

Continuity and Change in Omen Literature

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When I was very young, I was fortunate to have come to the Oriental Institute to study Akkadian. My first class, “Old Babylonian Legal Texts,” was with Professor Renger. Five minutes into the first lesson he epitomized my image of the professor of Assyriology: he knew everything and he had a German accent. Later I would come to a more informed understanding of the breadth and depth of Renger’s knowledge and interests. I sincerely hope that our honoree will find something of interest in the following essay, and that he might accept it as a token of the (not so young anymore) student’s appreciation for the (not so old yet) teacher.

In her 1985 monograph on Babylonian poetry, Erica Reiner said, “the Assyriologist knows that it is too early to attempt to write a history of Babylonian literature. In fact, he has so often said it – invoking the force of tradition responsible for preserving and perpetuating texts over hundreds, and possibly thousands, of years and thus allowing no real development – that he has been generally believed. Yet Babylonian literature is not as static and immutable as might be suggested by finds of nearly identical copies of some composition written down hundreds of years apart – a frequent phenomenon that is the despair of the historian but a boon to the philologist who can use similar exemplars to reconstruct a fragmentary text. In what measure identical exemplars reflect the immutability of tradition and, conversely, in what measure changes observed between an earlier and a later exemplar are indicators of a change in taste and interest are important questions for the interpretation of Babylonian literary history that only much painstaking philological work will elucidate.”¹

The divination corpus is aptly characterized by Reiner’s statement, and in my view, omen texts are the equal of other more “literary” literary genres for examining aspects of literary construction such as authorship, stabilization of a *textus receptus*, transmission, and the limits of textual variation. In short, divination provides a rewarding context for examining the tensility of Babylonian traditionalism. In the following discussion, I will focus on the

¹ Erica Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (Ann Arbor 1985), p. X-XI.

celestial omen texts, approaching this corpus from two sides, so to speak, from outside and inside. By "outside" I mean the history of the celestial divination tradition as we have reconstructed it, based upon the literary product of that tradition, the text *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Such an "external history," outlines the chronological development of its manuscript tradition, as far as we can establish it on the basis of extant texts. The "origins" of formal written celestial divination, according to our external history, are to be placed in the Old Babylonian period. If we look, however, at the origin of the discipline as well as of the text, from the scribes' own "internal" perspective, we enter the hoary age of the gods themselves; or in another version, we look back to prediluvian times, when gods communicated directly to the *apkallu*-sages, such as the famous fish-man, Oannes. I will, therefore, consider whether the notion of "divine authorship" presumed by some for *Enūma Anu Enlil* is relevant to the origins of the text according to its internal literary history. Finally, I will consider whether the idea of the divine origin of celestial divination was in fact relevant to the scribes' commitment to the basic permanence and unalterability of the content of the omen series, that is, their commitment to textual continuity over change.

I. External Literary History of Celestial Divination

The literary history of Mesopotamian divination has not yet been examined in any detail, either on the basis of a single series, much less in any comprehensive study. The obstacles to such research are easy to enumerate. On the one hand, the relatively small number of extant Old Babylonian omen texts as against the voluminous mass of later sources make a "history of Babylonian scholarly divination" difficult to formulate; on the other hand, because sources for omen collections in Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods are equally if not more limited than their Old Babylonian relatives, the continuity of tradition from Old Babylonian versions to the standardized recensions preserved in seventh century copies is not always apparent. Moreover, whether the various compositions comprising the core of the scholarly divination can be said to have shared in a common process of literary/textual development beginning in the Old Babylonian period is extremely difficult to assess since extispicy, for example, apparently had an extensive Old Babylonian tradition, while *šumma izbu* and the celestial omnia seem to be poorly represented in Old Babylonian sources.²

² It is noteworthy that Old Babylonian celestial omens not identifiable in the standard Neo-Assyrian edition are known, for example those published by W. Šileiko, "Mondlaufprognosen aus der Zeit der ersten babylonischen Dynastie", *Compte-Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS* (1927), pp. 125-128 and republished by Th. Bauer, "Eine Sammlung von Himmelsvorzeichen", *ZA* 43 (1936), pp. 308-314, as well as the fragmentary text VAT

Until relatively recently, Old Babylonian sources for celestial omnia were practically unknown. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, Weidner thought that the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* was a composition from the end of the second millennium or beginning of the first, without any clear Old Babylonian antecedents.³ Four unpublished Old Babylonian celestial omen tablets, identified by Douglas Kennedy in the British Museum, form a small corpus of lunar eclipse omens which stand in a direct relation to part of the canonical series, specifically the lunar eclipse section *Enūma Anu Enlil* 15-22.⁴ Because the lunar eclipse section of the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* has a number of Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian exemplars,⁵ we can examine the continuity of textual tradition and address the question of the development of the astrological series in general. In the light of the new corpus, Weidner's statement that *Enūma Anu Enlil* was likely to be a composition of the end of the second or beginning of the first millennium can be revised. Certainly however, if Weidner meant the composition of the standard 70-tablet series, this recension was indeed a product of the Middle Assyrian/Middle Babylonian period, as the non-standard character of the Old Babylonian texts confirms. Kassite compilers also must have formalized the bilingual introduction to the celestial omens, from which we derive the title "When Anu and Enlil" or *Enūma Anu Enlil*, after its three opening words, and from whence generations of scholars who transmitted the celestial omen series and who practiced celestial divination, derived their professional title "scribes of *Enūma Anu Enlil*".

Three of the four Old Babylonian tablets comprise a single corpus of eclipse omens, albeit not a fully standardized corpus. Textual variants are numerous, but only within the framework of the fixed set of omens (protasis + apodosis) representing the systematic organization of phenomena observed during lunar eclipses. The fourth text is an excerpt from Months XI-XII₂ of the other three texts. In the Old Babylonian texts the foundation can be seen for practically all the later lunar eclipse omens, including those attested in Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian, those in peripheral sources to some degree,⁶ and those of the canonical tablets 15-22 of *Enūma Anu Enlil*. The

7525 (line 12: [...] *ḫu-ut ka-ka-bi-im*), reference to which is made by E. Weidner, "Die astrologische Serie *Enūma Anu Enlil*", *AfO* 14 (1941-1944), pp. 173-174.

³ *Ibid.*, 174 note 7, and B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien. Zweiter Band* (Heidelberg 1925), 245.

⁴ See my *Aspects of Babylonian Celestial Divination: The Lunar Eclipse Tablets of Enūma Anu Enlil* (*AfOB* 22, Horn 1988), pp. 9 and 19-22.

⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

⁶ For example EAE 22 from Susa (*MDP* 18 258), see *ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

thematic elements and organization of the protases of the four Old Babylonian eclipse omen texts are seen to continue throughout the later recensions of the series. A comparison between the apodoses of the Old Babylonian texts and those of *Enūma Anu Enlil* proper further serves to specifically identify the tablet(s) of which the Old Babylonian exemplars are forerunners. The results of such a comparison are that *Enūma Anu Enlil* 17-18 are in fact Old Babylonian, and in virtually every detail except orthographic style.

A continuous literary history, characterized by a progression toward greater standardization, can therefore be demonstrated for this corpus, beginning already in the Old Babylonian period, becoming further expanded and standardized in the Middle period (ca. 1100), and attaining a kind of "final" version in the *Enūma Anu Enlil* represented by the texts found in the library of Assurbanipal (7th century B.C.), and reflected in the many citations from that work in the reports and letters from the Neo-Assyrian scholars to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.⁷ Such a reconstruction modifies to some extent the current modern consensus on Babylonian canonization, i.e., as the activity of Kassite period scribes who gathered traditional materials (mostly of Old Babylonian origin), catalogued and fixed the content. This reconstruction would see a tendency toward standardization already manifest in the Old Babylonian exemplars of the limited material under investigation. The Kassite activity certainly produced a widespread and thoroughgoing standardization of many literary and scientific genres, but as viewed through the narrow lens of celestial omens, it appears as though some notion of uniformity was already applied to the texts' content and organization, if not the orthography.

From the point of view of external literary history, the obvious major change within the text can be identified in the Kassite period when expansion and stabilization of a formal text took place. These changes are a measure of the intense scribal activity attested for the Kassite period in many texts and series. The character and assumptions of the various disciplines of divination were not altered by this period of comprehensive scribal redaction. With regard to celestial divination, the connection with the past as represented by the Old Babylonian lunar eclipse omens was rigorously maintained, and the corresponding nature of the textual changes can be defined more in terms of evolution and outgrowth from what went before, certainly not in terms of alteration or rejection of the previous stage of development. After approximately 500 B.C. when personal astrology was introduced, appearing in two new text genres, horoscopes and nativity omens, I would still argue that no fundamental alteration of the tradition occurred. *Enūma Anu Enlil*

⁷ Cf. the summary in D. Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology: From Babylon to Bikāner* (Rome 1997), chapter 1 "Mesopotamian Celestial Omens".

was not only intact, but the “new” forms of celestial divination were based on the same principles as before.⁸

II. Internal Perspective: Literary Origins According to the Scribes

Turning from the external textual history of *Enūma Anu Enlil* pieced together by modern Assyriology, we may also obtain a kind of internal perspective on the origins and development of celestial divination literature according to the scribes themselves. Ascription of, for lack of an accurate term, “authorship” for the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* appears, together with other omen, incantation, and ritual texts in a catalogue of texts and “authors” edited by Lambert.⁹ There we read: “[The Exorcists’] Series (*ašipūtu*), The Lamentation Priests’ Series (*kalūtu*), The Celestial Omen Series (*Enūma Anu Enlil*), [(If) a] Form (*alamdimmū*), Not Completing the Months; Diseased Sinews; [(If) the Utterance [of the Mouth], The King, The Storm(?), Whose Aura is Heroic, Fashioned like An: These (works) are from the mouth’ of Ea.” The selection of Ea as the ultimate source for the collections about exorcism, incantations, and celestial divination, is fitting, because he was the god associated chiefly with magic and *arcana mundi*. He was considered, as the creator of humankind, to be the divine figure with special sympathy for human beings, and, therefore, would be the likely candidate to make messages or warnings available for the benefit of the human race.

But the fact that Ea is the single divine name to appear in the list, and that moreover the text does not say Ea “wrote” *Enūma Anu Enlil* (using the verb *šaṭāru*) but rather that it was “of the mouth of” (*ša pî*) that god, raises a serious question about divine authorship in the context of Mesopotamian literature. Lambert observed that, “the relationship of the texts to the authors is expressed in most instances by *ša pî*, ‘of the mouth’. Previously we hesitated to decide if this indicated authorship or editorship. In view of the occurrence on one of the newly found fragments (I 4), where various works are said to be ‘of the mouth’ of Ea, authorship must certainly be indicated. No one would have described Ea as the editor of another’s works.”¹⁰ But what if we consider that authority can stem from authorship, but need not presume authorship. If Ea were regarded as the authority for the texts of *ašipūtu*, *kalūtu*, and *Enūma Anu Enlil*, because the knowledge contained in these corpora originated with him, it does not necessarily follow that he *wrote* the text. Indeed, when authorship is attributed it seems to be stated by a

⁸ See my *Babylonian Horoscopes* (TAPS 88/1, Philadelphia 1998), pp. 13-16.

⁹ W.G. Lambert, “A Catalogue of Texts and Authors”, *JCS* 16 (1962), pp. 59-77, for the text see p. 64 I (K. 2248):1-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

construction with *šaṭāru*.¹¹ In the Neo-Assyrian scholars' letters, a statement of authority, or simply origin, is sometimes given as *ša pî ummāni* "according to the masters,"¹² and certainly in these cases, the phrase *ša pî* does not imply anything written. In fact, the point of *ša pî* in the letters seems to be to contrast an oral with a written source of authority. Hence the phrase is now generally taken to refer to oral lore as opposed to written tradition, but with the added connotation that the oral lore had validity on a par with the text. On this basis, I regard x *ša pî* DN in the catalogue of texts as evidence not for authorship, as we understand it, but for authority. In this same "Catalogue of Texts and Authors," Ea is followed by Umanna-Adapa,¹³ literally "Umanna, the Wise," who is there assigned two series, "The Lunar Crescent of Anu and Enlil (ud-sar an ^den-lil-la)," and "I, even I, am Enlil (ma-e-me-en-nam ^den-lil-la)," neither of which are extant. The particular texts associated with Adapa aside, this legendary figure is seen as a recipient and transmitter of knowledge of texts of divine origin. The transmission is defined as his "recitation" (*dabābu* "to speak"),¹⁴ and recalls the passage from the Erra Epic that names Kabti-ilāni-Marduk as the recipient and transmitter of that poem revealed to him by a god.¹⁵ In one other place, Adapa is the "compiler(?)" of the series "the lunar crescent of Anu and Enlil," expressed with the verb *kaṣāru* "to collect."¹⁶ Umanna-Adapa is also known from another source as the first antediluvian sage, the Oannes of Berossus. Originally, Adapa seems to have been the epithet of Oannes, an epithet meaning "wise," and only secondarily became a name itself.¹⁷ Adapa, the *išippu* or purification priest of Eridu, who ascended to heaven, is also one of the famous *apkallu* or sages, and is frequently associated with the mythic time before the Flood.

According to the texts referring to the "seven sages,"¹⁸ the *apkallu* were mythological entities, only partly human, and had a magical apotropaic function. Like Ea, they were identified with special wisdom, wisdom of crafts and of magic. And like Ea, Anu, and Enlil, in the introduction to

¹¹ For example, [... a-da]-pà ina pi-i-šū iš-tu-ru (JCS 16, 66:16).

¹² As in LAS 13 rev. 2; cf. AfO 20 118:54, see also Y. Elman, "Authoritative Oral Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Scribal Circles", *JANES* 7 (1975), pp. 19ff.

¹³ W.G. Lambert, *JCS* 16, p. 64 line 6 reads ^muma(UD)-an-na a-da-p[a].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 6-7.

¹⁵ Erra Tablet V:42-44.

¹⁶ *BHT* pl. 9 v 12; see B. Landsberger/Th. Bauer, "Zu neueröfentlichten Geschichtsquellen der Zeit von Asarhaddon bis Nabonid", *ZA* 37 (1927), 92.

¹⁷ W.G. Lambert, *JCS* 16, 74.

¹⁸ *LKA* 76 and parallels, see E. Reiner, "The Etiological Myth of the 'Seven Sages'", *OrNS* 30 (1961), pp. 1-12.

Enūma Anu Enlil, the *apkallu*'s were considered to play a role in the maintenance of the “designs of heaven and earth,” (*uṣurāti šamê u erṣeti*).¹⁹ In the Epic of Erra, the seven sages (*apkallu*) are described as “the pure fish, who, just as their lord Ea, have been endowed with sublime wisdom” (*purādi ebbūti ša kīma Ea bēlišunu uzna širta šuklulu*).²⁰ Indeed, the term *apkallu* varies freely with the term *ummānu*, “expert,” or “master.” In the case of Adapa, he is sometimes given the epithet *apkallu*, sometimes *ummānu*.²¹ According to another tradition, the *apkallu*'s function was to transmit special knowledge from the divine realm to the world of men, as in the case of the revelation of oil, liver, and celestial divination by Šamaš and Adad to the sage Enmeduranki:²² “Šamaš in Ebabbarra [appointed] Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, the beloved of Anu, Enlil, [and Ea]. Šamaš and Adad [brought him in] to their assembly, Šamaš and Adad honored him, Šamaš and Adad [set him] on a large throne of gold, they showed him how to observe oil on water, a mystery of An, [Enlil and Ea], they gave him the tablet of the gods, the liver, a secret of heaven and [underworld], they put in his hand the cedar-rod, beloved of the great gods.”²³ Then Enmeduranki does likewise with the “men of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon,” bringing them in, honoring them, placing them on thrones, and showing them lecanomancy, extispicy, and then the text says (line 18), “that (text) with commentary, ‘When Anu, Enlil’; and how to make mathematical calculations.”²⁴ Clearly there were variant traditions on the line of authority behind the *Enūma Anu Enlil* corpus.

The linking of literary, magical, and divinatory traditions either to gods or to some mythic time before the Flood recurs in other passages of Akkadian literature, for example Gilgamesh, who “brought knowledge from before the Flood,”²⁵ Assurbanipal's reference to difficult inscriptions on “stones from the prediluvian times,”²⁶ or the attributions of the medical text tradition to the sages Lu-Nanna of Ur and Enlil-muballit of Nippur.²⁷ This theme is not without parallel elsewhere in Mesopotamian culture, for example, the idea expressed in the Sumerian King List of the divine origin of

¹⁹ K. 5119 rev. 5, see *ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Erra Tablet I:162.

²¹ E. Reiner, *OrNS* 30, p. 8.

²² W.G. Lambert, “Enmeduranki and related matters”, *JCS* 21 (1967), pp. 132f.

²³ K. 2486+ ii 1-9.

²⁴ See W.G. Lambert, *JCS* 21, 133.

²⁵ *EG* I i 6.

²⁶ M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergang Niniveh's. II. Teil: Texte* (Leipzig 1916), 256:18.

²⁷ See W.G. Lambert, “Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity”, *JCS* 11 (1957), pp. 7-9.

the institution of kingship. According to the Sumerian King List, kingship had been “lowered” from above, i.e., from the cosmic heavenly domain. In addition, continuity between the “present” and the distant past of antediluvian times, is made in the Sumerian King List with the addition of the section of antediluvian kings. But, as was noted by Jacobsen, the antediluvian section of the Sumerian King List was not limited to the king list, but was also found independently as a self-contained *topos*.²⁸ Jacobsen cited a Sumerian literary work²⁹ which begins “when the crown of kingship was lowered from heaven, when the scepter and the throne of kingship were lowered from heaven,” and continues with a list of the five antediluvian cities, beginning with Eridu, and an account of the Flood. In this piece, EN.KI is the hero god, playing the role of creator of humankind (with Enlil and Ninhursag), as well as savior of human beings threatened with extinction by the Flood. The provenance of such a tradition, as indicated by the prominent role of EN.KI, is the city Eridu, assigned by this tradition first place in line to receive kingship from heaven. The Babylonian chronicle known as the Dynastic Chronicle preserves the same tradition of the descent of kingship from heaven first to Eridu and then to Bad-tibira and the other three cities before the Deluge. A late bilingual copy of the Dynastic Chronicle provides the opening line of the text. It says: “[When Anu], Enlil, [...]; Anu, Enlil, and Ea [...]; [They established?] kingship for/in the land”, etc.³⁰

The aetiological function of Anu, Enlil, and Ea is similarly found in the opening lines of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, although what is of central interest is not kingship, but cosmic order and regularity in the heavens. This introduction begins: (Akkadian version) “When Anu, Enlil, and Ea, the great gods, established by their true decision, the designs of heaven and earth, the increase of the day, the renewal of the month, and the appearances (of celestial bodies), (then) humankind saw the sun going out from his gate and (the celestial bodies) regularly appear in the midst of heaven and earth.”³¹ The divine authority of the text *Enūma Anu Enlil* (as of the others mentioned as originating with Ea) is consistent and compatible with the notion of the divine establishment of order and regularity in the world. And because omens

²⁸ Th. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (AS 11, Chicago 1939), p. 57.

²⁹ *PBS V* no. 1; see A. Poebel's translation and commentary in *Historical texts* (*PBS IV/1*, Philadelphia 1914), pp. 9-70 and L. King's discussion in *Legends of Babylon and Egypt* (London 1918), pp. 41-101.

³⁰ I. Finkel, “Bilingual Chronicle Fragments”, *JCS* 32 (1980), p. 66:1-3.

³¹ *STC I* 124; II pl. 49:9-14. Note also the related bilingual introduction to an incantation text in I. Finkel, *JCS* 32, p. 67, BM 41328:1 (Sum.) EN u an ^den-líl-la ^den-ki-ke giš-ḥur-ḥur an-ki-ke mu-un-gi-na-es-a-ba? (Akk.) UD ^da-num ^den-líl u ^de-a uš-ṣu-rat AN-e KI-tim uk-tin-nu “when Anu, Enlil, and Ea established the designs of heaven and earth”.

were meant to benefit humankind by providing special knowledge of the future to those who learned to interpret the divine order of things, the diviner represented the one specially privileged by education to participate in the contact between divine and human. The diviner-scholar is sometimes referred to, especially in omen colophons, as *mūdû* “the one who knows,” or “the initiated,” as in *mūdû mūdâ likallim* “the initiated may show (the tablet) only to the initiated (but not to the uninitiated).”³² Whether the designation *mūdû*, “the initiate,” suggests a person having secret knowledge of the actual signs as well as the relevant textual corpus as a result of study, or as a function of special intimacy with the god, parallel with that of the wise *apkallu*'s of literary tradition, is an intriguing question.³³

The association of the content of a text with a divine source has another corollary in the incantation literature with the formula “the incantation is not mine, it is the incantation of DN (and DN ...)” (*šiptu ul iattun šipat ...*). EN.KI/Ea is often, but by no means exclusively encountered as the deity whose incantation is identified. Lambert, who did not consider these references in terms of divine authorship, but rather of revealed knowledge,³⁴ contrasted the allusion to gods in incantations with that of the catalogue of “authors.” I would instead understand both as consistent, and both as related to the role of the gods as providers of signs in the natural world and to their place in the cosmos itself.

III. Relationship Between the Histories

The Babylonian understanding of the divine origin and hence divine authority of the *Enūma Anu Enlil* text seems to be a scholarly derivation from the role of the gods in the system of Mesopotamian divination as of their place in the cosmos in general. A connection may therefore be made between

³² *AMT* 105:25; *KAR* 307 rev. 26; *LKA* 72 rev. 20; *TCL* 6 32 rev. 7.

³³ As far as the claim to the divine source of its knowledge is concerned, a certain generic relation can be seen between Babylonian celestial divination and later Greco-Egyptian astrology. The priest Petosiris, whose name was attached to a 2nd century B.C. hellenistic astrological compendium, addressed to king Nechepso (ruled at Sais 663-525 B.C.), was said by Proclus to have “met every kind of rank of gods and angels,” see A. Darby Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph Stewart (Oxford 1972), Vol. I, 496 and note 15. A much later hellenistic papyrus (A.D. 138) claims that Nechepso-Petosiris based their “teachings” on the god Hermes, as in *CCAG* 8 4, 95, cited in D. Pingree, *The Yavanajātaka of Sphujidhvaja* (Cambridge/London 1978), Vol. II, 430. The reference here is to texts of the “Hermetic” corpus, so-called because the Thrice-Greatest Hermes (Hermes Trismegistus) was the divinity associated as the source of revelation for an enormous variety of occult and philosophical literature, some of which was astrological, and some of which bears a relation to Babylonian celestial omen texts.

³⁴ W.G. Lambert, *JCS* 16, pp. 72-73.

the practical understanding of omens, i.e., that they were messages from gods containing clues to change in the future, and the claim that the written omen had validity because it was divine in origin. I do not believe this is tantamount to a claim that the text was authored by a god. But I do think that all this has much to do with the issue of tradition and change in the text, namely that the divine origin, and therefore the revealed character of its knowledge, made the text fundamentally unalterable.

Our external textual history provides some insights into the development of the system of celestial divination as a body of knowledge about the physical world derived from observation and systematic thinking over a very long period from Old Babylonian to Kassite times. The scribes who maintained the tradition of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, however, represented the text not as the final product of centuries of accretion of data organized within the vast system of celestial omens by successive generations of scribes, but as a body of revealed knowledge. The collection and systematization of celestial phenomena as omens contained within the 70 tablets of *Enūma Anu Enlil* was the product of an intellectual tradition that assumed the gods were inseparable from phenomena by virtue of their cosmology, were responsible for the associations between phenomena in nature and events in human society, and were the authorities behind the text which contained all the divine decisions. Well into the Seleucid Era, as long as there were scribes of *Enūma Anu Enlil* alive to copy that text, they preserved it in much the same form and content as it had in the earliest exemplars known to us.

The Babylonian scribe, whether a writer of omens, historical texts, or some other genre, is aptly described – however unintentionally – by Arnaldo Momigliano, in a characteristically penetrating essay on classical historiography, in which he talked about what the classical historian was *not*. He said, “the Greek and Roman historians were not supposed to be the keepers of tradition. They were not assumed to register events in terms of conformity to, or deviations from, the norm. They were not supposed to succeed each other in a profession supported by the State or by religious institutions, nor were they concerned with keeping change under control. ... There is nothing in Greece or Rome comparable with the traditionalist approach of an Al-Tabari with his report on the chain of authorities. There is nothing like Chinese official historiography with its minute registration of isolated facts ... There is nothing like the *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson, who had old stories written down as told by intelligent people about chieftains who spoke the Danish tongue.”³⁵ I would add here that neither is there anything like the Babylonian Dynastic Chronicle or the Sumerian King List which trace kingship from heaven through the antediluvian sages to the first cities after the Flood. The motif of the introduction of the tradition of kingship from the

³⁵ A. Momigliano, “Tradition and the Classical Historian”, in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Wesleyan/CT 1977), p. 166.

gods to the king-sages of remotest antiquity and from there to the present (and assumed to the future) harmonizes with the Babylonian scribes' own derivation of divination as well, expressed in the ascription of the cosmic designs and portents to Anu, Enlil, and Ea, and of the series *Enūma Anu Enlil* itself to the god Ea.

While the traditionalism of the *Enūma Anu Enlil* text continued to be upheld, no constraints seem to have been correspondingly placed on the techniques developed to predict mathematically the phenomena regarded as divine signals. In the sphere of the inquiry into nature, it is not the case that ancient Mesopotamian intellectual culture was so constrained by traditionalism that there was any lack of an effort to come to terms with the physical world. What separates the history of celestial divination as preserved in *Enūma Anu Enlil* from that of the history of mathematical astronomical techniques as we have them in the corpus of ephemerides,³⁶ is the traditionalist attitude toward the text itself. While mathematical astronomy evolved together with new forms of texts to accommodate the treatment of its subject matter, and as well, personal astrology with its own specialized text genre, the horoscopes,³⁷ the text of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, some of which remained essentially Old Babylonian in form and content if not orthography, continued as an unalterable literary embodiment of a divinely inspired tradition.

³⁶ O. Neugebauer, *ACT*.

³⁷ See my *Babylonian Horoscopes*.

MUNUSCULA MESOPOTAMICA

Festschrift
für
Johannes RENGER

Herausgegeben
von
Barbara BÖCK
Eva CANCIK-KIRSCHBAUM
Thomas RICHTER

1999
Ugarit-Verlag
Münster