



George, A. R.

Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection

Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology

Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2009. Pp. xx + 170 + 63 plates.
Hardcover. \$80.00. ISBN 1934309095.

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The present book is the fourth volume in the ongoing publication of the cuneiform tablets in the Schøyen manuscript collection.¹ In 190 pages of text (xx + 170) and 63 plates, Andrew George offers editions of nineteen different texts written on twenty-one tablets in Old Babylonian Akkadian. The overwhelming majority of these texts are from “literary” genres (epic, myth, prayer, incantation, instruction, or riddle). The four exceptions, a diplomatic letter and three texts probably used for scribal training, show significant affinities with literary texts and were included in the volume because they have “much to tell us about literary creativity in Akkadian” (xv). The tablets published here add new witnesses to well-known works (e.g., the *Gilgameš Epic* and *Atram-ḫasīs*) but also reveal many previously unknown compositions. Anyone interested in Akkadian literary and intellectual history will want to study this volume carefully. It adds significantly to the rather sparsely populated Old Babylonian Akkadian literary corpus² and provides new

1. See Jöran Friberg, *A Remarkable Collection of Babylonian Mathematical Texts* (Sources and Studies in the History of Mathematics and Physical Sciences; New York: Springer, 2007); Bendt Alster, *Sumerian Proverbs in the Schøyen Collection* (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 2; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2007); and Stephanie Dalley, *Babylonian Tablets from the First Sealand Dynasty in the Schøyen Collection* (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 9; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2009) for the previous three installments. Several more volumes are expected.

2. See Nathan Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts* (Cuneiform Monographs 27; Köln: Styx; Leiden: Brill, 2003) for the most recent treatment of all known texts, including many not traditionally considered “literary,” such as incantations.

insight into several aspects of scribal-intellectual culture. Biblical scholars, especially those interested in mythology, Song of Songs in its broader cultural context, and ancient scribalism, will find several points of comparative interest here.

Martin Schøyen provides a brief “Statement of Provenance (Ownership History)” at the beginning of the volume. In little more than a page Schøyen states that he bought the tablets in his collection from seventeen different private sources and two auction houses during the “late 1980s and 1990s” (vii). He hints at some complex genealogies of ownership but does not give details. He also more or less affirms that all of the tablets in the present volume lack a proper and specific archaeological provenience. Given its defensive tone (see also the series editor’s preface [ix]), it is clear that this statement is a response to some archaeological societies’ strong policies against publishing artifacts lacking provenience or acquired from antiquities dealers.³ Whatever one’s position on this complex ethical issue, everyone, I think, will agree that the tablets published in the volume add important new material to the OB Akkadian literary corpus.

In a very brief general introduction (xv–xvi), George categorizes the nineteen texts in the volume under four broad formal headings: narrative poetry (texts 1–6), praise poetry (text 7), love poetry and related compositions (texts 8–12), and prose (texts 13–19). These headings are merely “a pragmatic typology” that deliberately sets up a “distinction between poetry and prose, which is perhaps not given enough consideration in the study of ancient Mesopotamian literature” (xv). A catalog of texts (xvii) follows the introduction and then two tables that concord each tablet’s text edition number with both its Schøyen collection number as well as its CDLI number (xix).⁴ The latter, as I explain below, will prove invaluable to the advanced researcher.

In the remainder of the book George gives an edition of the nineteen texts. In each treatment George offers extensive introductory remarks, transliteration of each tablet, a translation, philological notes, and commentary that deals with topics pertinent to the text’s content. Non-Assyriologists will find this publication format very accessible, compared to some series that simply reproduce hand copies of tablets. The textual treatments shine with the kind of philological erudition that we have come to expect from

3. See, e.g., the policies of the American Institute of Archaeology (<http://www.archaeological.org/about/policies>) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (<http://www.bu.edu/asor/excavations/policy.html>), though note that the latter has made a qualified exception for looted tablets from Iraq (<http://www.bu.edu/asor/excavations/textpolicy.html>).

4. George’s text edition number = CDLI number: 1 = P251785; 2 = P254176; 3 = P252009; 4 = P251680; 5 = P252031; 6 (frag. 1) = P387696; 6 (frags. 2–21) = P388113–P388132; 7 = P250735; 8 = P251898; 9 = P254179; 10 = P252226; 11 = P252006; 12 = P252332; 13 = P251711; 14 = P251668; 15 = P252243; 16 = P252199; 17 (MS A) = P252200; 17 (MS B) = P252201; 17 (MS C) = P252202; 18 = P253613; 19 = P253038.

George.⁵ Though there is still much work to be done on these texts and many new readings will inevitably be proposed, George has put these tablets on a firm foundation upon which others will surely build.

Several plates in the back of the book are associated with each treatment. These present both good quality black and white photographs of the tablets as well as George's artfully executed hand copies. Except for the plates associated with texts 7–9 and 14–15, a photograph and its corresponding hand copy occupy facing pages, making comparison convenient. George mentions on page xix that the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (<http://cdli.ucla.edu/>) offers color digital photographs of all the tablets published in the book. Inspection of the CDLI photos shows that, although mostly reproductions of the photos used in the book, they often provide “detail” shots of the tablets and include more photos of the tablets' edges. Moreover, the photos are much larger than the ones in the book and can easily be manipulated with a photo editing program. For a dramatic example, one might compare the CDLI composite photo of text 14 (<http://www.cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P251668.jpg>) with plates XXXVIII and XLIII in the book. There is little doubt that advanced researchers will want to consult the digital images at CDLI rather than the photos in the book's plates.⁶

A detailed assessment of and interaction with each text edition would further inflate this book review beyond the typical parameters of the genre and, in any case, probably not serve the interests of most readers of *RBL*. Instead, I provide the following summaries of the texts and offer selected annotations, the length of which will vary according to my interest in particular texts.

George begins the “narrative poetry” category with the “Song of Bazi” (text 1). This text of fifty-eight lines is a new mythological account of a ram-god/divine herder called Bazi. Bazi grows up, according to the opening lines of the text, and seeks from Enki, his father, his own cult center over which he may rule as king. Enki grants him a cult center on “the mountain Šaššār and Bašār” (l. 16), which George shows was located in Syria. Bazi “smote the mountain, opened wide the terrain” (l. 23), and then created his residence, from which “waters flowed forth” (l. 24), “half were life, half were death” (l. 29a). As George recognizes, the water flowing from a god's temple recalls Rev 22:1 (4), but one might more readily compare it with Ezek 47:1–12. Bazi also seems to encounter some

5. See his earlier *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (OLA 40; Leuven: Peeters, 1992); *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 5; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993); and his monumental *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

6. To find a tablet from this edition in the CDLI database, simply type its CDLI number into the appropriate line on the form at this link: <http://www.cdli.ucla.edu/cdlisearch/search/>.

opposition from local princes, whom he dispatches via goring (ll. 38–38a). The remainder of the text, as far as it is legible, describes Bazi’s new abode.

As George notes, the broad outline of this brief myth is comparable to *Enūma eliš* (1). Also of interest is the fact that, although a divine Bazi from Mari is mentioned in the Sumerian king list and other traditions, this text makes Bazi a son of Enki, providing further support for an Enki-Ea connection with the Syrian highland (12–14). Finally, taking a cue from the subscript on the tablet, which reads “The [song(?) of] Bazi, which is sung when the people go up [on] the day of [...],” George plausibly interprets the text as “a symbolic myth of transhumance that transfers to the divine plane an annual event of Babylonian life, in which a vast throng of flocks and herders left the cities for extended stays in remote grazing grounds” (15). He suggests that the myth could have been performed publicly at a festival celebrating the occasion. If this is correct, we have here a clear OB reference to a public recitation of a myth.

On a more critical note, in a section entitled “The Numinous Mountain” George attempts to identify the mountain Šaššār and Bašār with a more precise location in Syria. Taking the text rather literally, he considers various locations that he imagines would have seemed “numinous” to the ancients. After some deliberation, he suggests the Al-Qawm basin as “an attractive location” (13). Aside from the questionable idea to take the text literally, the methodological assumption that we can imagine what the ancients found “numinous” and then use this imaginative data for historical purposes is highly problematic—an example of Rudolph Otto’s continued and unfortunate influence on Assyriology, fully ensconced since Thorkild Jacobsen’s appeal to him in his introduction to *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). This quasi-theological and romantic model for positing the origins of gods, sanctuaries, and other supra-human powers/beings is recognized as seriously flawed by scholars of religion. We would do well to abandon it in matters Assyriological.

Texts 2–6 provide new witnesses to well-known texts. Texts 2–3 preserve lines from the *Atram-ḫasīs* myth, filling in lacunae but also offering significant variations from previously known versions of the myth. According to George’s estimation, text 2 is now the oldest extant witness of the myth. Texts 4–6 attest portions of the *Gilgameš Epic*, the first two of which were already worked into George’s edition of the epic. Notably, however, text 5 has been cleaned since the publication of the edition and has permitted George to make several improved readings of an OB version of Gilgameš and Enkidu’s approach to the cedar forest (including two of Gilgameš’s dreams). Also pertaining to Gilgameš and Enkidu’s journey to the cedar forest, text 6 treats the eight most legible of

twenty inscribed fragments that (probably) derive from the same original tablet. George designates this group of fragments “OB Gilg Schøyen₃.”

The only text categorized as “praise poetry” is text 7, “A Song in Praise of Ningišzida.” Although clearly hymnic, its twenty-four lines also preserve some mythological allusions that relate to the establishment of the deity’s cult-center in Enegi (written *e-ne* -IG in l. 23 but without comment in the notes).

In the category of “love poetry and related compositions,” George gives editions of five new works, adding substantially to a rather small corpus. Biblical scholars interested in comparative perspectives on Song of Songs will welcome the opportunity to study several of these new compositions.

Text 8, “Oh Girl, Whoopee!” is a short poem of twenty-three lines spoken by a boy who has fallen head-over-heels in love with a girl; unfortunately, his mother disapproves. Using imagery reminiscent of Song of Songs, he waxes eloquent about the girl and his love for her. Then about halfway through the text he recounts a dream that seems to describe the boy’s transformation from despondency to elation via love. He awakens near the text’s conclusion and in the final line proclaims, “The Love [Charm] had come back into my heart!” The Akkadian word for “Love Charm” here, *irimum*, is understood as further evidence of “the Babylonian Cupid” (53).⁷

Text 9, “I Shall Be a Slave to You,” is a complete poem of thirty-six lines spoken by a woman—rare in Akkadian love poetry—who, consumed by her passion for a man, offers herself to him as a slave (*a-ma-[tu] e-li-k[a]*, l. 21). Unfortunately, the tablet’s surface is broken or abraded in places, and the writing contains some scribal complexities and infelicities, all of which make reading the tablet quite difficult. George himself understandably characterizes his edition as “highly provisional” (54).

Text 10, “A Field Full of Salt,” though sharing two stanzas of text with “The Faithful Lover” (60),⁸ is actually a misogynistic diatribe spoken by a man to the lover he is dumping (see *huṣbī ezbi*, “break off,⁹ leave!,” l. 9). Text 11 is a sixteen-line love incantation called “May She Throw Herself at Me! A Love Incantation,”¹⁰ and text 12, according to

7. See previously J. G. Westenholz and A. Westenholz, “Help for Rejected Suitors: The Old Akkadian Love Incantation MAD V 8,” *Or* 46 (1977): 198–219, specifically 205–7.

8. For a recent English translation, see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2005), 155–59.

9. If George’s decipherment and translation are correct, this is the first metaphorical usage of the verb *ḥaṣābu*, which usually refers to the cutting or breaking of reeds (see *CAD* H, 129).

10. The presence of the phrase *šiptum ul yattu* at the end of this nonmedical OB love incantation requires a modification to my suggestion that the very few exceptional uses of this phrase (i.e., those in nonexorcistic incantations

George's understanding, is probably a combination of poetic incipits (ll. 1–14, the first ten of which are love/sex-related) and “perhaps proverbs, riddles, or other sayings,” some of which contain erotic language. George characterizes his edition of this latter, quite obscure, material as “highly provisional” (71).

In a final category, “Prose,” George offers editions of seven new texts (texts 13–19). Five of these are treated briefly; two, texts 14 and 17, together occupy 65 of the 156 text edition pages (157–70 contain the bibliography). I will consider these after the five brief editions.

Text 13 is a short, fragmentary prayer of eleven extant lines directed to Ištar as Venus. Curiously, the lines begin on the obverse, continue around the tablet's edge, and end on the reverse. Another interesting feature of this text is its preservation of an early speculative etymology, “a tool for revealing the characteristics immanent in a divine personality” (76) used very frequently in first-millennium texts. Ištar is called *sinništum*, “woman,” in the opening line. But this word is spelled rather unusually: ^dZUEN-*ni-iš-tu-um*. This suggests the scribe intended to interpret the epithet as comprised of *Sîn*, the moon god and father of Ištar, and *nēštum*, “lioness,” the animal associated with the goddess.

Text 15 is a letter of sixty-three lines from a certain *Sîn-muballiṭ*, servant to Rim-Sîn of Larsa, to an unknown addressee (not preserved). The content of the letter leads George to identify the addressee, however, as a vassal ruler who has displeased Rim-Sîn (113). This political/diplomatic letter is unusual in that it “displays highly literary vocabulary and style” (113) and is written in “highly elevated prose” (117), which is why George included it in the volume. In his commentary, he distinguishes between a normal prosaic discourse in the text and “versified passages” (117) that use the normal word order of prose (e.g., verbs are always final) but also display parallelism and other typical features of Babylonian verse. Using this text as a foil, George provides a brief but engaging exposition of prose versus poetry and adds to the ongoing discussion of “verse in prose” as a literary analytical category (118–19).

Text 16 is a boy's *ze'pum* letter to his father, written in fifteen very short lines. George thinks it probably functioned as a literary model for scribal students.

or prayers) occur only in texts “of a relatively late date.” See Alan Lenzi, “*Šiptu ul Yuttun*: Some Reflections on a Closing Formula in Akkadian Incantations,” in *Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Jewish Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch* (ed. Jeffrey Stackert, Barbara Nevling Porter, and David P. Wright; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2010), 131–66, specifically 159–60. This one OB example shows that earlier nonexorcistic incantations, though still quite the exception, utilized this phrase to enhance ritual power via assertion of a divine origin.

Text 18 is an unfinished tablet of twenty-five legible lines, which provides a glimpse into OB academic legal composition. It preserves a date formula, written at both the beginning and end of the text, and several legal prescriptions dealing with property. The repeated date formula and the fact that the scribe abandoned the tablet a few signs into its last line lead George to identify this text as a scribal exercise.

Text 19 bears eight lines of cuneiform that form what George believes are two riddles. They are, as often is the case with ancient Mesopotamian riddles, quite obscure.

Text 17, “The Tribulations of Gimil-Marduk,” is part of an archive from Dūr-Abiešuḫ.¹¹ Preserved in three manuscripts in the Schøyen collection, George identifies this text as a model court document used in scribal education. The document’s ninety-eight lines record the legal case of one Gimil-Marduk, whose legal problems stretch over the course of forty-seven years! At the beginning of the document Gimil-Marduk appeals to a certain Awil-Nabi’um, the *šukallum* of Nippur. According to Gimil-Marduk’s testimony, he had been mistreated both at the hands of relatives (beaten twice and denied access to a prebend rightfully his) as well as the officials of Nippur (denied legal redress twice) and then later was denied justice on a legal technicality by officials at Dūr-Abiešuḫ. The present document establishes his case and resolves this long-standing, complicated miscarriage of justice, showing along the way the role of witnesses, the convening of a city assembly for establishing justice, and the use of a divine emblem (by which Gimil-Marduk seems to swear) in legal procedure.

The three manuscripts preserve a number of variants, including expansions and significant confusion among the ancestries of those involved in the dispute. In order to sort through these, George offers a score of the exemplars on pages 129–35.

In his commentary to the text, George provides an introductory discussion of model court documents and identifies what he believes are anachronisms in this particular example. In light of the latter, George entertains the possibility that the document is a fictional account, the product of a “pedagogical exercise, in which a teacher of law required his pupil to compose a convincing and ostensibly authentic court document on the paradigmatic theme of the Uncle who Stole his Nephew’s Inheritance,” which later “became adopted as a model ... and entered the scribal tradition” (146). He proposes that this may be true of all model court documents and sets this idea in the context of several examples of ancient Near Eastern folkloric texts, including the Poor Man of Nippur (146–48). His interpretation is subtle and will not convince all, but George offers a very

11. George devotes a substantial section of his commentary to locating Dūr-Abiešuḫ and establishing the archival historical context (see 136–42). If George’s reconstruction is correct, previous ideas about the time of the abandonment of OB Nippur will need modification.

thought-provoking line of interpretation, grounded in the details of the text, and will no doubt influence future work on model court documents. The remainder of his commentary explores the possible implications of this text for intellectual, legal, and juridical history.

Text 14, “The Scholars of Uruk,” is a very curious text in both language and content. The only bilingual text in the volume, it contains 126 lines that alternate between a line of the Sumerian “original” and a slightly indented line of the Akkadian “translation.”¹² But one need not read far before realizing the Sumerian “original” is not normal Sumerian at all but a learned, obtuse, retroversion-translation Sumerian based on the original Akkadian “translation” of the poem. In other words, the poem’s Akkadian text was translated into very obscure, academic Sumerian but arranged on the tablet in such a way so as to hide this fact.

In the notes to the text (89–104), George thoroughly examines the Sumerian-Akkadian equivalencies—many of which are unconventional and remain incompletely understood—and then in the first section of his commentary (104–6) summarizes the various translation techniques employed by the author.¹³ In the commentary’s subsequent discussion of “Academic Sumerian” and “The Ancients’ Perception of Sumerian,” George assesses the significance and importance of our text. He argues that translating from Akkadian into Sumerian had priority in the *Eduba* curriculum, and this practice “was surely an exercise designed to test mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, like Latin composition in a more modern school” (107). He goes on to suggest that, as living Sumerian died out, “Akkadian texts began to be converted into Sumerian not to reveal meaning or to demonstrate competence but to codify them in the old language of prestige that became the property of scholarship. This had the effect, no doubt deliberate, of hiding meaning” (107). George discusses the well-known fact that the Sumerian in post-OB texts does not adhere to the rules of third-millennium grammar but is a kind of arcane, academic Sumerian based on lexical texts. This brings out the present text’s distinctiveness because its Sumerian preserves an extreme form of academic Sumerian, similar, in fact, to the kind one finds in first-millennium commentary and explanatory texts. If George is correct in dating this text to the OB period,¹⁴ then we have proof that “the bilingual virtuosity that characterized Babylonian intellectual enquiry in the first millennium was already prevalent among scholars in the Old Babylonian period” (109).

12. Its last line is a subscript written in Sumerian: *šid.bi 1,3*, “its (line)-count: 63.”

13. The notes also point out a number of previously unknown Akkadian words (e.g., *wašbum*, “additional,” see the fem. form in l. 40, with note on p. 101) or unattested verbal stems of known roots (e.g., the D of *ašārum*, see l. 18 with note on p. 95) used by our learned author.

14. On the basis of orthography, cuneiform ductus, and the absence of any archaizing signals, George is confident that the text is from the late OB period and not an archaizing first-millennium text (82, 109).

The content of the text is also worth considering in some detail. The text is a monologue spoken by a father who is upbraiding his son for his ignorance, rudeness, indolence, and self-centeredness (ll. 2–9, 21–22; note l. 21, “Like a piglet you sucked at the teats of your own belly!”). Despite overtures for reconciliation (ll. 10–16), the father, a scribe, compares his erudition to his son’s, who is also a scribe, and repeatedly finds the son’s lacking (ll. 17–20). About halfway through the text, after a brief doxology for Nisaba, patron goddess of scribes (ll. 23–26), the father’s speech turns to a description of a quarrel between the scribes of Ur and Nippur (ll. 27–29). The patron gods hear of the collegial quarrel (l. 30), and the story turns to the mythological plane, apparently to describe a quarrel between Sîn, god of Ur, and his father Enlil, god of Nippur. This divine quarrel parallels the friction between the colleagues of Ur and Nippur but perhaps more importantly also parallels the tension between the father and his son (see ll. 55–60 below). Unfortunately, this “divine quarrel” section (ll. 32–40) is damaged, and its decipherment is problematic. According to George’s understanding, Sîn inadvertently (?) angers his father, Enlil, and a third party, whom George identifies as Nisaba (see also ll. 61–62), intervenes to resolve the conflict. Reconciliation is the topic of lines 41–43, but it is unclear who is speaking; George thinks it is the father. These lines also enigmatically introduce Ea, whose role in bringing the scribal arts to Uruk is mentioned in lines 44–48. Line 49 then asserts that Nisaba brought everything else into being. In lines 50–54 the father again denigrates the son’s learning and asserts that the son’s reputation depends on the father’s. After turning again to Enlil and Sîn in lines 55–60, where we learn that Enlil taught Sîn the scribal craft (thereby establishing the Enlil-Sîn/human father-son homology), and mentioning Nisaba’s conciliatory role between the two gods (ll. 61–62), the text ends with a traditional Sumerian doxology to Ea: “O father Ea, your praise is sweet!” (l. 63).

The content and tone of this complicated piece resonates with other compositions from the *Eduba* curriculum, especially disputes and instructions, and its moralizing theme of filial subordination to the wise, superior father (among both humans and gods) pervades the text from start to finish, commending it pedagogically as a means to instill in young scribes respect for their elders. In his attempt to understand the purpose of this text, George sees two viable alternatives. On the one hand, one might take the text at face value: “[a] text in which a father asserts the superiority of his scholarship over his son’s is a fitting vehicle for ultra-learned Sumerian, for by its very erudition the Sumerian itself vindicates his claims beyond any refutation” (112). On the other, in light of the extremely artificial Sumerian, “the composition may be taken as a satirical piece, which makes fun of the father as a scholar who professes himself learned but does not, in fact, understand how to compose correct Sumerian” (112). Without choosing between the two, George invites scholars to take up the debate.

Because of its bearing on scribal mythology, George's treatment of lines 44–48 deserves closer attention. It is known that mid-second- and first-millennium scribes claimed a professional, mythological ancestry through the *apkallū* that went back ultimately to Ea.¹⁵ According to George's decipherment and interpretation of lines 44–48, this idea was already present in the OB period. This would not be all that surprising if it were not for the manner by which an *apkallu* (singular) apparently brought scribal knowledge to Uruk. In lines 44–45 Ea bestowed (*išruk*) “wisdom” (*uznam*) on “my city,” that is, the father's city of Uruk, and created (*ušabši*) “eternal sagacity” (*nēmeqam dāriam*) in the midst of “my land.” Then, as if to tell the story again (note *ištu anūmīšu*, “thereupon,” at the head of line 46), lines 46–48 describe how a sage/wise one (*apkallum*, *ḥassum*) came up (*īliam*)—presumably from the Apsū, opened his mouth (*pīšu iptē*), and, according to George, “the scribal art [*tup-šar-ru-tum* , nominative] he carried off as booty [*iš-lu -ul*] to the temple of my city, in the hearts of my men he brought about the birth [*uwallid*] of much Sumerian.” These last three lines (ll. 46–48) lead George to suggest a different understanding of the scribal ancestry myth mentioned above. He writes, “[i]t is always assumed that the sages were sent by Enki-Ea as his agents, and that he was as complicit in the civilizing of mankind in this myth as he is in Sumerian mythology.... But one cannot rule out another interpretation of the myth, that Oannes and other mythical sages acted on their own initiative, like Prometheus” (110). Why, however, this *apkallu* needed to steal scribal knowledge when Ea had already granted it to the land is unclear. George simply says the text records two different traditions (110).

George's interpretation of these lines is possible; as mentioned in other texts, the *apkallū* were sometimes believed to be guilty of transgression or hubris.¹⁶ But I am not confident that this text is an example of the negative tradition for two reasons. First, the identity of the *apkallum/ḥassum* in line 46 is unclear. Ea himself is called an *apkallum* later in the text (see the Sumerian of ll. 58–59), and the description *ḥassum* would fit his role as god of wisdom. It is possible, therefore, that Ea himself was the agent who brought the scribal arts to Uruk. Given the fact that Nisaba is mentioned right after the lines under discussion (l. 49) and Nisaba and Ea both play a role in the text, including a reference to each in the last two lines of the composition (see ll. 62–63), placing Ea alongside Nisaba in lines 44–49 seems likely. Second, even if this *apkallu* is to be distinguished from Ea, it is questionable whether he took the scribal arts as plunder. The verb in line 47, *išlul*, is unexpected and epigraphically uncertain. Line 46 ends with the sage/wise one opening his

15. See Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (SAAS 19; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 106–20.

16. See Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *JSP* 19.4 (2010): 210–320, specifically 297–98, where he cites part of an incantation from *Bit mēseri*. Throughout the article, he develops the little-discussed demonological side of the *apkallu* tradition.

mouth. We therefore expect a verb of speaking to follow. Having examined the photograph, it does not seem outside of the realm of possibility to read the verb as *id-lu⁷-ul*, “he praised.” Collation, of course, is required. But if this reading is accepted, it would permit us to render line 47 as “he praised the scribal art in (*[i-n]a* rather than *[a-n]a*) the temple of my city.” This suggestion may also cohere better with the birthing imagery of line 48. This leaves open the question of the Sumerian translation of the verb, but such would not be the first unexplained translation in this text.¹⁷ Of course, this alternative reading remains uncertain because the signs are partially broken. As in so many other places, therefore, we will probably have to await the discovery of a duplicate before more light is shed on this very interesting passage.

As scholars engage these new texts, differences of translation,¹⁸ decipherment, and restoration will inevitably arise, as my one indulgence into the latter areas illustrates. But none of this will detract from the great debt we owe the author for his trailblazing effort through this new material.

17. One might notice that *dalālu* is translated into Sumerian earlier in the text (l. 26), but the Akkadian is uncertain, and George’s attempt to make sense of the translation “is put forward with some reserve” (97).

18. For example, why translate *taklimātīm* in text 1, line 15, as “revelations.” The father-son interchange here, despite the fact that both are gods, suggests “instructions” as more appropriate. The translation that will probably get the most attention is George’s rendering of *alālu*, *alāli* in text 8, line 1, with “whoop!” His justification is reasonable (52), but the translation is unparalleled.