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The Temple Scribe in Chaldean Uruk

The education and activities of the Eanna temple scribe in sixth-century B C. Uruk varied little from what they had been prior to the Chaldean era. The cuneiform writing system was still in use, and Akkadian economic documents continued to be composed and literary texts preserved in a manner not unlike that of previous periods. These traditions, however, did not preclude the scribe's attending to his own private business affairs or prevent his engaging in the collection or composition of literary documents that reflect either his own personal interests or the necessity to prepare materials with decidedly political overtones. The result of these endeavors is a body of texts which, in many respects, indicates both the influence of spoken Aramaic on written Akkadian and the everchanging political situation (from both official and private perspectives) in southern Mesopotamia in the Chaldean period.

With the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC the once mighty Assyrian empire passed into history. A new star was on the rise in the form of the Chaldeans; power shifted from northern Mesopotamia back to Babylon. The conquests of Nabopolassar¹ (626-605) the founder of the Chaldean dynasty, however, did not result in a severing of ties with the past. Like the Amorites and Kassites of an earlier age, these Chaldeans were well aware of the cultural achievements of their predecessors and sought to reestablish ties with them. The libraries of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal lay in ruin; yet the scribal schools of palace and temple in southern Mesopotamia sought to perpetuate the use of the cuneiform system of writing and, as a consequence, to preserve a tradition long associated with bygone eras. Cuneiform, and the clay tablets on which it was written, were not adapted to the writing of Aramaic, yet their use was continued, partly because tradition dictated that this be so and partly because Akkadian, the written language of court and commerce, had always been linked with the system and was still a facet of everyday life in sixth-century Mesopotamia.

This can best be seen in examining the documents from the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk (modern Warka) and its great Eanna temple (the center of worship of the goddess Ishtar)² that was for so long a center of economic life. Uruk is a site that has yielded hundreds of tablets from earliest times as well as from the Chaldean period; although the vast majority of this material can be dated to the sixth century, a portion of it attests to the use of cuneiform in Uruk as early as the third millennium BC.³

While discussion concerning the original purpose of cuneiform writing continues, there can be no question that record keeping was an important part of every

Mesopotamian city-state.⁴ Bureaucracies constituted a feature of each community, and data concerning the delivery and dispensation of commodities had to be kept. The earliest documents indicate that an educational system existed to provide scribes, priests, and merchants with a knowledge of writing essential to their work. Scribal schools designed to teach the art of writing Sumerian (and, later, Akkadian) cuneiform thus emerged in urban centers and were to continue to exist long after Sumerian and Akkadian ceased to be spoken languages. Early school exercise tablets show that particular texts could be copied over and over again, perhaps by several different individuals.⁵ Through the training received in the *edubba* ("tablet house") the scribe could "satisfy the economic and administrative needs of the land, primarily, of course, those of temple and palace."⁶ While very little (comparatively) has survived (or has been published) from the second and early first millennium, documents from the seventh and sixth centuries indicate that scribal activity expanded in Uruk to include the preservation and copying of literary texts composed much earlier.⁷ In addition to the preparation of receipts, ledgers, or balanced accounts necessary to the daily business of the Eanna temple, medical texts, hymns, rituals, and astrological and birth omens were copied and preserved for the future.⁸ In the later Achaemenid and Seleucid periods relatively recent discoveries indicate that scribes also composed somewhat "apocalyptic" or "prophetic" texts with decidedly political overtones that may reflect both a genre having its roots in much earlier periods of Mesopotamian history and a public function of the scribe that is now receiving increased attention (see below).

We actually have no contemporary evidence for the training of the scribe in the sixth century, but there is no reason to suppose that it varied greatly from what it had been previously. From earlier evidence we know that, as with the learning of any language or script, memorization played a very important part. Lists of signs, along with their pronunciations, had to be copied and recopied until the student had mastered all of them.⁹ Moving from the simple to the more complex, he then had to undertake the task of reproducing some of the more important literary works. Many examples of such efforts have been unearthed in excavations of various sites. Some of these copies remained incomplete as the student moved on to more complicated works. This scribal training resulted early in the creation of reference tools such as "syllabaries" (signs with their pronunciation written out phonetically), bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian "vocabularies" (combinations of Sumerian word signs and their pronunciation together with their corresponding Akkadian meanings), topically arranged lists of Sumerian words with their Akkadian meanings, and grammatical texts that were intended to help Akkadian scribes learn Sumerian morphology. Thus, as A. L. Oppenheim has put it, "the traditional bilinguality of the Mesopotamian scribe was maintained by the training in which a great deal of Sumerian material was used."¹⁰ Both the "literary" and "economic" documents reflect this tradition. Such circumstances led, naturally, to the specialization of scribes and to the preservation of several categories of material, although it is important to note that present evidence does not allow one to be precise in determining the exact extent of this latter aspect of the Uruk scribe's activities.

In attempting to deal with the Chaldean scribe in general, as with scribes in any other period, one problem stands out above all the others: almost nothing is

known of his background, position in society, or possible political influence. While the goddess Nisaba and the god Nabû were, at times, patrons of this profession, it is still unclear what the precise relationship between them and the scribal craft really was. The scribe was probably trained to deal with virtually every category of material—from omen texts to plant and stone lists. However, the occurrence in the Neo-Assyrian period of a *tupšar enūma Anu Enlil* (the scribe of the series *enūma Anu Enlil*), who dealt with materials of an astrological or astronomical nature,¹¹ is one of a number of indications that a certain degree of specialization existed. Another case involves those men designated as "city scribes," who are significant administrative officials in the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries. In focusing more precisely on the Chaldean era and some of its rather interesting source material, it is important to note for our purpose that perhaps (next to the third dynasty of Ur) more documents survive from the Neo-Babylonian period than from any other. Among these is a rich corpus of contract tablets and administrative records from Uruk and its great Eanna sanctuary. These provide us with a rather fascinating picture of the public and private life of numerous temple scribes and aid in attempting to reconstruct the "careers" of these individuals and their responsibilities. They suggest that a scribe in the Neo-Babylonian period was one of two types: "the literary scribe who had to be specially trained and underwent thorough schooling, and the scribes who knew enough to write out business documents but did not have any literary background."¹² This appears to have been the case in the Old Babylonian period as well. Much more, of course, is known of the activities of the men who "controlled the writing down of all legal, epistolary, business, and administrative documents" since the corpus of material in which their names are mentioned is extremely large. Although there have been those who have suggested that those scribes belonged to some type of "guild" or "association,"¹³ the evidence, I believe, is presently inconclusive since the personal and "family" names included in the documents do not hint at the existence of such groups.

Fortunately for us, contracts from the Eanna sanctuary or from Uruk itself combine to paint an intriguing picture of both the personal and professional sides of the life of the scribe in the Chaldean period. A case in point is that of a certain Nabû-bāni-ahi,¹⁴ son of Ibnâ, who repeatedly appears in administrative documents beside members of the Eanna hierarchy. While his occupation and involvement with the overseer (*qīpu*) and administrator (*šatammu*) of this important temple are well-known, his activities provide us with a few more clues as to a) the precise role played by scribes in the public and private lives of the officials beside whom they worked, and b) the background or training that may have been necessary before an individual could assume an administrative position. His name is attested in the Uruk documents as early as the 23rd year of Nebuchadnezzar (582) where he first appears as a witness to a transaction. He also appears as a witness in a promissory note involving the delivery of sheep to the executive officers (the *bēl piqnēti*) of Eanna and later turns up in 564/3 (the 8th of the month Abu) in another promissory note concerned with the payment of silver. It is in this latter text that he is designated "scribe of Eanna" (the *tupšar Eanna*), although this is not an official title. He seems to have been one of several scribes who, contemporaneously, are called "scribes of Eanna" in the Uruk contracts.¹⁵ However, he is one of the most

prominent scribes who is associated with the affairs of administrative personnel both in the temple proper and in other cities in Babylonia.

His most frequently attested role is not that of writer of the tablet in which his name appears but, rather, as a witness to transactions involving prominent individuals both before and after they assume their offices in Eanna or Uruk. Among these interesting people are 1) Marduk-šuma-iddina of the Gimil-Nanâ family, a man who became comptroller (*šākin tēmi*) of Uruk; 2) Sîn-iddina, the famous overseer of the Eanna sanctuary; and 3) Bānija of the Bā'iru house, who was himself a scribe before assuming the office of temple administrator (*šatammu*). Marduk-šuma-iddina seemingly performed the function of receiver of grain delivered to the temple even before he was elevated to the office of *šākin tēmi*. It is, therefore, probable that top city and temple administrative personnel went through an apprenticeship in Eanna before assuming their office. Sîn-iddina, the overseer of Eanna, turns up everywhere, both in public and private records in both northern and southern Babylonia, and Nabû-bāni-aḥi is almost always at his side either as a party to several transactions or as a witness. Lastly, Bānija, appears as witness in promissory notes involving not only Sîn-iddina, but also his predecessor as temple administrator and the temple accountant. This Bānija, recruited from the scribal ranks, subsequently became Eanna administrator during the reign of Neriglissar (560-556).

These bits and pieces of information, extracted from contract tablets, do not shed much light on the function of the scribe as "tablet writer." Nevertheless, the names and activities of such men as Nabû-bāni-aḥi do allow us to draw tentative conclusions concerning the background and possible political influence of certain Uruk scribes in Chaldean Mesopotamia. First, it seems likely that at least some of the men in the scribal ranks came from banking houses or "families" noted for their business activities throughout southern Mesopotamia. The documents bearing their names do bear witness to the prominence of certain families in temple affairs. Nabû-bāni-aḥi was just one of the many scribes who, while apparently never holding such important administrative positions as did Sîn-iddina or Marduk-šuma-iddina, were involved with these men (just as members of the Egibi, Nabāja, and Nūr-Sîn families were business associates in northern Babylonia) in transactions that transcended the basic responsibility of "tablet writer." The same types of relationships existed in the succeeding Achaemenid period, where it can be shown that the scribal positions and administrative offices (at times filled by individuals who were trained scribes) were handed down from one family member to another.

A case in point is that of Mūrānu, Nabû-bāni-aḥi's son. Mūrānu, like his father, is, on occasion, mentioned in texts along with other scribes, most notably Nādin, son of Bēl-aḥḥe-iqīša, descendant of Egibi, and Kinā, son of Zērīja, where he and Nādin are referred to as *tupšarrū ša Eanna*. On the 20th of Nisanu, 544/3, Mūrānu is found writing up a tablet involving Gabbi-ilāni-šarra-usur, *qīpu* of Eanna, and Zērīja, the *šatammu* of Eanna. In the reign of Cyrus (539-529) the names of all three of the above scribes occur together in several documents where they act as witnesses. On the 9th of Simanu, 534/3, Mūrānu appears with another scribe, Nabû-nādin-apli, son of Bānija, former *šatammu* of Eanna. This evidence seems to indicate that offices became to an even greater extent (no doubt as a result of royal intervention or control) virtually the private preserves of individual families.

Secondly, material such as this, when taken together with the almost totally propagandistic documents from the early Achaemenid period, shows that an Eanna scribe could not only be influential, but could also be installed in or removed from a position of authority in accordance with the king's wishes. A case in point is that of Zērīja, the administrator of the Eanna sanctuary in the reigns of Amēl-Marduk (562-560) and Nabonidus (556-539). The interesting "Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus," composed by Babylonian scribes after Cyrus' conquest, clearly portrays Zērīja as a loyal follower of the last Chaldean monarch, who used to "sit at the feet of the king." His official activities are well documented in numerous Uruk contracts bearing his name. Yet it has been recently shown that this Zērīja held his office at two different times.¹⁷ His first term is documented from the month of Nisanu in 561 until at least 559, when he suddenly disappears and is replaced by a certain Bānija, son of Tabni-Ea of the Bā'iru family, a man who, as we have already seen, was also a scribe.

It is indeed interesting that Zērīja's sudden departure from his official position in the Eanna sanctuary coincides with the equally sudden disappearance of the temple overseer Sîn-iddina and with the accession to the throne of an apparent usurper, Neriglissar. While the reasons for these changes are, understandably, not revealed by these or any other documents presently known, it nevertheless seems likely that close relationships had to be maintained between the palace and temple personnel who, at least in this instance, were scribes before they assumed their administrative duties. Furthermore, if the information contained in the fragmentary history of Berossos (fl. ca. 290) is correct and Neriglissar did obtain his throne by a coup d'état, then it would seem logical for him to attempt to build a base of support, either through forming alliances with individuals who were already powerful (in the temple and elsewhere throughout the kingdom) or, where circumstances would permit it, by placing individuals loyal to him in positions of authority. Perhaps, then, he removed Zērīja (not to mention other prominent personnel) from his office in Eanna, replacing him with his own appointee.

Whatever the case, available source material clearly indicates that, as was the case in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, an Eanna scribe could not only rise to a position of administrative importance, but also develop ties with the monarchy in Babylon that could be of use in holding on to his own office, as well as providing the king with needed support.

As a consequence of several recent discoveries, we should say a few words about the "public" activities of the Uruk scribe during the Chaldean period. The Uruk contracts bear unmistakable witness to the prominence of certain families in temple affairs.¹⁸ The scribes who were members of these families seem to have been involved in collecting cuneiform tablets representing various literary genres surviving from earlier periods¹⁹ as well as in composing texts which had the effect of perpetuating earlier tradition for political reasons.²⁰ While it has been known for some time that Achaemenid propaganda was circulated by the priest-scribes of Babylon to justify Cyrus' conquest of the Chaldeans and the apparent "exile" of Nabonidus, it is now clear that the Uruk scribes were also engaged in composing such material at least as early as the Neo-Babylonian period.

A case in point lies in an example of the so-called "apocalyptic" or "prophecy" literature brought to light only a few years ago, a genre which is now receiving

increased attention. Discovered in a residential area of early Achaemenid Uruk during the German Warka Expedition in 1969, text 22307/7 may well have come from the library of some magician or diviner. In any case, it constitutes further evidence for the inclination to collect and preserve tablets prepared by scribes of prior periods. While the lack of personal names has resulted in considerable debate over the identity of individuals referred to in the text, there can be little doubt that the Uruk priest-scribes were involved in preparing this propagandistic document. A portion of the text reads as follows:

After him a king will arise, but he as well will not provide justice in the land;
he will not give the right decisions in the land.

He will subdue the world, and all the world will tremble at the mention of
his name.

But after him, a king will arise in Uruk, who will provide justice in the land and
will give the right decisions for the land.

He will establish the rights of the cult of Anu in Uruk.

He will remove the ancient protective goddess of Uruk from Babylon and let
her dwell in her own sanctuary in Uruk. The people belonging to her he will
devote to her. He will rebuild the temples of Uruk and restore the sanctuaries
of the gods.

He will renew Uruk. The gates of Uruk he will build of lapis lazuli. He will fill the
rivers and fields with abundant yield.

After him his son will arise as king in Uruk and become master over the world.

He will exercise rule and kingship in Uruk, and his dynasty will be estab-
lished forever.

The kings of Uruk will exercise rulership like the gods.²¹

This document clearly reflects a function of the priest-scribes of Chaldean Uruk, which is to be seen also in the so-called "Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus," the Cyrus Cylinder, and the Adad-guppi material from Harran. At times when threats to the stability of the monarchy may have been perceived, local attitudes toward political events could be represented by using apocalyptic descriptions which perhaps reflect a literary genre having its roots in earlier periods of Mesopotamian history.

In this case the scribe employs the *vaticinium ex eventu* device "to prove the authenticity and reliability of the real prediction . . . and thus to legitimate and lend support to the predicted rule of the son of the good king and his dynasty."²² Parallels to this type of text extend from the Neo-Assyrian period to the time of Alexander the Great and his successors and serve to give "in the form of predictions, a history of the kings of Babylon from the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire to the Hellenistic Age," while at the same time reflecting local attitudes to changing conditions.²³ Thus, while the thousands of Neo-Babylonian business documents provide glimpses into the private life of some scribes, the literary remains also bear witness to their inclination to collect and copy literary material surviving from earlier periods, as well as to their political involvement by the production of "apocalyptic" pieces like the one we have discussed above.

Appendix: Aramaic Influence on Cuneiform Akkadian.

The preceding paper has focused in a general way on the training of scribes and in a more specific way on the official and unofficial activities of the scribes of Eanna who wrote Akkadian cuneiform documents in the Chaldean period. However, as we noted at the beginning, Akkadian was no longer the primary spoken language and, despite the established tradition, this frequently posed graphic-linguistic problems. As Gelb notes, "this was the time when Aramaic influence began to be preponderant in large parts of the Near East. How strong this influence was, especially in Mesopotamia, is well-attested by the numerous Aramaic inscriptions discovered in both Assyria and Babylonia, which clearly prove that the country was at that time bilingual and biscriptural."²⁴ Even though the educational system designed to teach cuneiform seems to have remained basically the same as in previous periods, this did not preclude the development of local or regional "styles" of writing. Akkadian cuneiform, though far removed from the days of its origin, came to display characteristics heretofore unknown that have come, in modern times, to be associated with a Neo-Babylonian "dialect." As a result, the writing of cuneiform signs expressing the final vowels or consonants of an Akkadian word frequently creates the impression of a scribe prone to grammatical error. This simply was not the case.

Contrary to Hyatt's reasoning of a generation ago,²⁵ what may appear as incorrect spelling in Chaldean cuneiform is actually a reflection of Aramaic intrusions or, more correctly, "a system of syllabic signs each expressing a consonant plus any vowel."²⁶ This would explain the occurrence of unusual verbal forms (such as *na-ta-ku-lu* or *ba-la-ta*). Furthermore, it appears likely that the scribes of the Neo-Babylonian period "consciously began to select certain signs over others in order to express unambiguously the nature of the consonants in the words they were writing."²⁷ This would involve overlooking a number of grammatical features common to correct Akkadian, such as case endings and proper final vowels. However, because of the flexibility of the cuneiform writing system itself, the scribe could discard "correct" spellings in favor of accurately indicating the consonants making up the root of the word employed in the text.²⁸ Thus, while the form of a verb, for example, might appear to be awkward, such a situation could be readily tolerated, since the "awkwardness" was purposely designed to remove all doubt as to what verb was being used. Hence, the presence of Aramaic in both spoken and written form served to partly change the character of the Akkadian being written in the cuneiform system.

1. For translations of the "Nabopolassar Chronicle," see Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: The British Museum, 1961) 51 ff.; and A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Texts From Cuneiform Sources) V (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1975) Chronicle 2, pp. 87 ff. A bibliography of reviews of Wiseman's book and related studies is included by Grayson on p. 87.
2. See "Eanna" in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* II (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1938) 260. Inscriptions attest to construction efforts as early as the time of Enannatum of Lagash during the Early Dynastic period.
3. See Eva Strommenger, "The Chronological Division of the Archaic Levels of Uruk-Eanna VI to III/II: Past and Present" in *American Journal of Archaeology* (1980) 480-1. See also Adam Falkenstein, *Archaische Texte aus Uruk* (Berlin, 1936).
4. Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 230. For additional commentaries on the Sumerian Edubba, see Adam Falkenstein "Der Sohn des Tafelhauses," *Die Welt des Orients* 3 (1948) 172-86; Cyril J. Gadd, *Teachers and Students in the Oldest Schools* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1956); Samuel Noah Kramer, *Schooldays* (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1949).
5. See Gadd, *Teachers and Students* (1956) 1 ff.
6. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (1963) 230 ff. This did not preclude the broadening of the scribe's base to include the study and composition of literary works.
7. See Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und Assyrische Kolophone*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* II (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968); Adam Falkenstein, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk* (Berlin, 1931) no. 2 ff.; F. Thureau-Dangin, *Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du temple d'Anu au temps des Séleucides* Textes cunéiformes, Musée du Louvre, VI (Paris, 1922) no. 1 ff.
8. While much, to be sure, has been written on the subject of teaching those who spoke Sumerian the art of writing the language, very little (comparatively speaking) has until recently been done to explain the method of scribal education after its demise as a spoken language. See now the recent treatment of H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "How Did They Learn Sumerian?" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* XXXI (1979) 118 ff. For older analyses of the teaching of Sumerian, see F. R. Kraus, *Vom mesopotamischen Menschen der altbabylonischen Zeit und seiner Welt* (Amsterdam, 1973) 214-31; A. W. Sjöberg, "The Old Babylonian Eduba" in *Assyriological Studies* 20 (Chicago, 1975) 159-79; S. N. Kramer, "The Sumerian School" in G. E. Mylonas (ed.), *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson* (St. Louis, 1951) 243 ff.; A. Falkenstein, "Die babylonische Schule," *Saeculum* IV (1953) 125-37; and C. J. Gadd, *Teachers and Students* (1956).
9. Vanstiphout "How Did They Learn Sumerian?" (1979) 125.
10. A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 249.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 242. See also Oppenheim's essay "Man and Nature in Mesopotamian Civilization" in the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* XV 364 ff.
12. See David B. Weisberg, *Guild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achaemenid Mesopotamia*, Yale Near Eastern Researches I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 84. See also Samuel N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (New York: Doubleday, 1959) 1 ff.

13. Weisberg, *Guild Structure* (1967) 81.

14. Conclusions expressed in the following pages regarding Nabû-bāni-ahi and the public and private life of an Eanna scribe writing business documents are drawn from my article "The Scribe Nabû-bāni-ahi, son of Ibnâ, and the Hierarchy of Eanna as seen in the Erech Contracts," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 67 (1977) 42-52.

15. In the preparation of business documents, as was the case with the writing of letters, the scribe would employ phraseology and a format that was consistently used in these texts. Thus, while letters (as in the Old Babylonian period) began with standard introductory phrases, the contract tablets included common idioms and were structured according to customary procedure (e.g., the body of the text would be followed by a list of witnesses, with the year and month of composition appearing at the end of the tablet).

16. For a translation of this interesting text, see Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts* (London, 1924) 83 ff.; and J. B. Pritchard (ed.) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1955) 314.

17. See R. H. Sack, "Sin-Iddina and Zērīja, *qīpu* and *šatammu* of Eanna in Erech," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 66 (1976) 280-91.

18. The contract tablets from the Achaemenid period offer even more evidence to support this conclusion. See San Nicolò, *Beiträge zu einer Prosopographie neubabylonischer Beamten der Zivil- und Tempelverwaltung* (München, 1941) 16 ff.

19. These comments certainly apply to the scribe in Achaemenid and Seleucid Uruk as well, since the literary genre discussed here is evidenced in the texts from these later periods.

20. For scribal activity at Uruk involving collecting and copying texts representing various literary genre, see Adam Falkenstein, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk* (Berlin, 1931); Hermann Hunger, *Kolophone* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1968); and F. Thureau-Dangin, *Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du temple d'Anu au temps des Séleucides* (Paris, 1922).

21. See also a much later cuneiform parallel in a British Museum text published recently by A. K. Grayson in *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto, 1975) 33, lines 11 ff.: "A rebel prince will arise [. . .] the dynasty of Harran [. . .] for 17 years he will exercise kingship and will prevail over the land the festival of Esagil (?) [. . .] the wall in Babylon [. . .] he will plot evil against Babylonia. A king of Elam will rise up, the sceptre [. . .] he will remove him from his throne [. . .] he will seize the throne."

22. See H. Hunger and S. Kaufman, "A New Akkadian Prophecy Text" in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95/3 (1975). Likewise, see W. G. Lambert, *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978) 11: "The document is clearly a product of the city of Uruk, which had very ancient cultural traditions that had been maintained, but was not the political capital, that position being indisputably Babylon's. Thus the Urukean prophecy has tacitly passed over all the Assyrian puppet rulers in Babylon and records by their Assyrian masters! A combination of chauvinism and political realism. It is not possible to demonstrate from other evidence that all the things said about this sequence of seven kings did in fact happen. We are far from well-informed about the details of this period, especially as they were seen from Uruk, but equally nothing said can be shown to be wrong."

23. See Eric Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts II* (Leipzig, 1923) no. 421. This is a late Assyrian tablet from Assur containing, essentially, the same phraseology as the Uruk text cited above. A portion reads: "A prince will arise and will exercise kingship for 13 years. There will be an attack of Elam on Babylonia and the booty of Babylonia will be carried off. The shrines of the great gods will be ruined and Babylonia will be defeated. There will be chaos, upset, and trouble in the land, and the upper classes will lose power. Some other, unknown person will arise, will seize power as if a king, and will kill off the nobility." See Lambert (1978) 10.
24. I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) 152.
25. J. P. Hyatt, *The Treatment of Final Vowels in Early Neo Babylonian*, Yale Oriental Researches 23 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941).
26. Gelb, *Study* (1952) 152.
27. Weisberg, *Guild Structure* (1967) 108.
28. Weisberg, *Guild Structure* (1967) 108 and 112-117, where a lengthy bibliography is found containing references to studies dealing with the relationship of the Aramaic language to the writing of cuneiform.

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Three Problems in the History of Cuneiform Writing: Origins, Direction of Script, Literacy

"Origins" suggests that cuneiform was invented in a short period of time around 3000 BC by a citizen of the Sumerian city of Uruk and that it arises conceptually out of the token system described by D. Schmandt-Besserat. "Direction of script" agrees with S. Picchioni that cuneiform was written and read vertically down through c. 2300 BC, but it emphasizes the use of reed patterns to demonstrate the manner in which the stylus was manipulated and sees this mode of manipulation as the motivating force behind the transition to horizontal script. "Literacy" argues that cuneiform was not as difficult as usually assumed, that the alphabet had no demonstrable effect on the level of functional literacy, and that the superiority of the alphabet over cuneiform has been exaggerated.

All of the problems discussed in this paper have long been pondered by cuneiformists. None of them have simple answers. Thus, their perennial attraction. I do not propose to solve these problems in a definitive fashion. However, I do propose alternative solutions which, in some cases, run counter to prevailing opinion, and here my intention has been to construct answers which are not less likely to be true than opinions generally held. Ideally, we would like to substantiate our hypotheses by at least two independent witnesses. Where this is possible we conventionally call these hypotheses "facts," but it must be borne in mind that such "facts" become progressively rarer as one moves back in human history from the present day. In this sense, much of mediaeval and ancient history is without "facts," and the third millennium, which forms a large part of our concerns in this paper, is almost entirely devoid of them. Bearing this real fact in mind, we now proceed to indulge ourselves in what a certain wit termed the prerogative of the living: to play tricks on the dead.

ORIGINS

The problem of cuneiform origins can be reduced to four interrogatives: *who*, *when*, *where*, and *why*? Given my caveat above, no one will expect me to suggest the name of the individual, the year BC, and the street address associated with the invention of cuneiform writing. However, publication of the papers by Margaret

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Visible Language, XV 4 (Autumn 1981), 419-440.

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