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CANONICITY IN CUNEIFORM TEXTS*

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1. Introduction

By the seventh century B.C. the tablets and series comprising the literature of the scholars in the “scientific” disciplines of divination, medicine, and magic had attained a kind of literary stabilization in the sense that old material was conscientiously maintained in its traditional form and new material was no longer being incorporated. The internal literary development of the “scientific” texts is frequently traceable in skeletal outline, where the Neo-Assyrian recensions have clear forerunners in Old Babylonian, Middle Babylonian, or Middle Assyrian copies. The process by which the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* or any other omen series reached its final form is nowhere explained or even mentioned in our sources, but is likely to be the work of Kassite period transcribers and editors, since many representative texts of the scholarly tradition, omens, or lexical texts, emerged from the library of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1107 B.C.) in the form in which they are later attested in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian copies.¹ In addition, Lambert argued for an institution of ancestry which showed that during the Kassite period scribal families, particularly of Uruk and Babylon, were responsible for the codification and transmission of the literary-scholarly tradition.²

The conscious effort on the part of these assumed Kassite editors to preserve and transmit texts of the learned tradition may, however, not have been “canonization” in the sense in which the term is applied to the biblical text with all its connotations.³ Rather, it may be viewed in terms of

*. The substance of this paper was presented at the 1984 meetings of the American Oriental Society in Seattle, Washington. I would like to thank Professor Erica Reiner of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, for reading a draft of this paper and making valuable comments and criticisms.

1. M. Civil, “Lexicography,” in *Studies Jacobsen* p. 128.

2. W. G. Lambert, “Ancestors, Authors and Canonicity,” *JCS* 11 (1957) 1-14, with additions and corrections on p. 112. See also W. W. Hallo, “New Viewpoints on Cuneiform Literature,” *IEJ* 12 (1962) 14-16.

3. The introduction of the Greek word *κανών* as a technical term applied to a corpus of religious texts (the New Testament) was a late Christian innovation of roughly the fourth century A.D. The canonical status of the Old and New Testaments represents a later attribution stemming from some new assessment of the texts not necessarily original to or inherent in the compositions comprising the canon. The canonization of the biblical writings

standardization of formal aspects of the text, that is, the number and arrangement of tablets, while a degree of flexibility remained permissible in the content, in terms of exactly what a particular tablet was to include and in what order, thus resulting in only a relative stabilization of the wording of the text. There is in any case no evidence in the cuneiform scholarly tradition that suggests that standardization became a rigorous law applied to a text's particular form and content. As Lambert pointed out, "much Akkadian literature did assume a fixed form, did become a *textus receptus*, but not all. The Gilgameš Epic never reached a canonical form and Enuma Anu Enlil circulated in several variant official editions."⁴ Exact wording does not seem to have been an essential ingredient in textual transmission.

What is more evident in the colophons and catalogs of Akkadian literary and omen texts is the serialization of the order and sequence of tablets within multi-tablet compilations. It is not clear how the final serializing was achieved and how long the process took. In the case of the series Izbu, Leichty observed that "the ordering and standardizing of the texts into the twenty-four tablet Kuyunjik edition was probably not the work of a single man at a fixed point of time, but was rather a continuing process covering a long period of time in several different places. It must also be remembered, because of this, that when the text was standardized it did not result in a single edition, but rather in several parallel editions each with varying details, depending upon their source."⁵

On the basis of this apparent standardization, as well as insights into authorship provided by various literary and scholarly texts, some form of

was a process that spanned some five centuries and the first evidence of the application of the term does not appear until the list of divinely inspired books officially recognized by the Church was issued by the Greek bishop Athanasius (see B. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture [Philadelphia, 1979] p. 50). Although the term canon belongs to Christian usage, some notion of the special status of the scriptures was already developed within the Rabbinic tradition, as is clear from the Mishnaic reference to the "sacred writings" (*kit'vê haqqōdeš*) that were said to "defile the hands" (*m'šamme'im 'et-hayyōdayim*) (Yadaim 3,5, and see P. R. Ackroyd in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, eds., The Cambridge History of the Bible, 1: From the Beginnings to Jerome [Cambridge, 1970] 113; see also S. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence, Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 47 [Hamden CT, 1976] 102-20). The Jewish notion of canon included the acceptance of divine authority, the morally binding character of the texts, and its fixed—that is, unaltered and unalterable—nature (see Ackroyd, Cambridge History of the Bible 1 116). Indeed, these were the fundamental notions of canonicity that were inherited by the Christians.

4. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 9 with n. 34.

5. Leichty Izbu p. 26.

canonicity has been generally held to be a characteristic of these genres of cuneiform literature, in particular, of the divination corpus. Since neither a process of canonization nor anything regarding a Babylonian notion of canonicity can be recognized in cuneiform sources, a cuneiform “canon” proves difficult to define. The biblical text provides the well-known model of canon, according to which canon refers to a corpus of texts selected on the basis of some unified content or purpose, subsequently fixed in an authoritative version, considered to embody law so that it becomes normative for belief and conduct, and held to be revealed in character. An enormous literature has been built up around the debate, which itself goes back to the early Christian period, concerning such aspects as the extent of the biblical canon (that is, which books are in the Bible), the history of the stabilization of the texts, and what is meant by the authoritative nature of the canonical text.⁶

The fully articulated (and quite late) concept of canonicity peculiar to both the Old and New Testaments stems not primarily from formal considerations of text or genre, but from the acceptance of those writings as normative for the faith and practice of the religious community.⁷ This attitude was in part a function of the divine authority believed to be inherent in those texts. The criteria on the basis of which attributions of canonical status are made of the biblical writings, therefore, do not readily apply to cuneiform texts, particularly so inasmuch as the theological dimension is not a factor. Against the background of the biblical definition(s) of canon, perhaps the aspects of the corpus of texts belonging to the Mesopotamian tradition of scholarly divination that share features with the biblical canon are limited to those of “text stability and fixed sequence of tablets within a series.”⁸ As long as many aspects of the biblical canon debate remain in dispute, our understanding of the possible “canonicity” of Akkadian scholarly texts will not be furthered by attempts to carry over the categories and concepts from one model to the other.

Neither has there been consensus among Assyriologists on the specific

6. For bibliography see Childs, Introduction ch. 2: “The Problem of the Canon.”

7. Childs notes that “among the Church fathers the term canon was used in a variety of combinations—‘rule of truth’, ‘rule of faith’—as a norm of church doctrine and practise.” (Childs, Introduction p. 50; see also H. W. Beyer, ‘κανών,’ in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 (Grand Rapids, 1964-76) 600ff. sub C 1.) Similarly in the Judaic tradition the final criterion for canonicity of a book is the requirement that it be authoritative for religious practice and/or doctrine; see Leiman, *Canonization* pp. 14-16 and *passim*.

8. Civil, *MSL* 14 168.

use of the term “canonical.” As Civil points out in his brief history of the term,⁹ its meaning has ranged from the recension of a text which constitutes “the single authoritative work”¹⁰ for a given subject, to the more open interpretation as “purely literary”¹¹ as opposed to archival texts. The terminological problem becomes more acute when we consider that the particular scholarly tradition that the scribes designated by *abû*, “extraneous, unusual,” is frequently translated “non-canonical.”¹²

On the evidence of a number of letters from scholars to the Neo-Assyrian court and a literary catalog of roughly the same period, it appears that the scribe-scholars had devised a classification system to differentiate various “streams”¹³ of textual transmission.¹⁴ One stream consisted of the literary works termed *iškaru*, our presumed “canonical texts,” or official editions. Another was that of the extraneous sources termed *abû*. Extraneous is used here in its first sense of “coming from outside,” that is, extrinsic, rather than its secondary although perhaps more commonly used sense of “not being pertinent” or “superfluous.” A third stream was the oral tradition of the experts, referred to as *ša pī ummâni*, frequently recorded in written commentaries or referred to in the letters from scholars to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.¹⁵ Commentaries (*mukallimtu*), explanatory word lists (*šâtu*), excerpts (*liqtu*), and other forms of scholia comprise still another aspect or perhaps branch of the scribal tradition. The stream of tradition by means of which knowledge was both preserved and passed on can therefore be seen as a composite, made up of several channels in which different classes of texts are represented by different

9. Civil, MSL 14 168.

10. W. von Soden, “Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft,” in *Die Welt als Geschichte* 2 (1936) 432f. with n. 28.

11. W. W. Hallo, “Contributions to Neo-Sumerian,” *HUCA* 29 (1958) 88, and see also Hallo, *IEJ* 12 (1962) 21-26.

12. F. R. Kraus, “Die physiognomischen Omina der Babylonier,” *MVAG* 40/2 (1935) 38, and see also CAD A/1 s.v. *abû* mng. 2b, “referring to omens not in the standard series,” with “non-canonical” used in translation of passages cited there, and *AHw* 1 22b s.v. mng. 4, “serienfremd, unkanonisch.”

13. For the term “stream of tradition,” see A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed. Erica Reiner; Chicago and London, 1977) p. 13.

14. For the letters see ABL 519 (= LAS 13); ABL 453; ABL 13; and see the references in CAD A/1 s.v. *abû* mng. 2b; for the catalog Rm. 150 see W. G. Lambert, “A Late Assyrian Catalogue of Literary and Scholarly Texts,” in Kramer AV p. 314. Compare Civil, MSL 14 168, for the same outline of three modes of transmission.

15. See LAS 13 r. 2, ACh Adad 7:22, ACh Adad 30:10, ACh Istar 5:18 (all subscripts to *mukallimtu* commentaries); compare the references sub *mašāltu* in the dictionaries.

terms within a native typology. Since all the criteria that established the basis for this typology are not ascertainable, it will probably not be possible to bring our modern terminology designating texts as canonical and non-canonical, into alignment with the ancient system. But it may be possible on the basis of available, albeit limited, evidence to determine at least some of the criteria that distinguished *ahû* from *iškaru* texts.

Beyond establishing a discreet genre or identifying a general category of texts, there is the difficult problem of describing what it is that uniquely characterizes the corpus of texts we have designated as canonical. To prepare the way for such a general investigation, I will focus here on the more specific problem concerning the nature of an *ahû* text exemplar from *Enūma Anu Enlil* and the relationship between the category *ahû* and its counterpart, the so-called canonical version from the series or *iškaru*. I will approach the problem in terms of whether or not these two classifications of texts may be distinguished on the basis of the criteria that have been used to claim the existence of a canonical tradition of scholarly texts, namely standardization, serialization, and authority.

The discussion which follows is based on evidence from the celestial divination corpus *Enūma Anu Enlil*, as that text series has provided the possibility for systematic comparison of an *ahû* source with a corresponding group of sources from the official Neo-Assyrian recension, deriving largely from the library of Assurbanipal.¹⁶ Whether or not it will be possible to generalize from the results of the present study can only be determined as further evidence from various text genres are similarly compared.

2. *The Stabilization and Standardization of Tradition*

The formation of comprehensive omen and other learned corpora served the practical needs of the scholarly segment of the scribal profession. Omen series constitute the major product of Mesopotamian scribal scholarship and in most instances can be seen to evolve toward a more or less stabilized form from the time they are first attested in the Old Babylonian period to the Neo-Assyrian recensions known primarily from Nineveh and Assur. The celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* exemplifies

16. See my "The Assumed 29th *ahû* Tablet of *Enūma Anu Enlil*," in F. Rochberg-Halton, ed., *Language Literature and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner* (Locust Valley, NY, in press).

this evolution of a series.¹⁷ The observations of celestial signs together with artificial elaborations and correlations in terms of mundane events were apparently collected, organized, and stabilized as a scholarly reference work sometime before the eleventh century.¹⁸

The Neo-Assyrian lunar eclipse omen texts represent the fullest development of the subject matter into series of omens covering all imaginable variations and combinations of eclipse variables so that they may be interpreted according to traditionally accepted schemata, such as north = Subartu, south = Akkad, and so on, where the cardinal points stand for the schematic quadrants of the lunar disk.¹⁹ For all their systematic repetitions and comprehensiveness, the Neo-Assyrian sources for *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 15-22, containing the lunar eclipse omens, exhibit a mixture of writing conventions. Logographic writing predominates, especially for technical vocabulary, but no strict conventions hold. In the standard text of the eclipse series, survivals of Old Babylonian spellings are evident both in passages with attested Old Babylonian forerunners²⁰ and passages for which there are no extant Old Babylonian parallels. Of course it cannot be proved that all syllabic writings reflect Old Babylonian material, since so few Old Babylonian celestial omen texts are available for comparison with the later recensions.²¹ The lack of uniformity of the Neo-Assyrian orthography can be accounted for by the lengthy process of

17. The development of the series from a corpus of Old Babylonian forerunners will be explicated in a forthcoming article by the author. The Old Babylonian tablets are listed below in note 21.

18. Civil, *MSL* 14 169 and *Studies Jacobsen* p. 128; E. F. Weidner, "Die astrologische Serie *Enūma Anu Enlil*," *AFO* 14 (1941-44) 175f.

19. Three schemata are attested in which the schematic moon (divided into four parts) is correlated with cardinal points and the four quarters of the world (Akkad, Subartu, Elam, and Amurru). For an outline of the three sets of correspondences see A. Schott and J. Schaumberger, "Vier Briefe Mar-Ištars und Asarhaddon," *ZA* 47 (1941) 106ff.; see also Kugler, *SSB* 2 60ff., and Ungnad *Subartu* (Berlin, 1936) §§ 62-81.

20. For example, *ni-su še-er-ri-ši-na a-na KÙ.BABBAR i-pa-aš-ša-ra* (BM 16775:25 [publication by the author forthcoming]) and the corresponding Neo-Assyrian omen UN.MEŠ TUR.MEŠ-*ši-na ana KÙ.BABBAR BÜR.MEŠ* (ACh Sin 33:39 and duplicate AFO 17 pl. 3:15'; also ACh Sin 34:2).

21. To date the following Old Babylonian celestial omens are known: (1) T. Bauer, *ZA* 43 (1936) 308-314, originally published by W. Sileiko, "Mondlaufprognosen aus der Zeit der ersten babylonischen Dynastie," *Comptes-Rendus de l'Academie des Sciences de l'URSS* (1927) 125-28; (2) BM 22696; (3) BM 86381; (4) BM 16775; and (5) BM 109154 (all lunar eclipse omens, identified and brought to my attention by D. Kennedy); (6) BM 97210 (excerpt tablet(?) containing Šamaš and Adad omens, identified and brought to my attention by Christopher Walker); (7) VAT 7525 i 12-15, mentioned by Weidner, *AFO* 14 (1941-44) 175 n. 7, of uncertain identification.

standardization. Each source reflects the gradual accumulation of textual change, improvements, and corruptions, over centuries during which scribal conventions changed. From the standpoint of textual history, the Neo-Assyrian period represents the final stage in the development of the series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. All themes relating to celestial phenomena are organized according to compositional elements into a final codified form. Thus *Enūma Anu Enlil* was preserved and transmitted as part of a wider intellectual tradition down to the cessation of the cuneiform scribal tradition during the Seleucid period.

This Mesopotamian intellectual tradition remained unchallenged and legitimate in the form in which it was passed on and thereby promoted a cultural continuum. Oppenheim has pointed to “the desire to maintain a written tradition” as “an important culture trait of Mesopotamian civilization.”²² Although he did not refer directly to the issue of canonicity, Oppenheim observed that the motivation behind Mesopotamia’s conscious maintaining of tradition is not “the intention of preserving a body of religious writings or the wish to sustain one tradition against or in competition with rival traditions,”²³ both of which reasons can be found in the background of the biblical model of canon. Instead, he added, “in Mesopotamia this continuity of tradition was achieved by a purely operational though highly effective circumstance rather than by ideological pressures: it was considered an essential part of the training of each scribe to copy faithfully the texts that made up the stream of tradition.”²⁴ The scribal curriculum can therefore be seen in the service of cultural continuity.

Another impetus for the continuity and preservation of tradition comes from the practice of Mesopotamian divination, which operated on the basis of the traditional interpretations of precedents. The omen series were not mere fossil records, but continued to have currency as reference books because the association of a celestial (or terrestrial) phenomenon with a public event would hold true *whenever* the given phenomenon occurred.²⁵ In this sense the omen corpora represented a highly conservative but nevertheless vital written tradition.

It may be of interest to point out here that the nature of the Babylonian written tradition does not conform to the theoretical paradigm for

22. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* p. 13.

23. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* pp. 13f.

24. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* p. 14.

25. See my remarks in “Fate and Divination in Mesopotamia,” *AFO Beiheft* 19 (1982) 366.

explaining “tradition” advanced by Goody in his work on the psycho-social impact of literacy.²⁶ Once the Mesopotamian intellectual tradition was stabilized in the form of multi-tablet series, the unchanging consistency of this traditional body of knowledge (sometime maintained in the face of contradictory new knowledge, as is apparent in *Enūma Anu Enlil* where omens for non-occurring phenomena are retained) runs counter to what Goody and Watt predict of written tradition in literate societies, namely, the inevitable re-evaluation and revision of older tradition under “a much more conscious, comparative and critical attitude to the accepted world picture, and notably to the notions of God, the universe and the past.”²⁷ According to their analysis of attitudes toward the past in non-literate and literate societies, non-literate societies develop neither criticism nor scepticism of their traditions. The past, being orally transmitted, is continually in concord with the present by means of an “unobtrusive adaptation of past tradition to present needs.”²⁸ Conversely, when the past assumes a frozen written form, the discord between past and present finds its resolution through a new and active criticism which can then reject or revise old tradition in accordance with the growth of knowledge.

Mesopotamian material offers a wholly different configuration which cannot be easily fitted into the binary scheme proposed by Goody and Watt.²⁹ Mesopotamia is distinguished by its extensive written tradition whose primary validity was precisely that it recorded traditions originating in the distant past and preserved for present and future generations of scribes the language and culture of their forebears. The continuing validity of the divination corpus, determined by the fact that it represented a record of celestial (or terrestrial) “occurrences” and correlations in terms of mundane events made in the past, illustrates this point.

26. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977), and also Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in J. R. Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968) pp. 27-68.

27. Goody and Watt in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* p. 48.

28. Goody and Watt in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* p. 48.

29. Goody and Watt recognize the problem of fitting the Mesopotamian material into their scheme, but attribute the difficulty not to a difference in that civilization’s attitude toward tradition as such, which would be more to the point, but rather to the fact that the sheer difficulty of writing cuneiform restricted literacy to a learned elite which held the effects of literacy (as they predict them) to a minimum. In their view, the conservative force of the literati (the “oligoliterate,” p. 36) and the particular character of logographic cuneiform (which they incorrectly describe as a writing system that primarily symbolizes objects rather than speech) are what account for the limited effects of literacy in the ancient Near East. See Goody and Watt, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* pp. 36ff.

3. *Authority and Authorship*

Although the serialization of Akkadian literary and omen texts is evident from colophons and catalogs, and a relative standardization is apparent in the duplicate copies of these same genres made over centuries, the process of formulation of such texts into an authoritative body of works, a binding canon, *stricto sensu*, is not at all evident. Lambert found in the cuneiform scribal tradition “no suggestion of a systematic selection of literary works, nor of a conscious attempt to produce authoritative works which were passed on,”³⁰ both of which are essential elements of canonization in its usual sense. Lambert also added that “the very word ‘canon’ is unfortunate in suggesting this kind of activity.”³¹ The question of the authoritative status of the texts is a thorny one because it involves two conditions for which we have no direct evidence: (1) on what basis would a text be considered authoritative, that is, does it embody the word of the divine, or some other officially approved source, and (2) what would the effect be of that text’s authoritative status, that is, would other texts be invalidated by it? We may add a third condition, which applies when the representative *iškaru* and *aḫū* sources for the lunar eclipse section of *Enūma Anu Enlil* are considered: (3) can evidence for a systematic demarcation between “authoritative” scholarly works and “non-authoritative” ones be construed in the terminology *iškaru* and *aḫū*?

A sense in which cuneiform texts can be said to have authoritative status derives from scribal conventions concerning authorship of texts. A literary catalog claims for *Enūma Anu Enlil* (as also for *alamdimmū*, *izbu*, and other omen series) authorship by the god Ea (*ša pi 4E[a]*).³² In that catalog of authors Ea is the only divine name that appears; it is listed first in the catalog, followed by the sage Adapa. The isolated example of explicit divine authorship derived, as Lambert suggests, from a kind of cosmological thinking regarding the relationship between the divine realm and the phenomenal world in which certain occurrences could be read as signs or divine warnings. The naming of a divine author of omen series can therefore be explained in terms of the ancient understanding of omens as a kind of divine language. If a deity was thought to produce signs to be interpreted by experts (as was Šamaš for liver omens), it follows that that deity could also be thought of as the author of omen literature. With regard

30. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 9.

31. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 9.

32. Lambert, “A Catalogue of Texts and Authors,” JCS 16 (1962) 64 I (K.2248):1-4.

to Ea, Lambert points out that this deity was frequently associated with esoteric knowledge as is shown by the ascription to him of incantation and ritual texts.³³ But divine authorship, placed as it is in the literary catalog in the context of legendary authors, human authors of great antiquity, and descendants of ancestral scribes, fits into a broader pattern of antiquity of authorship. The antiquity rather than the divinity of authorship clearly emerges as the important criterion for a text's authoritative status.

Another first millennium tradition, attested in scholia and colophons, attributed the origin of certain texts to the age of the antediluvian sages.³⁴ Lambert has drawn a connection between this form of the tradition or antiquity of authorship and Berossus' claim that the totality of all knowledge was revealed to and handed down by the antediluvian sages.³⁵ The distinction between the Babylonian placing the origin of certain texts with the sages of the distant days before the flood³⁶ and the latter more encompassing claim for the revealed character of esoteric knowledge found in Berossus should however be noted.

With regard to divination and especially *Enūma Anu Enlil*, a text edited by Lambert ascribes the revelation of oil, liver, and celestial divination by Šamaš and Adad to Enmeduranki, the antediluvian king of Sippar who in turn handed down his knowledge to the privileged men of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon.³⁷ The intent of this text, as Lambert indicates, is not to establish the revealed character of divination (in particular, of oil divination, liver divination, and the holding of the cedar-rod), but rather to establish a legitimacy to the line of learned masters (the expression LÚ.UM.ME.A *mūdū* is found in JCS 21 132:19) who instruct their "sons" in

33. Lambert, JCS 16 (1962) 72.

34. See the colophons discussed by Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 7-8; on the author Oannes-Adapa, see Lambert, JCS 16 (1962) 73-74; and see also Lambert, "Enmeduranki and Related Matters," JCS 21 (1967) 132f.

35. F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923-58) 3C1, 680F1, and see S. M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, SANE 1/5 (Malibu, 1978) 14 Bk.1.5, "From the time of that beast [Oannes] nothing further has been discovered." (Cf. Schnabel, *Berossus* p. 253.) The implication of this passage is not only that civilization was not the product of human history but followed from divine revelation, but also that, as Burstein put it (p. 7), "the beginning of history was also its end since everything thereafter could only be, and quite explicitly was, preservation, exegesis and application of that initial revelation to life." Put this way, the text amounts to a rationale for the formation of a "canon." Whether Berossus expressed something true for Mesopotamian attitudes toward tradition is still not clear.

36. See, for example, . . . *ba-ru-ti . . . ša pi apkallē labirūti ša lam abūbi*, "the craft of the *bārū* . . . according to the old sages from before the flood" (AMT 105:22), cited in Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 8.

37. Lambert, JCS 21 (1967) 132-33.

the divination and ritual lore imparted to Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, in the days before the Deluge.³⁸ A parallel to this derivation of learned literature from the antediluvian age is found in the colophon of a hemerology, where reference is made to “originals of Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, Larsa, Ur, Uruk, and Eridu.”³⁹ The interpretation of this unusual colophon is by no means transparent, but, following Lambert, it is not likely that the scribe had seven copies before him; rather, as Lambert said, “the seven originals of the Assur colophon are nothing but a deduction from the seven sages.”⁴⁰

The two traditions (if indeed they are established traditions rather than random trends in Babylonian scholia) that derive the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* from Ea in one text and from the revelation to an antediluvian king in another are not making a theological claim. By ascribing the series to a divine or legendary author, these traditions both simply attribute to the text the most ancient possible origin.⁴¹

No evidence links the traditions about authorship that suggest a correlation between antiquity and authority to the emergence of an official corpus of practical handbooks used by professional scholar-scribes. The reverse may in fact be true. The “catalog of texts and authors” is apparently the product of seventh-century scholarship,⁴² and, as we know from actual manuscript histories of specific texts and as is indicated by the scribal convention of ancestry, the creation of the official scholastic repertoire is considered to be the product of the mid- to late-second millennium. If a series (*iškaru*) had authoritative status by virtue of its place in the repertoire, that status was not the result of ascription of great antiquity to an author, but rather was a function of its representing a literary consensus produced by the scribal schools under the imprimatur of “the great organizations,” that is, temple or palace.⁴³

4. An *aḫû* text from *Enūma Anu Enlil*

The term *aḫû*, “extraneous” (written syllabically or BAR), appears to denote a classification primarily applicable to casuistic literature, and

38. Lambert, JCS 21 (1967) 127.

39. KAR 177 obv. iv 25 - rev. iv 3, see Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 8 and n. 31.

40. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 8.

41. See W. W. Hallo, “On the Antiquity of Sumerian Literature,” JAOS 88 (1968) 176, and IEJ 12 (1962) 16.

42. Lambert, JCS 16 (1962) 76.

43. See Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* pp. 95ff., where he coined the phrase “great institutions” and elucidated the institutions. See also Hallo, IEJ 12 (1962) 24-25.

more specifically to the so-called scientific texts, that is, divination and medicine. Evidence points to the existence of *ahû* collections of the celestial omens *Enūma Anu Enlil*, the terrestrial omens *ālu ina mēlê šakin*, the menology *iqqur ipuš*, the physiognomic omens *alamdimmá*, the teratological omens *izbu*, as well as medical prescriptions.⁴⁴ The term is also applied to tablets in the lexical series and is found in a catalog of Sumerian liturgical texts where a number of balag's have the qualification *ahû*.⁴⁵ The term *ahû* has been understood to mean "non-canonical" in the context of omens not belonging to the *iškaru*, or official, series, an interpretation that has contributed greatly to the view that something like a selective or authoritative canonical tradition existed for omen texts. Another indication that such a distinction was made between official texts and texts falling outside that category comes from the fact that the scribes occasionally referred to texts of the *iškaru* as "good" (*damqu*) in contrast to "extraneous" (*ahû*), meaning extrinsic to the *iškaru*.⁴⁶

The relationship between the two classifications *iškaru* and *ahû* of *Enūma Anu Enlil* may be examined using two representative groups of texts from each. The assumed 29th *ahû* text⁴⁷ is to my knowledge the only nearly complete *ahû* text preserved from *Enūma Anu Enlil*. The identification of this tablet as "*ahû*" was originally made by Weidner, who connected six sources (five of which were joins, the sixth a duplicate) from the library of Assurbanipal with the last incipit in the Assur catalog of *Enūma Anu Enlil* that designated the tablet as the 29th in a series of IM.GĪD.DA.MEŠ BAR.MEŠ.⁴⁸ Whether the tablet identified itself as *ahû* cannot be established because neither subscript nor colophon is preserved.

The assumed 29th *ahû* tablet contains lunar eclipse omens that compare in an interesting way with those of the official edition of *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 15-22.⁴⁹ The general thematic elements of the protases made up of the characteristic phenomena of a lunar eclipse are shared by the *ahû* text and the *iškaru* version of tablets 15-22. These are elements such as the date,

44. Boissier DA 105:39 (*ālu*); RA 28 136 (Rm.150):13f., see Lambert in Kramer AV p. 314 (*iqqur ipuš*); Kraus Texte 64 rev. 6, 23 rev. 8, and 24 rev. 14 (physiognomic omens); CT 27 49 K.4031 rev. 15, CT 28 3:17, CT 28 4:12, CT 28 32 rev. 7, see Leichty Izbu p. 199 (*izbu*); Streck Asb. 370 q 4, also Hunger Kolophone No. 329 (medical).

45. 4R 53 i 34ff., and see Civil, MSL 14 168.

46. See ABL 453 rev. 14 and ABL 13:25.

47. See F. Rochberg-Halton in Studies Reiner.

48. Weidner, AfO 14 (1941-44) 185f.

49. F. Rochberg-Halton, "The Treatment of Lunar Eclipses in Babylonian Celestial Divination" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1980).

the time, the color, and the direction of the eclipse shadow, as well as frequently the prevailing wind at the time of the eclipse occurrence. While these thematic elements are shared by the two traditions, the particular phenomena possible under each general theme (for example, the particular day of the month, or the particular color of the eclipsed moon) are not shared. In fact, little or no overlap can be demonstrated between the content of the official lunar eclipse series and that of the *ahû* version. The *ahû* tradition, therefore, seems to be unusual with respect to its content, whereas its organizing principles, manifest in the arrangement of the protases, correspond with those of *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 15-22, taken as a group.

A brief enumeration of some of the discrepancies between the two traditions will suffice here.⁵⁰ The days of the month given for the occurrence of an eclipse in the standard lunar eclipse omen texts comprise a fixed schema, which includes days 14, 15, 16, 20, and 21. This sequence was so rooted in the tradition that the Hittite lunar eclipse omens show the same schematic sequence of days.⁵¹ The traditional character of the schema can be the only explanation for the borrowing of a sequence of days that is otherwise inexplicable from the point of view of astronomy, days 20 and 21 being impossible for the opposition of sun and moon. The *ahû* text diverges from this widespread tradition in having omens primarily for eclipses of the 12th and 13th days, with the 14th sometimes given as a variant; all of these are theoretically possible days for an eclipse, the actual span being the 12th through the 15th day.

Another departure from the official tradition can be seen in the omens for the color of the eclipsed moon. The sequence of colors in the standard series is representative of an even more inclusive tradition than that represented by the eclipse days. The particular color schema—white, black, red, and yellow—can be found in other omen series as well.⁵² It is clear again that observationally valid characteristics of lunar eclipses were not the only variables included within the protases of *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Rather, the schemata and phraseology common to the omen tradition as a whole made their imprint in the standard texts of various series within the tradition. In the *ahû* text only part of the color sequence just described

50. See F. Rochberger-Halton in *Studies Reiner*.

51. See KUB 8 4; KBo 8 47; JCS 24 (1972) 175 no. 75; KUB 8 1; KBo 13 18; KBo 13 15; KBo 34 7; KUB 8 5; also KBo 13 14 (+) 16 (+?) KUB 8 7, see Laroche, CTH 532 II. An excerpt text with omens for *šumma ālu* combined with celestial omens may be added to these sources; see H. G. Güterbock, AfO 18 (1957-58) 80 iv 4-12.

52. See Leichty *Izbu* 67:13-15; 189:59'-63'; 196 (K.13443):3-6; CT 38 10:28, 11:29ff.

occurs,⁵³ but in addition the *ahû* text contains an otherwise unattested way of describing the darkness of the eclipsed moon. The moon is said to be dark, using the word *da²mu*, written MÚD, and is further qualified as appearing like sulphur fire, or like lapis lazuli, or like smoke, or like a cloud.⁵⁴ This is expressed as *panūšu kīma kibriti* MÚD, “its features are dark like sulphur fire,” and similarly for the other comparisons, lapis lazuli, etc. Note that sulphur fire, lapis lazuli, smoke, and clouds are described as “dark” even though we associate at least lapis and sulphur fire and, frequently, smoke with the color blue. This fully corroborates what has been well-known ever since Landsberger’s “Über Farben,” that no differentiation of and consequently no word for the color blue exists in the Akkadian lexicon.⁵⁵

Lastly, the *ahû* text presents its own unique formulation with regard to the direction of the movement of the eclipse shadow. The stock phrase in *Enūma Anu Enlil* is simply “in direction x it begins and in direction y it clears” (*ina* IM_x SAR-*ma* *ina* IM_{x2} ZALAG₂), where SAR (*šurrú*) and ZALAG₂ (*namāru*) are the technical terms for the beginning and clearing of the eclipse.⁵⁶ The *ahû* text on the other hand uses the verb *arāmu*, “to cover,” in the following statement: “the eclipse covered the moon in direction x and it cleared as it covered” (*ana* IM_x *irīmma* *kī* *irīmu* *izku*).⁵⁷ The use of the verb *arāmu* as a technical term for “to eclipse” or “occur” is to my knowledge not attested elsewhere in omen texts, but appears in late astronomical texts, where it is written ŠŪ, or syllabically as *a-rim*.⁵⁸

5. *Iškaru* and *ahû*, canonical and non-canonical?

Once we have established that the *ahû* material constitutes a genuinely separate tradition from that of the Neo-Assyrian standard series (*iškaru*), and we do not know how generalizable the evidence from this one segment of *Enūma Anu Enlil* might be, we need to know how the *ahû* texts fit into the scribal tradition as a whole and in what relation they were to the

53. The formula is IGI.MEŠ-šú SA₃.MEŠ (MI.ME, SIG₇.ME), “its features (*panūšu*) are red (black, yellow),” see K.3563+:36, 40, rev. 7, rev. 25 in my edition (see F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*). Note the alternate reading for IGI.MEŠ : *nanmuršu*, “its appearance,” written syllabically in the Assur catalog, AfO 14 (1941-44) 185 ii 4.

54. K.3563+:2, 48, 60, rev. 12, 20 (see F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*).

55. B. Landsberger, “Über Farben in sumerisch-akkadischen,” JCS 21 (1967) 139 and n. 7.

56. For example throughout *Enūma Anu Enlil* 15, see Bab. 3 280 and AfO 17 (1954-56) 71f. (VAT 9803); cf. AfO 17 81 (VAT 9740+11670) rev. ii 5-8 (= *Enūma Anu Enlil* 20).

57. K.3563+:23, 30f., 54, rev. 8, 18f., 29f. (see F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*).

58. See LBAT 1251 rev. 24 (goal-year text) and LBAT 1448:7 (eclipse report).

iškaru. In the absence of additional *aḫû* sources which might be compared against their corresponding *iškaru* texts it is impossible to answer these questions satisfactorily.⁵⁹ Neither is it possible by means of the lunar eclipse omen texts, both *aḫû* and *iškaru*, to determine (1) whether the *aḫû* classification preserves material which had been consciously separated or excluded from the main series; or (2) whether it simply represents an alternate tradition, not in competition with the *iškaru* for validity or acceptance; or (3) whether it forms a subsidiary of the *iškaru*, thereby indicating some hierarchical division within the divination corpus into main text and offshoots.

That the “29th *aḫû* tablet” of *Enūma Anu Enlil* was an official part of the scribal repertoire can be seen from the fact that duplicates were made and its incipit was entered into an official catalog of omen tablets from Assur which included both *Enūma Anu Enlil* and its *aḫû* tablets side by side.⁶⁰ The extant copy was made from yet another tablet, as the occurrence several times of *ḫīpi* and *ḫīpi eššu* makes clear.⁶¹ If evidence for standardization includes, in addition to the relatively fixed form of the Neo-Assyrian recensions, the division and serialization into tablets (*tuppu*), then the *aḫû* classification appears equally to be a standardized product of the editorial process that produced the official series *Enūma Anu Enlil*.

If we consider the lunar eclipse *aḫû* text to be representative, its content is distinguishable from that of the series proper. The Assur catalog lists 29 tablets classified as *aḫû* in *Enūma Anu Enlil* and indicates that the order of the *aḫû* tablets was fixed. Texts classified as *aḫû* were obviously transmitted in the same way as were other omen tablets. Even though direct evidence for the editorial classification process is unknown (for example, whether selection or rejection of texts was involved) since only the end products and not the intermediary stages are extant, the *aḫû* texts must represent an integral part of the scribal tradition, as their stabilization and serialization suggest. While the *aḫû* texts may indeed have been considered extrinsic to the more widely circulating *iškaru*, they were

59. For some fragments of *aḫû* texts from the *izbu* series, see the three excerpt texts in Leichty *Izbu* pp. 198f.

60. For this catalog, which included incipits from both *Enūma Anu Enlil* and *šumma ālu*, see Weidner's comments in AfO 11 (1936-37) 360 and also in AfO 14 (1941-44) 185. The first line of the assumed 29th *aḫû* text differs from the incipit quoted in the Assur catalog in that the verb of the protasis is written with the logogram TAB (= *ḫamāṭu*). See my edition (cited F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*), note to line 1 of the text.

61. K.3563+21, 25, rev. 19, 21ff. (see F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*).

clearly not excluded from the stream of tradition as a whole. The *ahû* material was neither subsumed under nor superseded by the official edition of *Enūma Anu Enlil*.

Subscripts of tablets containing *ahû* omens frequently state that the *ahû* omens derive from a *ṭuppu šanūmma*, “a second tablet” or “another tablet,” written either DUB 2(.KAM) or DUB MAN.⁶² Parpola has interpreted the designation *ṭuppu šanūmma* as a technical term (meaning “secondary” or “alternate” tablet) for tablets containing *ahû* omens,⁶³ the implication being that *ahû* material was considered to be different from that of the series proper and was maintained as a distinct collection on separate tablets. This possibility was also considered by Weidner in his study of *Enūma Anu Enlil*.⁶⁴ It is clear that extraneous lines could be inserted within a “canonical” framework, as is illustrated by the following subscript and catch line⁶⁵: 29 MU.MEŠ *a-bu-ti šá ina ŠĀ ṭup-pí šá-nim-ma in-nam-ru-ma* [. . .] DIŠ MUL.*Dil-bat ina ITI.BARA₂ IGI EBUR KUR GÁL-ši KIMIN SI.SÁ DUB 57.KAM UD.AN.*⁶⁶ *En-lil*, “29 extraneous omens which are found on a second tablet; (catch:) ‘If Venus appears in Nisannu there will be a harvest of the land, var.: it will thrive’; 57th tablet of *Enūma Anu Enlil*.” the subscript identifies the text as containing lines from another (a second) tablet, but the catch line shows that the next work in the series is the 59th tablet of *Enūma Anu Enlil*.⁶⁶ In another example an otherwise “canonical” copy of *Enūma Anu Enlil* astral omens has two *ahû* omens inserted between rulings. These two lines are designated immediately following the second apodosis as 2 MU šá ŠĀ DUB MAN-*i*, “two lines from another tablet.”⁶⁷ In a third case, *ṭuppu šanūmma* is found in the subscript of an excerpt tablet of astral omens: 12 MU.MEŠ BAR.BAR ša KA DUB MAN-*ma*, “12 extraneous omens according to the wording of

62. Weidner, AfO 14 (1941-44) 183ff., and compare Parpola, LAS 2 348 n. 641. The two adjectives *šanú* I (written 2.KAM(.MA)) and *šanú* II (written MAN) in AHw 3 1164b-1165a are combined in a single lexeme in CAD Š s.v. *šanú* adj., with the meaning *inter alia* “second (of two or more), something else, another.”

63. Parpola, LAS 2 348 n. 641.

64. Weidner, AfO 14 (1941-44) 184.

65. ACh Istar 23:31-33.

66. The tablet numbers are frequently one (or two) number(s) off in copies of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, since several systems of numbering this series were in existence. For example, it is apparent from the subscript of a commentary tablet that *Enūma Anu Enlil* had 70 tablets, while a source identified with this “70th” tablet bears the number 68 in its subscript. I have followed the edition of Reiner and Pingree in identifying the cited catch line as that of *Enūma Anu Enlil* 59, for which see Babylonian Planetary Omens 2 23.

67. K.3107:4, see CAD Š s.v. *šanú* adj. mng. 1.

another tablet.”⁶⁸ Since no other subscripts are preserved on that tablet, it is not clear whether the omens excerpted in other ruled sections of this same tablet are also from *ahû* collections or whether the lines referred to in the subscript are the only extraneous lines inserted within an otherwise normal collection of omens from *Enûma Anu Enlil* proper.

Whether the adjective *šanû* has the force of a technical term when applied to *tuppu* is not certain. Evidence may be adduced that this designation is not necessarily always associated with *ahû* material, but is in fact parallel to expressions like the following *wîltu šanîtu anassaḫa*, “I will excerpt a second tablet” (Thompson Rep. 188 rev. 4) and *tuppam ša-ni-e-am nippuṣ*, “we will draw up another tablet” (KBo 15 iv 28).⁶⁹ The frequent appearance of the term in subscripts identifying *ahû* lines, however, underscores the separation between the traditions of “canonical” and “extraneous” omens.

By virtue of their place as an integral part of the composite scribal tradition, the *ahû* texts may have carried the same “authoritative” status as those of the *iškaru*. Authority was perhaps after all chiefly a matter of official endorsement, while the scribal tradition concerning antiquity of authorship may have been an outgrowth of the institution of scribal scholarship itself. Apparently the approval of the king was required for preparation of new copies of series for the Neo-Assyrian library at Nineveh.⁷⁰ A revised edition of LAS 331 written by the scribe Akkullānu to Assurbanipal shows, despite its fragmentary condition, that the scholar who was to inscribe the new edition of the omen series (title of the series referred to is broken in obv. 2) checked with the king for approval of the material to be included and asked whether the *ahû* tablets ([DUB.MEŠ *a-b*] *u-ú-ti*, obv. 3) were to be written on another tablet, a *tuppu šanûmma*.⁷¹ That there should be a question of whether to separate the *ahû* omens or not suggests relatively little difference in terms of their legitimate standing in the repertoire.⁷² Nor were they deemed unworthy of commentary, as is shown by the few glosses on one exemplar of the *ahû* text referred to above.⁷³ At least in the case of the *iškaru Enûma Anu Enlil* and its related *ahû* tradition, we have no evidence for a selection process that eliminated

68. ACh Supp. 2 68 rev. 16. Cf. *ša pî tuppi* MAN-i, ACh Sin 19:15 (coll.).

69. Compare also (introducing another *Enûma Anu Enlil* commentary) *ša pî ummāni 2-e*, “according to another scholar,” K.11092+ ii 28, cited CAD Š s.v. *šanû* adj. mng. 1 b 1'-a'.

70. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* p. 244 and n. 22.

71. Parpola, LAS 331 rev. 3-5, see revised transliteration in LAS 2 513.

72. See Parpola LAS 2 348, commentary to lines rev. 3ff.

73. K.3563+56 and rev. 7 (see F. Rochberg-Halton in *Studies Reiner*).

the *abû* material as unacceptable or not useful. The references to *abû* texts of other omen series also show them to be on an equal footing with the official editions and merely provide additional or simply different material.⁷⁴

Since no categorical separation between the two groups of texts designated *iskaru* and *abû*, respectively, can be detected in terms either of standardization or authority, the distinction between the two looks less like one between traditionally conceived “canonical” and “non-canonical” texts and more like the reflection of a thorough and systematic typology of distinct classes of texts within the corpus of scholarly divination and therefore also within the “stream of tradition” in general. The distinction between *iskaru* and *abû* texts seems to be based upon the particular content of these texts, that is, the content of the *abû* texts, judging by our exemplar the “29th *abû* tablet of *Enūma Anu Enlil*,” seems not to be exactly duplicated in any tablet from the main series. The content of these texts is then simply extrinsic to the main series, as the designation implies. Where this extrinsic material came from, how it entered the repertoire, and why it was never directly incorporated into the series proper are unanswerable questions. The distinction between the two classes of texts is perhaps more subtle than presently available evidence would allow us to perceive.

Whether the designation “canon,” broadly conceived, is appropriate to this corpus as a whole is arguable up to a point, but clearly the nature of the Babylonian “canon” is unique and not definable in terms of any other known model, least of all the biblical one. An historical process of editing and redacting texts is demonstrable for cuneiform scholarly divination, but evidence for selectivity and an interest in producing authoritative and immutable texts characteristic of the biblical canonization process is lacking. The aspect of the “canonicity” of cuneiform texts that concerns antiquity of authorship simply points to the high regard for traditions of scholarship which the scholars themselves traced back to the sages of the time before the legendary Flood. This absolutely contrasts with the particular doctrinal aspect of canonicity in the Old and New Testaments which concerns theological claims about the origin, sacredness, authority, and inspirational nature of that canonized literature.

74. See note 44 above.