 773.

25. BAK 321, l. 3, see Hunger 1968, 98-99.

26. 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” (um-me-a dur-an-ki, l. 3’). Despite repeated collations, the fragment remains obstinately unreadable to me.

27. Respectively, Lambert 1967, 128-129 and Cagni 1969, 126-127.

matching prayers to Marduk, refer to their authors Saggil-kin-ubbib and Nabu-ushebshi through acrostics woven into the poems.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> *Erra* is an especially difficult case: it has been dated to the ninth, eighth, and seventh century BCE, with no agreement in sight.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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. For example, 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 Sin-leqi-unnenni, but without explicating that he was the author of *Gilgamesh*.<sup>32</sup> 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 there he is not identified as the author of *Etana*.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

A particularly contentious set of sources concern the authorship of king Ashurbanipal, including the colophon to *Uruanna* mentioned above, an acrostic bearing his name in a hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu, as well as hymns to Ashur, Nanaya, Nabû, Tashmetu, Ishtar, and Shamash that refer to him as their composer.<sup>36</sup> There has been considerable debate over whether or not Ashurbanipal was literate, as he claims to be in his inscriptions,<sup>37</sup> 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

28. For the *Theodicy*, see Lambert 1996, 63-91. For Nabu-ushebshi, see Lambert 1968, 130-132; Sweet 1969.

29. For the dating of the *Gula Hymn*, see Lambert 1967, 108-109, 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, 121-125, with references). However, it is hardly a reliable source, as it also places Sin-leqi-unnenni under the reign of Gilgamesh. Von Soden 1990, 143 argues that the *Theodicy* was composed between 800 and 750 BCE.

30. See Cagni 1969, 37-45 and Franke 2014, 320, with references.

31. On the possibility that Shubshi-mehrê-Shakkan, the narrator of *Ludlul bel nemeqi*, should also be identified as its author, see Foster 1983 and Oshima 2014, 18-19. On the author Nabu-shuma-ukin, who is Neo-Babylonian and thus outside the scope of this article, see Finkel 1999.

32. Beaulieu 2000.

33. L. obv. 24’-27’, Reiner 1961 and Borger 1974, 192.

34. Cooley forthcoming.

35. BM 34110 + 35163, edited in Lambert 1974, see also Reiner 2008.

36. Livingstone 1989, 4-20.

37. Parpola 1983, 347; Lieberman 1990; Villard 1997; Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 311-315; Fincke 2003, 120-122; Livingstone 2007; and Zamazalová 2011, 318-320.

impressive grasp of cuneiform polysemy. Of course, it is possible that Ashurbanipal played some role in the composition of the texts, but nonetheless, the 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.

### 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, arguing that the authors appear as (1) family ancestors, (2) literate professionals, and (3) mechanisms of textual control. Taken together, these functions served to establish *the scribes' special access to literature*, depicting the cuneiform corpus as the exclusive possession of a small group of family guilds, whose social status depended on the control of and access to 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,<sup>38</sup> 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”.<sup>39</sup> 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”.<sup>40</sup>

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 an 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 first millennium.<sup>41</sup> 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 the

38. Lambert 1957.

39. Beaulieu 2007, 15.

40. Jiménez 2017, 112-113.

41. Nielsen 2011.

ancestors are connected with authorship in one way or another: either the ancestor is identified as an author in the *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-ili-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 *Cures of the House of Dabibi* (*bultu bīt Dabibi*),<sup>42</sup> a title that fully conflates authorship and ancestry. Likewise, a colophon to a *shu'ila* prayer from Nippur states it was copied in "the house of Aba-Enlil-dari".<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

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, thereby establishing 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 of Assyria and Babylonia.<sup>45</sup> 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,<sup>46</sup> the scholars anchored their sense of importance in the past, embedding themselves on a very personal level in the tradition of cuneiform scholarship. A clear example of this 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".<sup>47</sup> 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 on the level of sound, writing, bilingual equivalence, 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 of ancestral patronymics: 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

42. This elusive series is known from BM 35512 and BAM 4, 403, as well as from the commentary texts 11N-T4, W.22307/15, Si 276, and BM 59607, edited in the *Cuneiform Commentaries Project* as 4.2.B, 4.2.G, 4.2.P, and 4.2.Q.

43. BMS 35 = K 2757.

44. Beaulieu 2006, 190. The equation with Ahiqar is from the "Uruk List of Kings and Sages", ll. 19-20, see Helle 2018, 233-234. The equation with Mannu-kima-Enlil-Hatin is from VR 44, l. iii 42', see Cooley forthcoming.

45. Nielsen – Waerzeggers 2016.

46. Lambert 1957.

47. Cooley forthcoming.

profession. For example, Shiyanthi Thavapalan notes that a family of glassmakers traced their descent back to an author of glassmaking recipes.<sup>48</sup> The trend became increasingly pronounced during the first millennium: in the Neo-Babylonian period, for example, all temple brewers in Nippur invoked “Absummu the Sumerian” as their ancestor.<sup>49</sup> Ancestry was thus closely linked to professional identity. Claiming descent from an author was thus 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: Sin-leqi-unnenni was regarded as the ancestor of *kalû*’s though he himself was an *āšīpu*.<sup>50</sup> 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 ancestral 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 in question contains secret information that should not be shown to the uninitiated, and Kathryn Stevens has shown that they most often occur on tablets that are associated with their owners’ profession.<sup>51</sup> For example, tablets of lamentation lore 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 n. 18, ll. iii 17’-20’ and 25’-30’, respectively) or the astral rituals attributed to Lu-Nanna (rev. 17).<sup>52</sup>

As Eleanor Robson puts it, there was an onus on scribal families “to jealously guard their knowledge as inherited professional secrets”.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Alan Lenzi has explored the ways in which Neo-Assyrian scribes presented their lore as a prestigious secret – one that could be traced back to the gods and which had to be passed down along family lines.<sup>54</sup> As argued by Francesca Rochberg, this exclusive access to knowledge created a circular bond of textual power: texts such as *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 knowledge of those texts.<sup>55</sup> 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

48. Thavapalan forthcoming.

49. Oelsner 1982; Joannès 1992, 90.

50. The question of Sin-leqi-unnenni’s profession was settled by the discovery of a miniature fragment from the *Catalogue*. See Jiménez 2017, 111-113.

51. Stevens 2013; see also Lenzi 2008a, 186-204.

52. George – Taniguchi 2010, 110 and 12; Schwemer 2015, 220 and 223.

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

54. Lenzi 2008a and 2013.

55. Rochberg-Halton 2016.

turn passed it on to the citizens of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon.<sup>56</sup> 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*), and that each priest is allowed to teach the art of divination to his own sons but is otherwise expected to act as “a guardian of the secret of the great gods” (*na-šir AD-ḪAL DINGIR<sup>meš</sup> GAL<sup>meš</sup>*, l. 19).<sup>57</sup> Granted, Enmeduranki is not an author in the strict sense of the word: no text directly attributes to him the authorship of any of the divinatory series. 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 then passing it on to a human audience.<sup>58</sup> But more importantly, the story about 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 inheritance that distinguished them from other performers of epic poetry.<sup>59</sup> 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 China, the line between authorship and oral performance was all but non-existent,<sup>60</sup> but this was not the case in ancient Iraq, where literature was almost always envisaged as the creation of literate scholars.

Many works of Sumerian and Akkadian literature may well have had an oral background,<sup>61</sup> 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 *Catalogue* whose profession is listed are scholars of one kind or another: sages (*ap̄kallu's*), chief scholars (*ummânu's*), incantation priests (*āšipu's*), and

56. Lambert 1998.

57. 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.

58. Foster 1991; Cancik-Kirschbaum – Wagensohn 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.

59. West 1999; Graziosi 2002, chap. 6.

60. Beecroft 2010, chap. 1.

61. On the question of orality in cuneiform literature, see the essays collected in Vogelzang – Vanstiphout 1992.

lamentation priests (*kalû's*).<sup>62</sup> The two exceptions are revealing, namely Ea, the patron deity of scribes and scholars, and Enmerkar (section 3, l. 5'), the king who was said to have invented writing. By contrast, there are no *nāru's*, “singers”,<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> This is made particularly clear in the epilogue to *Erra*, which describes how Erra revealed the epic in a dream to Kabti-ili-Marduk, who set it down in writing without adding or omitting a single line. Erra then blesses 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: writing comes before orality.

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: Sin-leqi-unnenni, Kabti-ili-Marduk, and Taqisha-Gula become <sup>m</sup>30-ti-ér, <sup>m</sup>IDIM-*il*-<sup>d</sup>ŠÚ, and <sup>m</sup>ta-*qiš*<sub>1</sub><sup>2</sup>-<sup>d</sup>ME-ME, respectively.<sup>65</sup> Often, these spellings deploy learned equivalences between Akkadian and Sumerian: Papsukkal-sha-iqbû-ul-inni, for example, becomes <sup>m</sup>dsukkal-dug<sub>4</sub>-nu-bal-bal, and Esagil-kin-apli is regularly written <sup>m</sup>èš-gú-zi-gi-a (or -ibila), which Andrew George refers to as “a scholarly conceit, even a kind of cryptography”.<sup>66</sup> 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 *Mullil*, the Emesal rendering of Enlil’s name”<sup>67</sup> – 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.<sup>68</sup>

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. These 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 gods the passage embodies the protective attitude of the *āšipu*

62. Admittedly, the *Catalogue* does seem to attribute a text to a horse (*a-na pi-i ANŠE-KUR-RA iš-tur*, section 5 l. 20'), but the passage is highly fragmentary, and its phrasing differs from the *Catalogue's* other attributions of authorship, so the nature of the horse’s authorship remains unclear. See also Annus 2016, 13.

63. By contrast, *Isbme-Dagan A* mentions various musical compositions that “skilled singers created for me” (*nar gal-an-zu-ne ma-an-ġar-re-cš-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.

64. See also Beaulieu 2007, 15.

65. Helle 2018, 233-234.

66. George 1993, 64.

67. Frahm 2010, 173.

68. Some of these associations are unpacked in Cooley forthcoming.

to his inherited lore”.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup> The first part of his name is written in a variety of different ways, including <sup>m</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-an-na, u<sub>4</sub>-ma-d<sup>a</sup>-nim, <sup>m</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-d<sup>a</sup>n, and <sup>m</sup>U<sub>4</sub>-an.<sup>72</sup> “Oannes” is the Greek rendering of the name (Ὠάννης, as preserved in Berossus<sup>73</sup>), 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/.<sup>74</sup> 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”, 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”,<sup>75</sup> 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

69. Finkel 1988, 150. The nature of this “protective attitude” is explored more fully in Lenzi 2008a, chapters 2-3.

70. 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.

71. 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 – Mayer 1980, 20; the *Verse Account of Nabonidus*, V 12’, as discussed by Machinist – Tadmor 1993; and possibly the mysterious story of *Enmerkar and Adapa*, edited in Picchioni 1981, 102-109. See also Reiner 1961; Wilcke 1991; Streck 2003; and Sanders 2017, 38-68.

72. See the references collected in Lambert 1962, 73-74.

73. See e.g. Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica* 51, in Mosshammer 1984, 29.

74. Westenholz 2007, 283-284.

75. Lambert 1962, 74.

professionals.<sup>76</sup> 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 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”.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> According to “Esagil-kin-apli’s Manifesto”, the editing of *Sagig* 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.<sup>79</sup> 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” (DIŠ *alam-dim-mu-u* LIBIR-RA šá É-sag-gil-GIN-A NU DU<sub>8</sub><sup>meš</sup>-šú, l. iii 6).<sup>80</sup> 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”.<sup>81</sup> 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 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

76. Michalowski 1996, 187; see also Beaulieu 2007.

77. Veldhuis 2003, 21.

78. Heeßel 2011.

79. LL. 51-62, edited in Schmidtchen 2018b, 316-318.

80. VAT 10493+10543, edited in Heeßel 2010.

81. Veldhuis 2003, 21.

is one” (*ša ÉŠ-GÀR ki-lal-la-an ʾKÉŠ<sup>1</sup>-su-nu DIŠ-ma*, l. 68).<sup>82</sup> 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 that 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”.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> While it is technically possible that Sidu was a real individual,<sup>85</sup> 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.

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 (though 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-canonical).<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> 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”.<sup>88</sup>

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 Wagonsonner 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.<sup>89</sup> 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

82. Schmidtchen 2018b, 318.

83. Finkel 1986.

84. See the “Uruk List of Kings and Sages”, l. 14, and VR 44, l. iii 35’.

85. See the discussion in Frahm 2010, 174.

86. Foucault 1969.

87. Van de Mieroop 2016, 19-21, 25.

88. Van de Mieroop 2016, 21.

89. Cancik-Kirschbaum – Wagonsonner 2017.

bestowed upon the text by its divine origins. Colophons sometimes describe the textual pedigree of the tablet, referring to a particularly prestigious *Vorlage* and averring that it was copied accurately.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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 then asks why this development took place at that moment in time. Many of the trends explored above – the use of ancestral patronymics, the arrival of an increasing number of Aramaic-speaking people, the establishment of family guilds, and the professionalization of literature – have roots already in the second millennium,<sup>92</sup> 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”,<sup>93</sup> that is, the arrival 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

90. 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, 212-213 and Stadhouders 2018, 169.

91. See also Rochberg 2016, 222 on the link between textual authority and family lineage.

92. 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. Michalowski 1996, 186-187.

peoples and through its subjugation of an ever-expanding territory.<sup>94</sup> This resulted in two simultaneous and seemingly opposite developments during the eighth to 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.<sup>95</sup> 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-Pilesher III (745-727 BCE) tells us that already by this time the palace employed both Assyrian and Aramaic scholars (*ummānu*'s).<sup>96</sup>

This resulted in a counter-reaction among the old families of Assyria, who insisted on their difference from and superiority to Aramaic “new-comers”.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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”.<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup>

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 shifting 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:<sup>101</sup> 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.

Likewise, the increased use of ancestral patronymics can be tied to the “Aramaic influx”.<sup>102</sup> 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”.<sup>103</sup> In an attempt to address the instability that had been triggered by 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 of property by invoking

94. Zehnder 2007.

95. Beaulieu 2006, 188; Fales 2005, 596-597 and 2010.

96. SAA 19, 154 mentions “the scholars of the palace, whether Assyrian or Aramean” (*l<sup>u</sup>um-ma-nu ša É<sub>2</sub>-GAL lu-u<sup>l<sup>u</sup></sup>aš-šur-a-a lu-u<sup>l<sup>u</sup></sup>ar-ma-a*, ll. 3-5, Luukko 2012, 156).

97. Beaulieu 2006, 189; Foster 2011, 120.

98. Fales 2009.

99. Fales 2009, 191.

100. Fales 2010; Pongratz-Leisten 2013.

101. Lambert 1998, 147.

102. Nielsen – Waerzeggers 2016.

103. Nielsen – Waerzeggers 2016, 331–333.

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”.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup>

A further and particularly important effect of the increase in the Aramaic-speaking population was, of course, 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.<sup>106</sup> 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 in the early first millennium BCE. 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”.<sup>107</sup> This shift did not mean that Akkadian lost all importance, rather, it led to what Philippe Clancier calls “une contraction des sphères d’emploi”<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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 special education, profession, identity, and social status.<sup>110</sup>

It is very possible that Akkadian literature had always been first and foremost the domain of textual experts.<sup>111</sup> For example, despite *Enuma Elisb’s* request that it be taught to “shepherd and herdsman” (VII 148), its complex graphic games would only ever 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

104. Nielsen – Waerzeggers 2016, 333 (erroneous comma in the original).

105. Beaulieu 2013, 133.

106. See e.g. Leichty 1993, 27-29; Beaulieu 2006, 187-192; Frahm 2011, 336-337; and Hackl 2018, with references.

107. Michalowski 2004, 169.

108. Clancier 2007, 22.

109. Beaulieu 2006, 188-190.

110. Michalowski 1996, 186-187.

111. See e.g. Beaulieu 2007.

with higher 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.<sup>112</sup> Akkadian literature was not to be popularized, but protected – and as argued above, the narratives of authorship were one way to establish 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. Now, 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 add to it. This is how it became possible to establish the kind of textual control I discussed above.<sup>113</sup> 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, studied, and applied them”.<sup>114</sup> The texts were written in dead and obscure 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 fix their interpretation. In the preceding section, I argued that narratives of authorship served a similar function, as they were a para-textual vehicle for commenting on texts, fixing their authority, connecting them to each other, distinguishing between variants, tracing their pedigree, and so on.<sup>115</sup>

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 many authors, such as Esagil-kin-apli and Sin-leqi-unnenni, can be dated to this period.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, it is very 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.<sup>117</sup> 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

112. Lenzi 2013.

113. 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”.

114. Frahm 2011, 336.

115. For a similar argument linking language death to intellectual innovation, see Leichty 1993.

116. See e.g. Lambert 1957, 2-4; Finkel 1988; George 2003, 28-31; Heeßel 2011, 193-195.

117. Heeßel 2011, 193-195.

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 meta-textual reflection on works that by that time had already become standardized, fixed, and difficult to understand.

## Conclusion

The essay has 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 the cuneiform world, and why did they do so during the Neo-Assyrian period? I have 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, including 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 these factors are related to the transformation of Akkadian literature from a living tradition into a 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 as 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, *tuṣṣarru*'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 experts, 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.

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