

From Sumerophone Scribe to Court Scholar:
Lexical Texts in the Stream of Tradition

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1.0 Introduction

This paper will seek to examine an important Assyriological stock phrase “the stream of tradition” (SoT), which was coined in 1960 by A. Leo Oppenheim. The phrase serves as a convenient reference for a complex and shifting scribal phenomena within Mesopotamia and its periphery, however, its use benefits the modern scholar only insofar as it can be deemed to be reflective of the available evidence. An important question then, is what exactly did this phrase entail in Oppenheim’s original usage? The author’s core contention can be sketched as follows: **i)** day-to-day texts such as administrative texts, economic texts, reports, receipts, *etc.* do not constitute stream of tradition texts (Oppenheim 1960, 411); **ii)** the stream of tradition is “the corpus of literary works of various types that was maintained, controlled and carefully kept alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes” (Oppenheim 1960, 410-411); **iii)** it was an essential part of a scribe’s education to copy the texts of the SoT (hence the modern reconstruction of the Mesopotamian school curriculum is highly relevant here) (Oppenheim 1960, 411); **iv)** while Oppenheim distinguished scholarly texts (i.e. omen texts, incantations *etc.*) from other literary texts, he nonetheless subsumed them within the SoT (Oppenheim 1960, 413).¹ Therefore, according to its original definitions, the SoT must be literary, must be continually transmitted over a span of time, and includes professional scholarly texts as well as the didactic texts of the curriculum.

While the original argument for the SoT was primarily based on first millennium material from the Library of Assurbanipal, this study will adopt a diachronic approach which understands scribal

¹ Tinney (2011, 589) discusses scholarly text types as belonging to a professional praxis, versus didactic texts which belong to a curricular praxis. This terminology is adopted here.

ambitions and achievements as developing in tandem with the turbulent political realities of ancient Mesopotamia. Following the rise and fall of the Ur III period, and the reinvention of Sumerian literature, it will be argued that the *terminus post quem* for the stream of tradition lies in the Old Babylonian period, in the development of the central Nippurian school curriculum, and in the development of the curricular lexical tradition. With a literary corpus consisting of some 97% Sumerian language texts, it must be said that Sumerophone literature is the salient feature of the stream at this juncture (sections 2.0 – 3.2). Writing in 1960, Oppenheim had a prediction:

When Assyriologists will be able to follow the fate of individual text groups through the history of their tradition, they will obtain more insight into the workings of this “stream” and, conceivably, light will be shed some day on ideological preferences and other attitudes that neither the content nor the wording of these texts is likely to reflect directly (Oppenheim 1960, 412).

With a view towards testing this prediction, and partially out of methodological consideration, this paper will give particular attention to the lexical corpus, to the curricular praxis and to a groundbreaking work on the history of the cuneiform lexical tradition by Niek Veldhuis (Veldhuis 2014a), which provides the opportunity to trace these textual groups through their history for the first time. Section 4.0 will examine the transmission and the maintenance of the Sumerophone literary corpus into the late second millennium while section 5.0 returns to the library of Assurbanipal to re-evaluate continuity versus change in light of Oppenheim’s stock phrase.

2.0 Ur III backdrop

While the story of Mesopotamian writing can be traced all the way back to the Uruk period, back to the dawn of writing itself, it is expedient here to sketch only a few developments in the Ur III period that would alter the course of the Mesopotamian intellectual tradition. The reign of the Ur III king Šulgi was exceptional for many reasons. In the second half of his 47 year long reign, Šulgi expanded the Ur III state into the peripheral area stretching from Assur in the North to Susa in the East (Roaf 1990, 102). The need to administer and regulate the provincial *bala* tax and the peripheral *gun mada* livestock tax was undoubtedly an underlying reason for an explosion in bureaucratic activity during the Ur III period. Many tens of thousands of administrative documents from this period have been uncovered from palace and provincial archives of the period (Adams 2009, §2.4 - §3.2.1). The establishment of a (comparatively) huge third millennium bureaucracy is a development of no small significance for the history of Mesopotamian literacy, but it was not the only development.

Concurrent with the restructuring of the state was the reformulation of the state royal ideology, culminating in the oft-discussed deification of king Šulgi himself. In part, this was achieved by looking back to the heroic kings of Uruk and claiming the same parentage as the semi-divine Gilgamesh: “Lugalbanda and Ninsumuna became his metaphysical parents, assuring his divinity” (Michalowski 2008, 36).

In what way might these developments have foreshadowed the textual traditions which Oppenheim would label the “stream of tradition”? That the new state administrative apparatus required (and subsequently produced) a well-regulated and well-trained bureaucracy cannot be disputed. P. Michalowski has further argued that scribal training in this period evolved to include

material aimed at indoctrinating scribes into the new ideological aspirations of the state. This can be inferred from the following: **i)** following Šulgi's innovations, the king's scribes "wiped clean the literary slate" – they discontinued all but a few literary narratives that had roots in the ED period, and replaced them with material such as contemporary royal praise poetry (although didactic texts such as lexical lists were not affected) (Michalowski 2008, 38); **ii)** The original Sumerian king list is now thought to have originated in the Ur III period, and likely dates to Šulgi's reign. Among other things, this list served the ideological purpose of connecting the Ur III kings with the heroic kings of Early Dynastic Uruk, and it is interesting to note that Šulgi is the only king in this text to bear the divine determinative (Michalowski 2008, 38).

The accumulated evidence suggests that the administrative demands of Šulgi's centralized state resulted in the founding of purpose-built state sponsored edubbas at Ur and Nippur; these state sponsored edubbas established a literary corpus that would form "the core of the scribal curriculum" for the next three centuries (George 2005, 5-6). As will be borne out below, however, Old Babylonian adaptation also included its fair share of innovation.

3.0 The Old Babylonian Intellectual Revolution

At the dawn of the second millennium, a period of dynastic weakness and conflict ensued as the territory of the former Ur III empire fragmented. Local rulers from Isin, Larsa and Babylon as well as Uruk, Kish and Sippar fought and vied for advantage. While some vestiges of the old Ur III state power were manifested in Isin, where rulers saw themselves as heirs of the former empire, this was a period of comparative decentralization (van de Mierop 2004, 92; Brisch 2011, 712).

As one ruler after another suffered defeat and setback, state power weakened further and the conditions for a shift in social power were set. Robert McCormick Adams states that, at this juncture, a new ‘proto-middle class’ emerged within the weakened states, and that this class gradually began to assume the productive forces and property that had hitherto lain within royal control. Characterized as a mix of entrepreneurs, landowners, merchants and “other urban notables,” they were literate, or semi-literate, and substantially replaced the administrators and scribes of the former Ur III state. Of high interest here is Adams’ equation of this emergent literati with the *awīlum* class known from Hammurabi’s law code. This suggestion, if maintained, would supply much needed contextualization for the term (Adams 2009, §6.8, §9.1; Veldhuis 2014b, 30). More pertinent to this study is that fact that this emerging class co-opted, and adapted to its own ends, cuneiform writing and recording technology resulting in a “great expansion in the private, secular uses and users of writing in Old Babylonian times” (Adams 2009, §5.2).

3.1 A Sketch of the Old Babylonian Edubba

Unsurprisingly, the decentralized city states did not maintain purpose-built state sponsored schools, and the edubba reverted to privatized settings. Archaeological findings suggest that in Old Babylonian Ur and Nippur, the education of young scribes took place in private houses,² and, in much the same situation as would still be found in the first millennium, expert scribes (*ummia* / *ummânu*) taught small groups of students in their own houses (George 2005, 4). The extent to

² George points out that there is occasional evidence for city-state involvement in education during the OB period, for example, school-tablets were found in the palace of Šin-kāšid at Uruk; still “most schooling was undertaken in the private sector” (George 2005, 7).

which the emergent semi-literate or literate ‘proto-middle class’ (possibly, the *awīlum*) should be associated with the scribal activity of the privatized OB edubba is unclear to the present author; current scholarly commentary here is tentative at best. It is interesting to note that private letters, as well as legal documents such as loan and land sale texts, only emerge in force at this point in the Old Babylonian period (Adams 2009, §2.4). However, such texts as this required only a basic level of literacy which could be learned ‘on the job,’ and a command of Sumerian literary texts would not have been prerequisite (Parpola 1997, 320).

It was at this juncture, and precisely when one might expect otherwise, that the conservative nature of the Mesopotamian intellectual tradition was made manifest: scribes of the Old Babylonian edubba received an elite training introducing them to “ancient history, the organization of the cosmos, and all the ins and outs of Sumerian writing” (Veldhuis 2014b, 31). This training was surely reserved for the professional scribe, the *dubsar tur* and the *dubsar*. As is often noted, the scribal elites of Semitic Babylonia continued to engage in a distinctly Sumerian intellectual tradition, in some cases adopting Sumerian versions of their names, and retaining Sumerian as the prestige language of learning. The traditionalist nature of the edubba is apparent in the fact that, at a time when most administrative, business and legal documents were already being written in Akkadian, 97% of the literary texts from the period are in Sumerian (Tinney 2011, 588; Robson 2001, 60). It is therefore fitting to speak of a ‘Sumerophone intellectual culture’ in the Old Babylonian period.

3.2 The Old Babylonian Curriculum

It has been stated that the idea of a curriculum itself is an “Old Babylonian invention” (Veldhuis 2014a, 428), therefore it set the standard for what was to come. Complicating the analysis of the OB curriculum is the fact that some 83% of extant Sumerian manuscripts were excavated in Nippur, potentially skewing any estimate of what is normative within the corpus as a whole (Tinney 2011, 579; Robson 2001, 52). The curriculum within the Old Babylonian period was not, in fact, fully standardized: schools in the northern cities utilized some texts not found in southern schools, for example. There was even some variance within the schools of Nippur itself, mainly at the later stages of education (Veldhuis 2002, 61). With these caveats stated, the data presented below represents ‘consistent patterns of learning’ at Old Babylonian Nippur, and serves to approximate the curriculum:

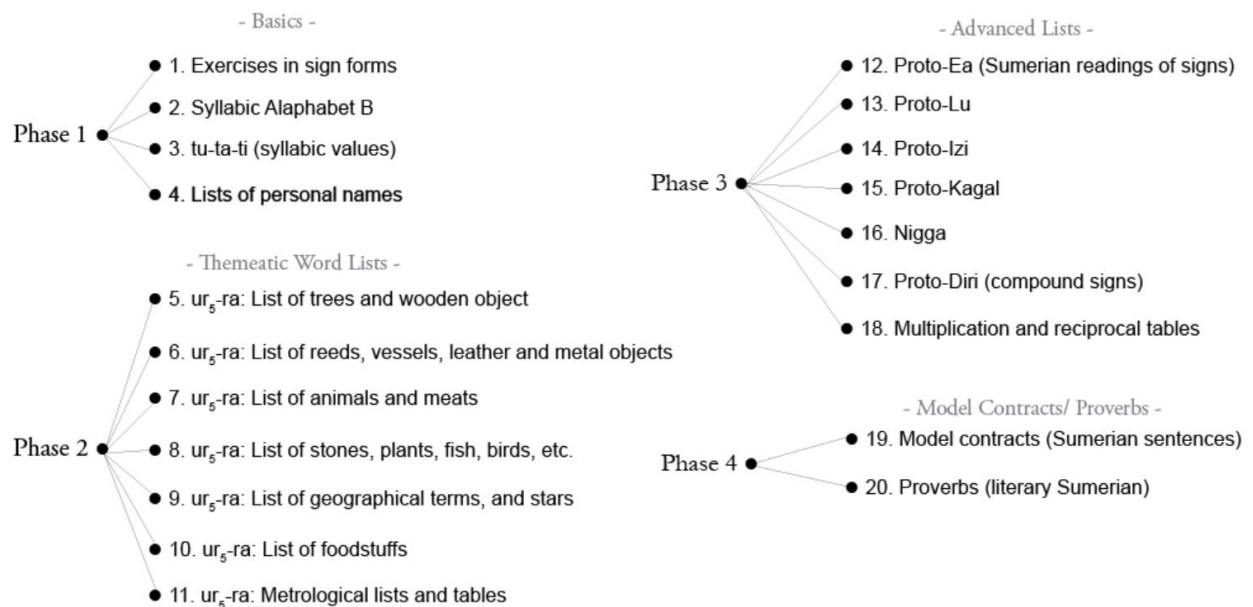


Fig. 1: The Elementary Curriculum from Old Babylonian Nippur (Robson 2001, 47; Veldhuis 1997, 63; Veldhuis 2014a, 206-213)

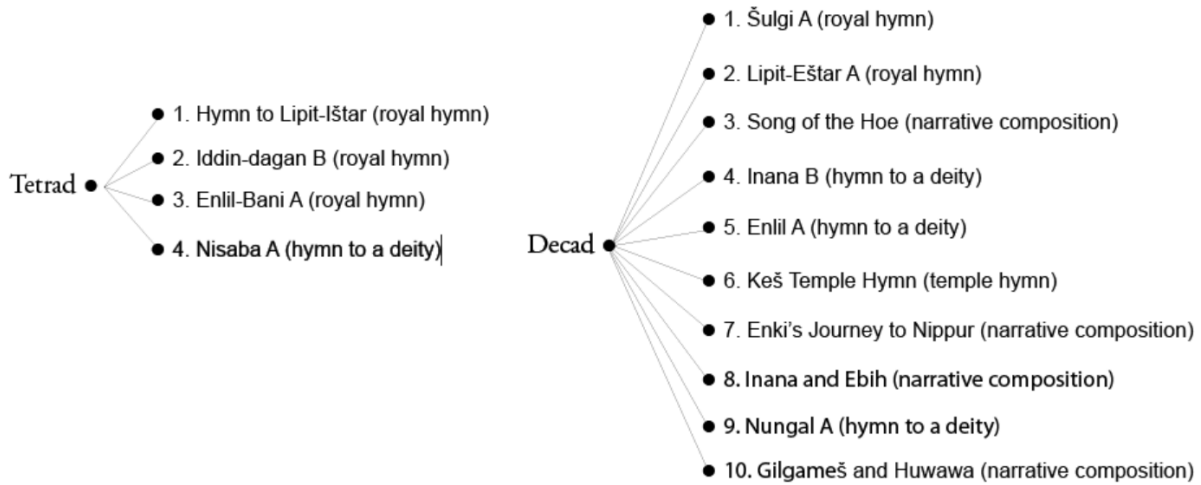


Fig. 2: The Advanced Curriculum from Old Babylonian Nippur (Veldhuis 2002, 63)

The Elementary Curriculum: As can be seen in *fig.1*, young scribes progressed through four stages of textual material of graduating difficulty. This progression has been succinctly described as follows: “The earliest exercises deal with sign elements (vertical, horizontal, and oblique strokes) and signs. Later exercises focus on personal names, words, and expressions...the proverbs, couched in literary language, provide the transition to literary texts...” (Veldhuis 2014a, 204).

The elementary curriculum incorporated a large body of lexical texts and, crucially, this represents the Old Babylonian repurposing of the lexical genre. While in the Sumerian speaking

Early Dynastic period the lexical genre had another purpose, in the Old Babylonian period these texts were repurposed as a tool for scribal education in Sumerian (Veldhuis 2002, 81-84). In fact, many of the OB lexical lists are entirely new and not based on earlier exemplars; they are structured according to didactic principles so that the student is introduced “step by step into more and more complicated aspects of the writing system” (Veldhuis 2014a, 13). Seeing as many of these lexical lists enjoyed transmission for almost two millennia, it will be argued here that the Old Babylonian period represents the *terminus post quem* for the curricular stream of tradition.

The Advanced Curriculum: Having mastered the elementary curriculum, the OB pupil then went on to work with an “advanced” curriculum which has been itemized in *fig. 2*. These consisted primarily of the Tetrad and the Decad, two terms introduced by Tinney 1999 to describe textual groupings which reoccur in the literary catalogues of the period. From a pedagogical perspective, these fourteen brief, but grammatically involved Sumerian texts are thought to have furthered the learner’s grasp of Sumerian literary language. Students who had mastered these two text groups could move on to study less standardized (though still curricular) text-types such as a selection of royal literary letters (Huber Vulliet 2011, 501-502). The pupil was then able to hone their grasp of Sumerian by copying a range of divine and royal hymns, proverbs, mythological texts, law codes and dialogues.

It is interesting to note the presence of five ideologically charged hymns within the Tetrad and the Decad which center on an Ur III king (Šulgi) and three kings of Isin (Lipit-Ištar, Iddin-Dagan, and Enlil-Bani) (George 2005, 7; Brisch 2011, 713). Veldhuis has advanced the hypothesis that the OB curriculum, in fact, had its roots in the time of centralized power in the Isin I period. The argument is made on the following grounds: i) the enormity of the curricular overhaul and its adaptation throughout Babylonia is suggestive of an institutional edubba (lacking in the later Old

Babylonian period); ii) the inclusion of the hymns to the king of Isin link the curriculum to his royal house (Veldhuis 2002, 61).

Despite this very lengthy period of transmission, some 400 years of Old Babylonian history, the advanced curriculum does not make it into the stream of tradition for the most part.

4.0 The Late Second Millennium Curriculum

For more than one reason, the curriculum of late second millennium Babylonia has remained a subject fraught with issues for modern scholars. The lexical texts from this period were mainly excavated at Babylon and Nippur. With reference to Old Babylonian precedents, one may posit that the lexical texts made up the core of the late second millennium curriculum. The texts, however, have proved notoriously difficult to date and, in practice, some scholars have opted to lump Kassite and (what may be) Middle Babylonian Isin II dynasty lexical materials together, under one heading (Veldhuis 2014a, 243). That practice is adopted here.

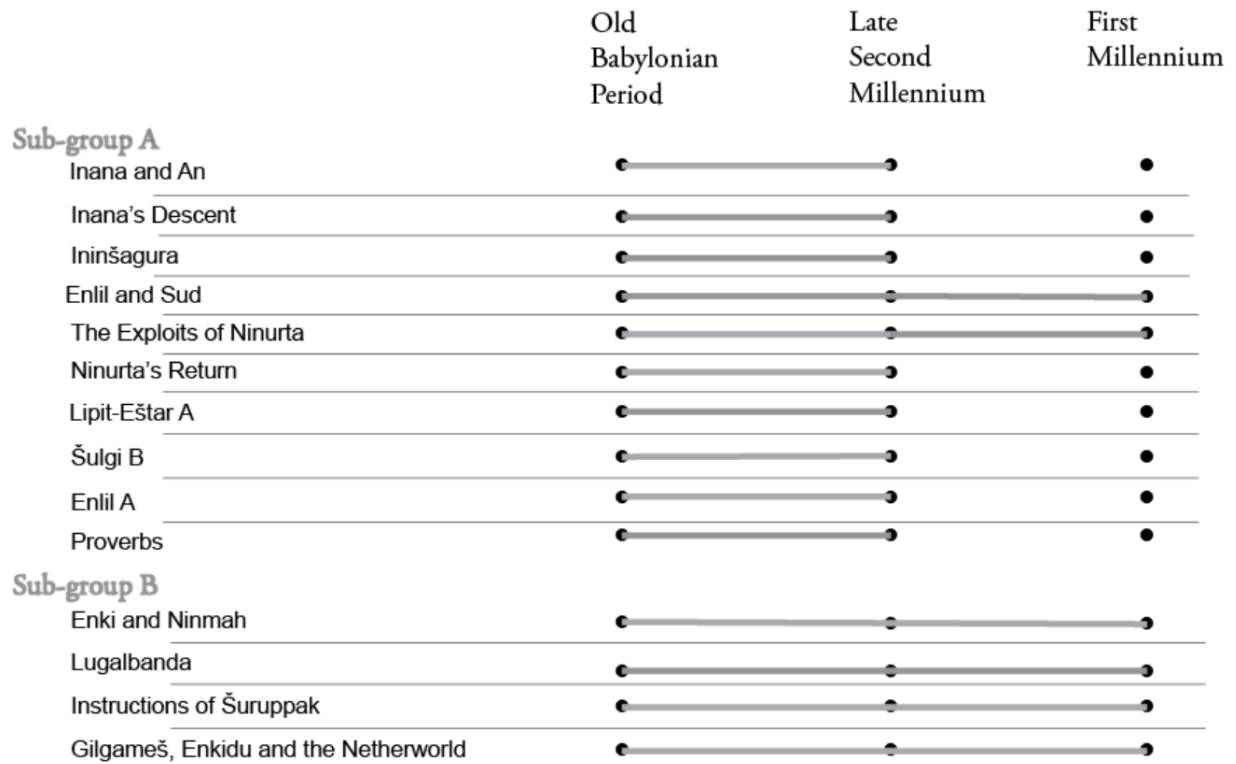
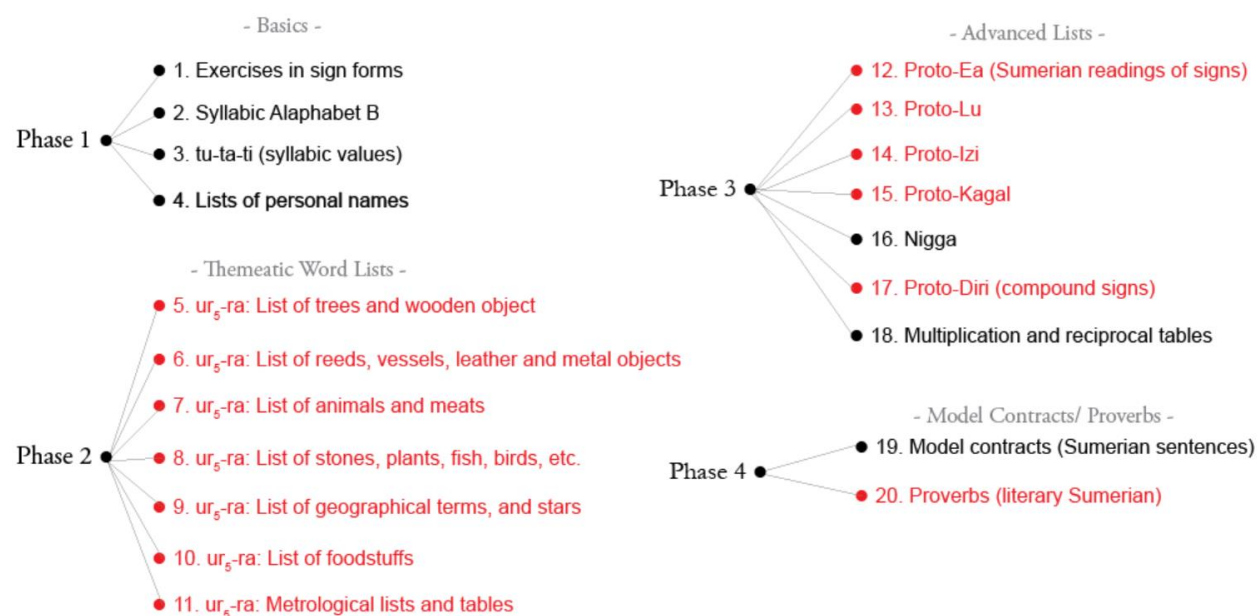


Fig. 3: The Transmission of Sumerian Literature in the Late Second Millennium (Veldhuis 2014a, 262; Tinney 2011, 593; Reiner & Civil 1967, 200)

A second issue emerges when attempting to define the *Sitz im Leben* of this lexical corpus. Scholars have traditionally concluded that the transmission of Sumerian literary compositions basically came to an end at the close of the OB period. Tinney, for example, stated that the demise of literary Sumerian is indicated by the fact that, of the nearly 600 Sumerian manuscripts, only the Ninurta mythology, Enki and Ninmah and “a handful of others” are known in the first millennium, the rest disappear at the end of the Old Babylonian period (Tinney 2011, 593). Contrary to this finding, Veldhuis has recently listed ten Sumerian compositions that were still being copied in the late second millennium (*fig. 3a*) and four Sumerian compositions known from the first millennium and whose continuation in Kassite schools is therefore implied (*fig 3b*) (Veldhuis 2014a, 262; Enki

and *Ninmah* is specified in Tinney 2011, 593). Fourteen compositions may represent a tiny fraction of the material known from the Old Babylonian period; at least some of this gap may be due to the current paucity of Kassite textual evidence (for example, outside of exercise tablets, the lexical corpus is attested on a mere fifteen tablets and fragments). For Veldhuis, the *sitz im leben* of the lexical corpus continues unchanged from the Old Babylonian period: it served as the basis for a curriculum intended to train the scribe in the knowledge of Sumerian writing, a knowledge base still held to be important. Kassite schools actively preserved the lexical and literary traditions of the past, which were of value to a dynasty identifying itself with the venerable past traditions of Babylonia (Veldhuis 2014a, 261-262).³



³ Secondarily, the lexical corpus of the period may be used in the composition of new Sumerian compositions such as those found on Kassite seals (Veldhuis 2014a, 262). Kassite royal inscriptions also tended to be written in Sumerian.

Fig. 4: Elements of the Old Babylonian Curriculum Attested (sometimes in modified form) in the Late Second Millennium Curriculum (Veldhuis 2014a, 250-259)

Fig. 4 above is intended to provide the reader with a quick reference, a visual indication of the exercises from the Old Babylonian Elementary Curriculum from Nippur that were also practiced, in some form, in second millennium schools (highlighted in red). It must be stated that *fig.4* is not intended to imply that the same curricular phases have been demonstrated for Kassite schools - the comparative paucity of textual material from the period is a major limiting factor here.

Despite a certain continuity, there were also considerable changes in later schools. The advanced curriculum, the Tetrad and Decad, is not attested (with the exception of Lipit-Eštar A), but this is perhaps unsurprising. In a 2011 study of the Sumerian writing in the West (at Hattuša, Emar, and Ugarit), M. Viano concluded on the basis of variant phonetic orthographies that the West drew upon a second stream of tradition, a “non-Nippur stream,” from the northern cities of Sippar and Meturan that developed its own characteristics which were subsequently transmitted elsewhere (Viano 2011, 387-388). His explanation for the emergence of this second stream is as follows:

Nippur like all cities of southern Mesopotamia declined at the end of the Old Babylonian period by the emergence of the Land of the Sea and the struggles that followed. Nippur scholarly activities reappeared around the end of the fifteenth century B.C. Thus one may understand that when the western regions came into contact with the Sumerian culture at the beginning of the second half of the second millennium the main scribal schools on which to draw this knowledge were those of Northern Babylonia (Viano 2011, 390).

Hence, although it is a descendant of the Old Babylonian lexical tradition, Veldhuis also sees the curriculum of the late second millennium as proceeding more directly from the Northern cities of Babylon and Sippar (Veldhuis 2014a, 250), i.e. the variant non-Nippur tradition. In this curriculum, the bilingual format becomes more widespread: the sign list Ea and compound sign list Diri are greatly expanded, receiving the standardized form that appears also in the first millennium; and new lexical compositions such as Erimhuš, Nabnītu and the god list An = Anum appear in the Kassite period (DCCLT 2003-2017).

5.0 The imported intellectual tradition of Assyria

To be sure, the Babylonian and Assyrian intellectual traditions, intertwined though they may be, cannot be conflated with each other. While they hinged on the same writing system, their aims and applications were decidedly distinct. In the Old Assyrian period, evidence for writing comes mainly from the trading center at Kaneš. Assyrian merchants adapted the Babylonian writing system for commercial purposes, employing a ‘mercantile form of literacy’ wherein both the number of signs used, as well as the complexity of signs used, was greatly reduced. Assur at this time was not an imperial power but a city state with localized concerns. What evidence there is for school texts in Assur, (and the evidence is meager) indicates an emphasis on metrology with little to no regard for Sumerophone literature (Larsen 1987, 220; Veldhuis 2014a, 315). However, some hint of the deference which Assyria would show to the high culture of the Sumero-Babylonian south is provided by the fact that Assyrian kings from Šamši-Adad forward would

commission royal inscriptions written in the Babylonian dialect of Akkadian (Machinist 1976 460-469).

Significant change came with the rise of Assur in the Middle Assyrian period. Following the defeat of the Mitanni by the Hittites, Aššur-uballiṭ I [1363-1328] expanded his kingdom and, for the first time, Assyria became a territorial state of considerable size. The sixth king of the dynasty, Tukulti-Ninurta I [1243-1207], a strong military leader and prolific builder, fought and defeated Babylon and installed Enlil-nadin-shumi as a puppet king of Nippur (Roaf 1990, 148). In an act described by S. Maul as an effort to replace one “world-axis” with another, Tukulti-Ninurta captured the statue of Marduk and brought it back to Assur (Maul 1997, 115). This was not all that he took with him. It was perhaps the high regard for the Babylonian literary register, evident in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, and now also in Assyrian royal titulary, in the Babylonianized dialect of the Tukulti-Ninurta epic itself, that motivated the king to bring back a large number of learned cuneiform tablets from Babylon (Machinist 1976, 469, Veldhuis 2014a, 317). By these and other means a foreign intellectual tradition was imported to Assyria.

Therefore, it may be noted that Assurbanipal’s effort to acquire and preserve the intellectual heritage of the south was nothing new (except perhaps in scope). He stands in a long line of Assyrian kings with a vested interest in Babylonian literature. To say that the tablets that scholars collected for the king from all across Babylonia ended up in a “library” is an oversimplification: most of the texts that are commonly said to come from “Assurbanipal’s library” actually come from “four different buildings at Nineveh, the Southwest Palace, the North Palace, the Ishtar temple, and the Nabu temple, as well as various places on and off the main mound at Nineveh” (Garrison 2012, 39). Further, a large number of the 30,000 texts and fragments (some

10,000 after the joining process)⁴ are documents or administrative records, collections of which are usually designated as “archives” in academic parlance.

Eleanor Robson has recently problematized the notion of a first millennium stream of tradition, particularly in the library of Assurbanipal (the same dataset on which Oppenheim originally based his discussion). Robson sought to demonstrate the innovative and fluid nature of Mesopotamian text traditions (as oppose to a fixed text tradition) and astutely noted the following about professional praxis texts: i) mathematical astronomy took off in the fourth century; ii) the diagnostic series SAG.GIG/*sakkikû* seems to have fallen out of use among the *āšipus* of the Neo-Assyrian court; iii) horoscopic astrology was first developed in the late fifth century; *etc.* (Robson 2011, 557). These observations seem valid but pertain more directly to the professional praxis rather than the curricular praxis which is the focus here.

A second objection raised by Robson, perhaps more pertinent here, is her objection to the statement that the library of Assurbanipal should be taken as ‘essentially representative’ of contemporary libraries (Oppenheim 1960, 412). The process whereby the huge tablet holdings of the library of Assurbanipal were collected was ‘unique and unusual,’ fueled by a royal acquisition process which yielded results beyond what a temple library or the library of a scholarly family could achieve (Robson 2011, 560-561). The library of Assurbanipal must be taken then to represent a very specific set of interests.

Some 1,000 tablets from Nineveh are to be identified as lexical (Veldhuis 2014a, 376). The intellectual heritage of these texts can be broken down as follows:

⁴ This number is based on an estimated 30,000 tablets and fragments which, after an extensive joining process, resulted in a total roughly 1/3 that number (Garrison 2012, 39).

	Sign Lists	Word Lists					
		Thematic	Group Vocabulary	Acrographic	Synonym lists	Other	Phrasebook
Old Babylonian	Diri (32) Ea/Aa (55)	Ura (124) Lu (22)		Izi (19)		Gramatical (18)	Ki-ulutinbiše (11)
Kassite/ Middle Babylonian	Syllabary A (31) Syllabary B (32)		Erimhuš (22)			Nabnitū (70)	
Middle Assyrian						Emesal Vocabulary (15)	
Neo-Assyrian	A ₂ = idu (14)	Murgud (64)	Antagal (68) Alan = Lanu (6) Other (4)	Igituh (3)	Malku = šarru (54) Other (19)	Practical Vocab. of Nineveh (2)	

Fig 5. The Lexical text groups of the Library of Assurbanipal, charted according to their historical first attestations (Note: Text groups listed as originating in the OB may also predate the OB period). (Veldhuis 2014a, 366-377)

The Lexical Data from Nineveh – Synthesis: Of the 158 signlists, the series Diri and Ea/Aa originate in the Old Babylonian period. In the first millennium they occur in bilingual Sumerian/Akkadian versions and have developed into seven and eight tablet scholarly series; these same trends can also be observed in the other text groups originating in the OB period. Of the lexical texts first attested in the Neo-Assyrian period, A₂ = *idu*, the Practical Vocabularies and the word list Igituh are perhaps most noteworthy as they focus on “signs and words that were in active use in scholarly and administrative writing of the time” (Veldhuis 2014a, 355). The Emesal

vocabulary is attested already in the Middle Assyrian period – it comprises 3 tablets which translate Emesal Sumerian to Sumerian and to Akkadian (Veldhuis 2014a, 318). These lists would likely have been of high value to scholars such as the *kalû* lamentation singers, whose lamentations continued to be written in this long lived sociolect (Löhnert 2011, 406).

The Lexical Data from Nineveh - Sitz im Leben: Any understanding of the Nineveh lexical corpus, its use and its curricular value, must proceed from a contextualized view of the Neo-Assyrian intellectual tradition. In an important article from 2007 which charts the development of first millennium intellectual life, P.A. Beaulieu discusses two major developments: **i**) beyond basic training “higher scholarship was now divided into three main disciplines: the *āšipūtu*, “craft of the exorcist,” the *kalûtu*, “craft of the lamentation singer,” and the *bārûtu*, “craft of the diviner.” Each discipline has its own curriculum and corpus of texts” (Beaulieu 2007, 11). This finding is certainly interesting in light of the word lists and emesal vocabulary discussed above. And **ii**) “by the end of the second millennium B.C.E. and the beginning of the first, intellectual life in Mesopotamia had become focused largely on the need to mediate between gods and humans” (Beaulieu 2007, 12). Of course, these observations are complimentary as exorcists, lamentation singers and diviners were the means to mediate between the realms.

These scholars of the Assyrian court operated under a distinctly first millennium epistemological notion which held that the god Ea and his *apkallu* were the originators of all knowledge, and that they, the scholars, were the keepers of this knowledge. Stringent devotion to tradition does not necessarily transcend the barriers of time and space: of the 600 Sumerian literary compositions known from the OB corpus, the only ones still being copied in Assurbanipal’s Nineveh were the two Ninurta myths (it is likely no chance that these Ninurta myths were the only Sumerian literary pieces designated by the Catalogue of Texts and Authors as having been

authored by Ea). The lexical texts are no longer the “core of intellectual creativity,” as they were in the Old Babylonian period, but now have a secondary supporting role “with more modest intellectual claims but with at least as much complexity” (Veldhuis 2014a, 380-382).

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the lexical corpus and its place in the schools and the intellectual traditions of the Old Babylonian, Middle Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods. It will be recalled that A. Leo Oppenheim predicted that, should a text group be traced in its development throughout history, light would be shed not only on the “stream,” but on the ideological preferences indirectly reflected in the texts. It is perhaps the latter notion, the sense of ideological contrast, that is borne out by a diachronic study of the lexical tradition. It might be asked: can one tradition sustain significantly divergent ideologies, or is it better at this point to speak of multiple traditions?

In the various historical contexts considered above, it is interesting to note that the correlation between centralized political power and scribal innovation is quite regular: from Šulgi’s reformation and politicization of Sumerian literature, to the Kassite standardization of texts, to the rise of the literature of the Neo-Assyrian court scholars and its theocentric ethos. It has been argued above, however, that the touchstone of tradition is to be found in a period of relative decentralization, during the imperial pretenses of the Isin-Larsa period and in the early Old Babylonian period. The underlying objective of this paper has been to trace the salient feature of the OB edubba, its Sumerophone literature and lexical based curriculum, as far as it could plausibly be traced in Mesopotamian history, in order to test one line of Oppenheim’s ‘stream of

tradition.’ The demise of Sumerian literature as an actively copied corpus, whether one places it at the end of the Old Babylonian period, or (as suggest above) at the end of the second millennium, indicates that this particular stream did not flow into the library of Assurbanipal in anything but a superficial way. And while there is considerable continuity in the lexical text tradition, text groups which were transmitted throughout the history of Mesopotamia (albeit with heavy modification), the profound ideological and epistemological developments that occurred in the Neo-Assyrian period meant that the aims and applications of these corpora were distinctly first millennium.

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