

SYSTEMATIC INTRODUCTION

I. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE MATERIAL: THE LETTERS

AS HISTORICAL SOURCE

In setting to characterize the letters under study, one hardly needs to point out that they differ considerably from modern letters in certain formal respects. Physically, they are lumps of clay carefully worked into the shape of flat rectangles¹ and inscribed, usually on both sides², with Neo-Assyrian cuneiform characters³. With regard to the time that has elapsed since they were, 100 generations ago⁴, filed in the royal archives of Nineveh, many of them have been preserved remarkably well⁵, but many again are in a deplorably bad state of preservation⁶. As for the literary scheme, all letters⁷ open with statement of the addressee and the sender⁸, followed by stereotyped salutations and blessings⁹; date and provenance are indicated only exceptionally.¹⁰ The message is then put down without further formalities¹¹.

¹ The tablets measure, on the average, 17X30X60 mm; the corners are usually rounded, and both sides (obverse and reverse) are convex, contrary to the literary texts. Fine clay has been used throughout, in contrast to letters sent from provinces (whose clay is sometimes mixed with sand); letters written in Assur are often covered with a coating made of very fine white clay. The colours of the tablets vary from black to light yellow; some tablets have been given a hard, shining surface by fire. For more details see the notes at the end of Pt. I; for the rules observed in the preparation of the tablets and the arrangement of the writing see A.L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 239f.

² All letters are inscribed parallel to the short axis; in LAS 318-345, as in all reports, the text runs along the long axis. To inscribe the reverse, the tablets were turned upside down; both edges, and occasionally the left side (seldom also the right side), could be inscribed as well.

³ LAS 340 is written exceptionally in Neo-Babylonian script.

⁴ See chapter IV.

⁵ The tablets were originally not baked; however, most of them were subjected to fire during the destruction of Nineveh by the Medes in 612 B.C., and were consequently burnt hard as stone.

⁶ According to the reports of the excavators, it seems that many tablets were broken already in the antiquity by the sackers of Nineveh; about 60% of the letters under study are incomplete, and in several tablets the script is considerably defaced or mutilated.

⁷ The reports lack all introductory formalities; only the name of the sender is given at the end of the documents ("from XX"). In LAS 318-345 even this is omitted.

⁸ Excepting LAS 104 which is anonymous; LAS 124 is a continuation of another letter.

⁹ Cf. R. Pfeiffer, *Assyrian Epistolary Formulae*, JAOS 43 (1923) 26ff. and E. Salonen, *Die Gruß- und Höflichkeitsformeln in babylonisch-assyrischen Briefen* (StOr 37, Helsinki 1967), p. 78 ff. The salutation (usually "good health to the king, my lord") is omitted, without any visible reason, in 23 letters (LAS 33, 77-78, 87-92, 104, 115, 138, 148, 156, 158, 170 and 215-221); thereagainst the blessing (usually "may the gods Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord") is omitted only exceptionally (in LAS 5, 40, 61, 83, 168 and 170). See LAS 61:5-7 and the pertinent comments.

¹⁰ The provenance is stated immediately after the name of the sender; it is found only in LAS 77, 78, 81, 85-86 and 93-99. For dated letters see chapter IV (the date, if given, is always found at the end of the letter).

¹¹ The epistolary style is, of course, characterized by certain stereotyped expressions. Thus, e.g., new topics are as a rule introduced by the words *ina muhhi* . . . *ša šarru bôti špuranni* "as regards the . . . about which the

Thousands of texts of this kind have hitherto been found in the Mesopotamian soil¹, and many more thousands are certainly still to come to light. The factor distinguishing the present letters from this mass is that they are practically the only letters that have come down to us from Mesopotamian scholars², and in any case the only letters of this kind forming a large, chronologically and internally coherent group³.

The nature of these letters is best illustrated by a reference to the "wise men of Babylon" of the book of Daniel⁴. The present scholars were the "wise men of Nineveh" likewise serving the king by their knowledge and advices. Thus, the letters are basically answers to questions asked by the king, or reports on the activities of the scholars in the fields of medicine, astrology, magic, extispicy and other arcane disciplines. Unlike the scholarly reports⁵, the letters discuss technical matters freely and generally, and touch also a variety of other topics ranging from the private life of the scholars to daily incidents in the court.

The historical environment to which the letters belong is illustrated as vividly by no other cuneiform source. Only the Bible or the classical sources can convey us as lively, though not as authentic picture of an ancient oriental court⁶. On the other hand, no other source elucidates all sides of the activity of the Mesopotamian scholars as effectively as the present letters⁷. Taking into account the great political and cultural significance⁸ of the Sargonid Assyria, the source value of the letters can hardly be overestimated. I dare say that without them our conception of the men on the top of that world power would be decisively poorer. Thanks to them we have a chance not only to learn to know the Assyrian king and his advisors as human beings, but also to understand the way of thinking and the world view of the intellectual elite of that time; at the same time they provide invaluable information about various aspects of the contemporary culture. I will, however,

king, my lord, wrote to me", or simply *ša šarru bēlī išpuranni* "what the king, my lord, wrote to me", etc.

¹ For an excellent selection and translation of Akkadian letters see A.L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (Chicago 1967). For complete bibliography of Mesopotamian letters see *ibid.*, p. 201 ff.

² Sporadic letters from Middle Babylonian physicians are to be found in H. Radau, *Letters to Cassite Kings* (BE 17/I, Philadelphia 1908); for a letter from a Neo-Babylonian astrologer (UET 4 168) see Oppenheim, *op.cit.*, p. 195. Cf. also the following note.

³ This is naturally a generalization; as stated in the preface to Pt. I, there are a number of related contemporaneous texts (Neo-Babylonian letters and astrological reports) which had to be excluded from this edition. They must naturally be taken into consideration along with the present letters. For a list of these texts see Appendix IB.

⁴ See Chapter II, p. 9.

⁵ The astrological reports consist of astronomical observations and relevant omens cited from the traditional literature; explanatory remarks are sometimes added. The reports of the haruspices contain a formal inquiry addressed to the Sun god, accompanied by quotations from the divinatory literature indicating the results of the extispicy.

⁶ See, e.g., the books of Esther, Ezra and Daniel; Herodotus I 8ff. VII 5 ff. etc.

⁷ Cf., e.g., W. von Soden, *Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft* (Nachdruck Darmstadt 1965). Anm. 43: "Diese [Briefe und] Berichte geben uns übrigens einen ausgezeichneten Einblick in die Arbeitsweise der assyrischen Astronomen und Astrologen, den uns die "wissenschaftliche" Literatur *nie verschaffen kann*".

⁸ As a result of the expansion of Assyriological studies, the interest in the Neo-Assyrian period has considerably decreased from what it was at the beginning. Yet this period is and will remain central for several reasons. Owing to the military might of Assyria, the Mesopotamian civilization at that time exerted an immense influence on the neighbouring world; at the same time the Mesopotamian culture experienced a short, but the more significant bloom. The conquest of Egypt, the Sargonid reliefs and the library of Assurbanipal still mark the culmination of the Mesopotamian political power, art and literature.

not go on analyzing pedantically the points in which the research could draw profit from this source¹; the variety and amount of information will stand out clearly enough in the introduction and commentary.

I would like to stress that though the letters have been subjected to study for over 60 years², their information is by no means exhausted yet. These letters, as the epistolary texts in general, present a number of inborn difficulties which make themselves all too clearly apparent in the hitherto available translations and studies. "In quick-shifting, emotion-charged, pregnant sentences, topics are introduced and abruptly dropped, and allusions are made to situations known only to the correspondents. Emphasis, irony, rhetorical questions, veiled threats, unfinished sentences, and imprecations run the gamut of syntactical finesse to mold the diction of these letters to such expressiveness that it remains beyond the ken of the philologist accustomed to the inane formalism of conventional literary texts."³ Add to this that many texts are badly broken or obliterated, and it becomes evident how great the danger of mistranslations and misunderstandings is. Furthermore, quite apart from the philological and epigraphical difficulties, it is often difficult to recognize and evaluate correctly the extant evidence. Since the letters are not dated, one cannot readily place them in their proper historical connections or even find out their correct chronological sequence or relation to each other. Depending on the emphases of the writers, many important details may escape attention at the cost of secondary information, and many letters lack the details and background that would clarify what the writers actually are speaking about.

It will certainly never be possible to remove all unclarity that beset the letters. However, far more than hitherto can be done in this respect, and every step forward contributes to the understanding of the rest of the material. In the preface to Pt. I, I have concisely sketched the methods which I have applied in order to make the best out of these letters. Though all possibilities of these methods have not been exhausted (e.g., there is always a chance that a couple of more joins could be found and some obscure passages clarified through collations), I am pretty sure that it is no more really rewarding to follow this line. A deeper understanding of the texts may better be obtained through their diligent correlation to other sources (ancient and modern), and especially the cooperation of the experts in the Mesopotamian traditional literature would be certainly profitable.

¹ Besides Assyriology proper, I would say the letters are of the greatest usefulness to Biblical studies and the history of sciences.

² The first detail study devoted to these letters, E. Behrens' *Assyrisch-babylonische Briefe kultischen Inhalts* (= LSS 2 2), was published in 1906.

³ A.L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 26. For a more detailed characterization of Akkadian letters see *idem.*, *Letters from Mesopotamia*, p. 64f.

II. THE SCHOLARS

A. Definitions

1. On the Mesopotamian concept of scholarship

The term "scholar" used in this book refers to learned persons, trained in a special branch of learning or wisdom (cf. Webster's *New World Dictionary*, College Edition, 1966, s.v.). I hasten to stress that this term has here to be understood relatively. It does not connote the modern concepts of "learning" or "wisdom" (according to which the modern astrologers and diviners cannot be termed scholars), but is used solely with regard to the Mesopotamian concept of these (just as we, in conformance with the Mesopotamian usage, would call a slinger "warrior", regardless of the modern connotations of the word). The purpose of this chapter is to define what exactly the words "learning" and "wisdom", and hence "scholar", meant for the ancient Mesopotamians.

There are two reasons to use the designation "scholar" of the writers of the present letters. First, they were experts in subjects that formed an integral part of the Mesopotamian "science" (see below). Second, they were called "scholars" by the ancients themselves. Whenever they are referred to in general terms, the designation *ummānu* is used. This word whose basic meaning is "master (craftsman)" has, as in English, several semantic shades, one of which corresponds to the notion "scholar".¹ In order to illustrate the semantic range of the word in Neo-Assyrian times, I shall cite a couple of examples taken from contemporary texts, preferably letters.

a) The meaning of the word *ummānu*

1) *ummānu* "master" = "scholar" (referring to the writers of the present letters): *šumu anni'u ū ša išk= kārīmma šū ša pī ummāni šū* "this omen is not from the Series: it is from the oral tradition of the masters (= scribes)" LAS 13 r1-2; *isūri ummāni ina muhhi māt Amurrē mōmmēni ana šarri bēlīja iqabbijū* "probably the masters (= scribes) will tell something about the (concept) Westland to the king, my lord" LAS 279:19-20; *ūmā kalūt imittišu ša šehratūni aktanak ana šarri bēlīja ussēbila ummāni lēmurū* "I am now sealing its right kidney which is (unusually) small, and sending it to the king, my lord: the masters (= haruspices) should examine it" ABL 975 r11-14; *annūte 9 ša isse ummāni izazzūni dullu ša bēt marši oppašūni* "these 9 are those who are assisting the masters (= exorcists) and working on the (series) (when the exorcist goes to the) house of the sick" ABL 147 r10-14; *ina zamāri ša māt Akkadī mā aššu pīka tābi rē'ū'a gabbu ummāni upaqquka* "in a song from Akkad it is said, because of your good speech, O my shepherd, all masters look forward to you" LAS 124 r10-11 (the author is making an allusion to himself).

¹ A specific word for "scholar" is missing in Akkadian. The notion "scholar" is usually associated (and partly expressed) with adjectives meaning "wise" and participles of the verb "to know" (see CAD s.v. *amīqu, arsu, bāssu, igallu, itpēšu*, and AHw s.v. *mūdū*). For the equation *apkallu* "sage" = *ummānu* "master" see below.

2) *ummānu* "master" = "teacher": *ana manni ibašši tābtu ša kī jāši šarru ēpuš ša ina pān nār šarri tapqidannīma ummānšu anākūni liginnu aqabbašūni* "to whom indeed has the king done such a favour as to me whom you have appointed to the service of the crown prince, to be his master and to teach him" LAS 34 r4-9.

3) *ummānu* "master" = "counselor": [*Šin*] *aḥḥē-erība šar māt Aššūr Nabû-aplu-iddina ummānšu* "(when) Sennacherib was the king of Assyria, Nabû-aplu-iddina was his master" KAV 216 IV 1-2; *ṭuppi Nabû-šallimšunu ṭupšar šarri rabū rab pīt uzni(?) ummān šarru-kēn šar māt Aššūr* "a tablet of Nabû-šallimšunu, the great scribe of the king, chief . . . master of Sargon, king of Assyria" Šg 8 428.

4) *ummānu* "master" = "master-craftsman": *ummāni ša issē'a illikūnenni kaspu niddanaššunu parakkī ša Ezida kī ša šarru bēlī iqbūni uḥḥuzū* "we shall give silver to the masters who came along with me, and they will mount the daises of Ezida just as the king, my lord, told me" LAS 284:5-8; *ḥurāšu ana šalam šarrāni . . . lā iddin šarru bēlī ana abaraki ana ṭupšar ekalli tēmu liškun ḥurāšu lipṭi'ū rēš urḫi <š> ṭābūni ana ummānī liddinū dullu lēpušū* "he has not given gold for the royal statues . . . the king, my lord, should give orders to the steward and the scribe of the palace that they should open the (sealed) gold: at the beginning of a favourable month they should give it to the masters, and these should perform the work" ABL 114 r3-12.

b) The Mesopotamian "science"

In the example cited above, under section a 1, scribes, haruspices and exorcists were referred to by the designation *ummānu*. I shall now adduce more evidence to show that also the physicians and appeasers serving in the court¹ were called *ummānu* and belonged to the same social class as the foregoing three occupations. In an unpublished Neo-Babylonian letter, K.3034 + K.7655 (digested by M. Dietrich, WO 4 [1968] 95f), the author enumerates by name 20 able scholars (PAP 20 UM.ME.A^{MEŠ} *lē'ātu*), of different occupations: only three of these have been preserved, namely Lābāši, expert of the series [. . .], Kudurru who masters the divination (*bā=rāti ile'e*) and has studied the (astrological) series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, and Aḫa-šubši, a very distinguished physician (*Lū'asū ma'diš ile'e*). Another letter from the same writer, ABL 1321 + 82-5-22, 123 (see *ibid.*, p. 96), deals with the same subject: there the crafts of the appeasers, the exorcists and the scribes are mentioned. Still another Neo-Babylonian letter from the Sargonid archives (ABL 954) reads: "Last year . . . I wrote to the palace as follows: 'The apprentices whom the king entrusted to me have learned the (series) *Enūma Anu Enlil*: so what is my fault? The king has not summoned me with his masters (*Lū'um-ma-ni-šū*). The king (then) said: 'I have not pushed (you) aside: I shall summon you.' But from the moment I left the palace until now the king has not summoned me. Now, as the king has summoned (all) the scribes, big and small, shall I not . . . ?" (Rest fragmentary). Here the existence of a circle of "the king's masters" is stated explicitly.

It has to be pointed out in this context that calling these masters "scholars" is perfectly justifiable insofar as their ability was based on study and mastery of an extensive technical literature. In fact, excepting lexical texts and syllabaries used for the erudition of scribes², practically the whole "scientific" literature of Mesopotamia consists of the lore of the omen-experts (scribes), diviners, exorcists, physicians and appeasers (called *ṭup=*

¹ I do not argue that all exorcists, physicians, etc. were called "masters". The Akkadians themselves differentiated between "masters", practitioners and apprentices.

² The creation of the syllabaries, vocabularies and lexical lists was necessary for two main reasons: to fix the cuneiform system of writing and to provide the means for studying the "sacred" Sumerian language. There is no need to assume that their compilation was guided by an "urge to coordinate the universe". That the philology was not considered an independent science appears from the lack of an appropriate word in Akkadian.

šarrūtu "scribal craft", *bārūtu* "divination", *āšipūtu* "exorcism", *asūtu* "medicine" and *kalūtu* "appeasers' craft"). Significantly enough, even the poetical works and other literary products were, as far as known, ascribed to scholars specializing in these subjects. According to the Nimvite "catalogue of texts and authors", the epic of Gilgameš was redacted by the exorcist Šin-leq-umminū (EŠ.GAR.GIŠ.GIN.MAŠ: *ša pi-i* [d]30-*to-pi-un-nin-ni* [LUM.ME.AŠ.MAŠ], JCS 16 66 vi 10), the fable of the willow by the exorcist Ur-Nanna, a scholar of Babylon ([EŠ.GAR.GIŠ.GIN.MAŠ: *ša pi-i* UR-NANNA LUM.ME.AŠ LUM.ME.A TIN.TIRKI *ibid.* vi 14), etc. In this way the text assigns various compositions to exorcists, diviners and appeasers, most of which are characterized as scholars of particular cities (LUM.ME.AŠ LUM.ME.A TIN.TIRKI v 2.5, vi 2.6,8,14, LUM.ME.A TIN.TIRKI vii 7; LUGAL LUM.ME.A ERLDU₁₀ vi 13, vii 2.4). Judging on the ground of the literature, one cannot, hence, escape the conclusion that the core of the Mesopotamian "science", as well as all intellectual life, was dominated by subjects which we nowadays tend to call *pseudosciences*. Such sciences as philology and mathematics were in a secondary position and even did not warrant a special designation².

The correctness of this conclusion can be tested in many ways. The best touch-stone is, of course, the famous passage in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal where the king boasts about the careful education he was given in his youth. Claiming that he had studied all branches of the wisdom of his time, he actually presents the contemporary concept of "science" in a nutshell. A short version of the passage reads: "I studied the wisdom of (the divine scribe) Nabû, the entire extent of the scribal art; I examined and learned the precepts of all the masters" (VAB 7 4 i 31-34); the full account (VAB 7 252 i 13-18) runs as follows: "(I am versed in) the craft of the sage Adapa; I studied the secret lore of the entire scribal craft. I know the celestial and terrestrial portents. I discuss with competence in the circle of the masters: I argue about (the work) '(If) the liver is a correspondence of the sky' with expert diviners. I can solve the most complicated divisions and multiplications which do not have a solution. I have read intricate tablets inscribed with obscure Sumerian or Akkadian difficult to unravel, and examined sealed, obscure and confused inscriptions on stone from before the Deluge." Converted into prose, these poetical words refer to exorcism (= craft of Adapa), omen-science, haruspicy, mathematics, appeasers' craft (= Sumerian) and elementary epigraphy.

Secondly, one can turn to the Akkadian lexical texts. E.g., in Igituh, Short Version (AFO 18 81-86), one finds the sequence *hassu* (= LUNUN+ME.NIG.TAG.GA), *bārû*, *āšipû*, *asû*, *kalû* "wise man, haruspex, exorcist, physician, and appeaser"; in ŠT 385 (a list of professions) the group *tuššarru*, *āšipû*, *bārû*, *asû* "scribe, exorcist, haruspex and physician" is found. Since in texts of this kind similar professions are grouped together, it is unlikely that other professions than the ones mentioned above were included into the conception "wise men".

Of special interest is a Neo-Assyrian memorandum from the reign of Assurbanipal, ADD 851³, which lists the scholars serving in the palace: it gives the names of altogether 7 scribes (PAP 7 A.BA:MEŠ: col. I B).

¹ For the mathematical texts see note 2.

² There is no word for "mathematics" or "mathematician" in Akkadian: Assurbanipal refers to mathematics by the words L.GI.A.RA-e (= *igê arê*) "reciprocals" and "productions" (in the inscription to be quoted presently). The large amount of excavated mathematical exercise tablets written by apprentice scribes indicates that the study of mathematics was part of the normal school curriculum and as essential to a scribe's instruction as the copying of vocabularies. Cf. the edubba-text K.2459:10 ff. "do you know multiplication (*arû*), reciprocals (*igê*), coefficients (*igibâ*), balancing of accounts (*igubâ nikkassi*), administrative accounting, how to make all kinds of pay allotments, divide property (and) delimit shares of fields?" (Gadd, BSOAS 20 256; cited after CAD I 39b).

³ Note also the partial duplicate Šm. 471 listing two exorcists and three physicians. ADD 851 dates from about 650 B.C.; see page 32, note 3.

9 exorcists (PAP 9: MAŠ.MAŠMEŠ, I 18), 5 haruspices (PAP 5 UAL.MEŠ, II 6), 9 physicians (PAP 9 A.Z[U]MEŠ, II 16), 6 appeasers (PAP 6 GALAMEŠ, III 7), 3 augurs (PAP 3 *da-gil* MU ŠEN, III 11), 3 interpreters of dreams (PAP 3 *har-ti-bi*, IV 2), and 3 Egyptian scribes (3 A.BA:MEŠ *Mu-šur-aje*, IV 6-7). The three professions mentioned last were alien to Mesopotamia and make an appearance in texts only as a result of the conquests of the Assyrian kings. Augurs were obtained from Syria and northwestern Mesopotamia (cf., e.g., the neo-Assyrian letter ND 2673 [= Iraq 20, p. 196 and pl. NLI], r14-16, "let the king, my lord, write to the Šubrian (king) so that he may send PN, his augur"; ABL 1346 r1-2 mentions augurs from Hamat); interpreters of dreams originated from Egypt and were first imported to Assyria by Esarhaddon in 671 B.C. (cf. CAD U 116b, s.v. *hartibi*: this word is a direct loan from Egyptian (*hrj-tp*). Note that interpreters of dreams are not mentioned among the scholars enumerated in LAS 2 dating from 672 B.C.).

The nature of the Mesopotamian "science" is particularly clearly displayed in the Bible, and the above deductions are fully confirmed by its testimony. In chapters 2, 4 and 5 of the book of Daniel, the author enumerates the "wise men of Babylon" who were summoned by the king to interpret the perplexing dreams seen by him. These "wise men" (Aramaic *hakkimîn*) can be confidently identified with the "masters" (*ummâ=nu*) of the Babylonians and Assyrians, and the enumerated professions coincide exactly with the ones treated above. The following series of "wise men" are found:

<i>hartummîm aššāpîm</i>	Dan. 1:20
<i>hartummîm aššāpîm mēkaššēpîm kašdîm</i> ¹	2:2
<i>āšēpîm hartummîn gāzērîn</i>	2:27
<i>hartumajjā' āšēpajjā' kašdājē' gāzē'rajjā'</i>	4:4
<i>hartummîn āšēpîm kašdā'în gāzērîn</i>	5:11

To visualize the coincidence with the Akkadian terms the following list of correspondencies may be drawn:

Aramaic	Hebrew	Akkadian	English
<i>hakkimîn</i>	<i>h^akāmîn</i>	<i>ummânî</i>	scholars
<i>āšēpîm</i>	<i>aššāpîm</i>	<i>āšipî</i>	exorcists
<i>gāzērîn</i>	<i>bārîm</i> ²	<i>bārê</i>	haruspices
<i>kašdā'în</i>	<i>kašdîm/šapsērîm</i> ³	<i>tuššarrî</i>	astrologers
<i>hartummîm</i>	<i>hartummîm</i>	<i>hartibî</i>	interpreters of dreams

The Hebrew and Aramaic renderings of the Akkadian *ummânu* prove unequivocally that the men so designed were really considered the scholars of the Mesopotamians and not simply experts on divination and similar matters. The abstract word corresponding to *hakkîm/hākām* is *hākām* "wisdom" (both in Hebrew and Aramaic). This is exactly the word which in classical Greek denotes the concept "science" (*σοφία* = wisdom, science), and the Greek word for "scholar" is a compound literally meaning "lover of wisdom" (*φιλόσοφος*).

Isaiah, in predicting the fall of Babylon, writes as follows (47:10): "Your wisdom (*hākmatek*) and your knowledge (*da'tek*) perverted you, and you said in your heart, I am, and none else beside me." What the prophet

¹ **mēkaššēp* corresponds to Akkadian *kaššāpu* "sorcerer", "practitioner of black magic". The mention of sorcerers side by side with Babylonian scholars reflects the despise that the Jews felt toward the Mesopotamian science; in fact, black magic was strongly opposed by the Mesopotamian scholars too.

² Cf. Hebrew conj. שררר pro שררר. Isaiah 44:25, Jer. 50:36; cf. Koehler-Baumgartner, *Lexicon* s.v. (J. Aro).

³ Cf. Nahum 3:17.

meant by wisdom and knowledge appears in the following verses (47:12-13): "Stand now with your enchantments, and with the multitude of your sorceries, wherein you have laboured from your youth: perhaps you will profit, perhaps you will prevail! You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels: let now the viewers of the heavens, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save you from what will come upon you." The same idea recurs in the prophecy of Nahum on the fall of Nineveh (3:17): "You have diviners¹ like locusts, and astrologers² like grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun arises they flee away."

These two passages, scornful as they are, reveal the great respect which the Mesopotamians had for the experts in divination, magic and astrology, and one may get an idea of why the study of these pseudo-sciences was appreciated above everything else. Insight into supernatural things was considered the greatest wisdom of all: the foundations of the divinatory and magical sciences were believed to have been laid by the gods themselves — or by the mythological sages who personified the highest wisdom one could think of. Thus the entire corpus of the appeasers and the fundamental work of the astrologers, Enūma Anu Enlil, were ascribed to the god Ea in the aforementioned catalogue of texts and authors; in the same catalogue, the seven sages figure as authors of several compositions beside historical persons designed as scholars. The high opinion held of the wisdom of the scholars is also reflected by the fact that the word *ummānu* is sometimes replaced by *apkallu* "sage", thus the scholar Lu-Nanna (cf. the said catalogue, col. VI 11) is also called sage (cf. the colophon of K.8030, LÚ.^dNANNA NUN.ME URIM) or "two-thirds" of a sage (LÚ.^dNANNA 2/3.bi.nun.m.e.n.e = LÚ.^dNANNA šu-ni-pat ap-kal-[li], LKA 76 r11-13). Note also the interchange of *nīsirti apkalli* "secret (lore) of the sage" and *nīsirti ummāni* "secret of the scholars" in colophons (cf. *nī-šur-ti* NUN.ME, Hunger, AOAT 2, Nr. 303 [astronomical text], and *nī-šur-ti um-ma-a-ni*, ibid, Nr. 519:2 [astrol. omens] or MĪ.ŠEŠ LU^{um-man-nu} [astronomical] ibid, 98:7³).

To sum up: Admitting that the Mesopotamian concept of "scholars" and "science" differed radically from that current in our times, the two have nonetheless much in common. Just as modern scholars are thought to represent the highest learning in all branches of science, so their Mesopotamian colleagues are found among the men who mastered the subjects worthy of the designation "science" in those times. The great difference is that while the Mesopotamian scholars were not only highly respected for their learning but also for their wisdom, the subjects they studied are nowadays considered worthless, and the emphasis is laid on studies which in turn were regarded as secondary by the ancients.⁴

2. Mesopotamian scholars: priests or scientists?

The subject matter of this chapter must be treated, since views differ as to the true nature of the Mesopotamian scholars. The English and American Assyriologists usually translate the scholarly occupations plainly with "scribes, diviners, exorcists, physicians, and *kallū*-singers" (see, most recently, CAD A 2 431a, 432a etc., whereas the Germans speak of special sorts of "priests" (AHw 623a "Beschwörungspriester", 109b "Opferschau(priester)", 427b "Klagepriester"; W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten Orient*, p. 125 "Priester Adads-humursur") and quite recently, H. Hunger, AOAT 2, p. 10 etc., labels *bārū* and *mašmaššu* as "Priester"). Thus there are two main "schools", one regarding these occupations priestly, the other more or less profane, B. Landsber-

¹ Amend the senseless 𒌶𒌶𒌶 into 𒌶𒌶𒌶.

² Literally, "scribes".

³ Cf. also the colophons of two medical texts, Hunger, AOAT 2, Nr. 471 and 533 (šū KA UM.ME.A šū KA NUN.ME.MEŠ or *la-bi-ru-ti*).

⁴ In both cases the appreciation of sciences seems to be conditioned by their immediate practical value; the usefulness of the technical studies was not foreseen by the ancients, whereas the study of pseudo-sciences was of great practical value, in accordance with the prevailing world view.

ger has recently (in *Brief des Bischofs von Esangla*, 1965) criticized the German renderings with the following objections: "Ist ihre [sc. des ganzen gelehrten Klüngel, der, meist vom Königspalaste aus, in seiner Weise Einfluß auf die Politik Asarhaddons nahm] Kennzeichnung als Priester berechtigt? — Es hängt von der Definition des Wortes "Priester" ab, ob man Magier, Haruspices, Propheten als Priester bezeichnet. Zur Zeit Asarhaddons wurden sie nicht zur Priesterklasse gerechnet, sie sind weder *šangū* noch *šribū bīti* noch *gallabūti*. In jeder Hinsicht profan ist die eigentliche Schreiberklasse, in deren Kompetenz die Astrologie fiel, für die schon die Spezialberuf *tupšar-Enūma-Anu-Enlil* entwickelt war." (p. 14, note 8). Yet even this criticism, though at heart correct, fails to take cognizance of the whole truth. I cannot naturally in this connection discuss the subject matter in all its aspects, but in fact cumulative evidence is not necessary to clear up the basic problem.

Some sort of connection with priests is first of all evident from titles of individuals such as "Ibni-štar, son of Unzu, *kallū* of Uruk, enterer of the temple of Nanā, priest of Ušur-amāša, and scribe of Eanna" (RA 16 126 III 7-12). The astrologer Akkullānu was, at the same time, a high priest, "enterer of the temple of Aššur" (ABL 539 r14), and most of his letters deal with matters of temples. Furthermore there is abundant evidence that *āšipus* and *kallūs* featured among the personnel of the temples: note only the colophon *tuppi Kišir-Aššur* MAŠ.MAŠ É Aššūr "tablet belonging to PN, the exorcist of the temple of Aššur" (CAD A 2 434), and the role played by the *āšipu* and *kallū* in the *akītu*-feast. On the other hand there is also very definite evidence suggesting that the scholars nevertheless were no priests. Their technical literature had nothing to do with cults and religious ceremonies performed in the temples; thus, e.g., the prayers which formed an essential part of the exorcistic literature, were not intended to be recited in the temples, but were spells used in the exorcists' daily practice. The haruspices, whose profession and literature was closely related to that of the astrologers, did not do service to the temples but to the court and the army (see the evidence collected in CAD B 123b ff); and the physicians whose technical literature sometimes is difficult to distinguish from that of the exorcists, can by no means be called priests. Except Akkullānu, who was explicitly an "enterer of the temple" and stayed in the Aššur-temple, none of the authors of the present letters were concerned with matters belonging to the sphere of temples, but stuck to their special fields.

I think the 'dilemma' finds its solution when it is associated with medieval Europe. Hardly anyone would claim that the theologians, scholastics, and grammaticians working in the monasteries were priests, but no scholars, or vice versa; the truth is certainly between the two extremities. To put the matter very generally, in the Middle Ages and before the foundation of universities, the conditions were such that scientific work was not possible but in courts and cloisters. Only these institutions possessed the necessary premise for any higher intellectual life: sufficiently large libraries. Another striking parallel to the ancient Mesopotamia is that the scientific work of the monks consisted primarily of copying and canonizing the traditional literature; in other words, of maintaining the classical Greek and Roman culture. The monks certainly did not study Aristophanes or Livy for religious reasons! In Mesopotamia, the script was first invented from necessities of the temple bureaucracy and the schooling of scribes was from the very beginning connected with the temples. Hence there should be nothing extraordinary in that later on "scientific" studies were practised in the temples which with time developed considerable libraries. In the Neo-Assyrian times an essential part of the literary tradition consisted of technical literature of various branches of Mesopotamian "science". The nature of this science gave its specialists jobs in the temples and in the courts as well as in private life. Of course, scholars could become priests too (as also priests could become scholars), but they did not have to; their professions may better be compared (and the ancients did do so) to the profane craftsmen, artists, sculpturers etc.¹

¹ As an interesting parallel I would like to point out that also the Middle American Aztecs differentiated between scholars and priests. See Bernardino de Sahagún's *Gliederung des alt-aztekischen Volks* (= Quellenwerke zur alten Geschichte Amerikas V, Stuttgart 1952), p. 75 ff: as scholars are enumerated "the wise man" (*tlamatin*), "the physician" (*tiectli*), "the magician" (*navalli*), "the computer" (of days) (*tlapochqui, tonalpohqui* = Mesopotamian "scribe") and "the owl-man" (*tlacatcullali*, = sorcerer). For priests see ibid, p. 83 ff.