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Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World

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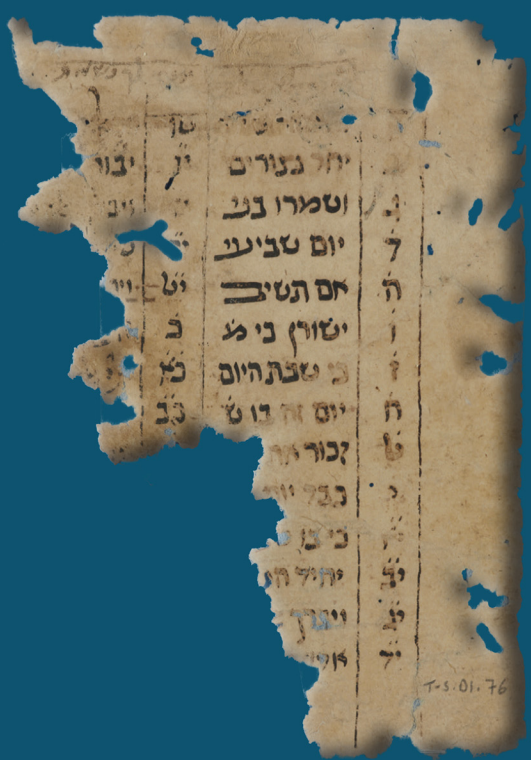

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Cover image: A fragment of a numbered and tabulated list of 22 biblical and rabbinic passages relating to the Sabbath, each referenced by means of a short lemma (T-S D1.76 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
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QUOTATIONS FROM LEXICAL LISTS AND OTHER TEXTS IN LATER MESOPOTAMIAN COMMENTARIES

Enrique Jiménez

It is difficult to overstate the importance of lists in ancient Mesopotamian culture. Two genres are attested at the dawn of history, when writing was first invented:[1] administrative lists and lexical lists.[2] Lists constitute, therefore, the earliest scholarly genre in ancient Mesopotamia, and thus probably the oldest scholarly texts in world literature. It is remarkable, and unparalleled in other traditions, that the first written testimonies of a language are lexicographical treatises:[3] the complexities of a budding writing system, and the necessity to account for all its possible uses,

[1] In the so-called late Uruk period, ca 3200 BCE.

[2] According to the figures provided by Veldhuis, *Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*, 29, administrative documents constitute approximately 90 percent of all tablets and fragments from the Uruk IV and Uruk III periods; the rest (around 10 percent) are lexical lists.

[3] As van de Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks*, 36–37, puts it: "Remarkably, the first works of Babylonian scholarship and thus the earliest in world history are lexicographic, that is, they are word lists. I use 'remarkably' because the extraordinary character of these works seems

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explain the importance of the genre at the genesis of writing.[4] The role played by lists in the conception, standardisation, development, and dissemination of the cuneiform script conferred them a distinguished place in Mesopotamian written culture: in the more than three millennia of history of ancient Mesopotamian civilisations, from the invention of writing to the demise of cuneiform script around the turn of the eras, lexical lists of various types constituted the most important assignment given to scribal apprentices. One of the latest products of cuneiform culture, the so-called Graeco-Babyloniaca, contain chiefly excerpts

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to be ignored not only by scholars surveying the world history of lexicography, but also by those specialists of Babylonian scholarship who have devoted much effort to the study of lexical lists. No other ancient culture developed lexicography at the moment its people started to write, and throughout antiquity lexicographic activity outside Babylonia always remained minimal."

[4] Veldhuis, *Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*, 28, notes: "We have to leave behind any implicit assumption that once you have a writing system you may use it for anything that involves language. We cannot expect any scribe to cross that bridge from pure accounting to using this symbolic system for something entirely different—not more than we expect anybody to use a cash register for writing poetry or for anything else than ringing up our groceries. The lexical lists, however, as haphazard and difficult to understand as they are, do cross that bridge and do use the symbols of writing as something that one can play with, that one can put to unexpected uses.… The lists are the first instances of the non-administrative uses of writing and as such demonstrate the flexibility and the potential of the system."

from lexical lists, some of them venerably old, written in cuneiform script on one side and in Greek transliteration on the other.[5]

Cuneiform commentaries, a genre first attested in the first millennium BCE, can be regarded as a product derived from the basic form of the lexical list. This genealogy is evident, in particular, in the fact that quotations from lexical lists constitute the foundation on which most commentaries are based. The goal of this paper is to study these quotations, and to compare them with quotations from texts other than lexical lists, in order to determine the degree of dependency of commentaries with the genre from which they derive.

1.0. The List Format and the List Science

The ubiquity of lexical lists in the cuneiform tradition decisively shaped Mesopotamian literature throughout its long history: the list became the default format of scientific texts in ancient Mesopotamia,[6] and genres such as divination treatises and law compilations can be seen as an expansion of the basic format of lexical lists. The list, with its typical laconism, became the vehicle for

[5] Proposals for the dating of the Graeco-Babyloniaca range from the second century BCE to the second century CE; see Oelsner, 'Überlegungen zu den "Graeco-Babyloniaca"', 150, with previous bibliography. On the Graeco-Babyloniaca in general, see Geller, 'The Last Wedge'; Westenholz, 'Graeco-Babyloniaca Once Again'.

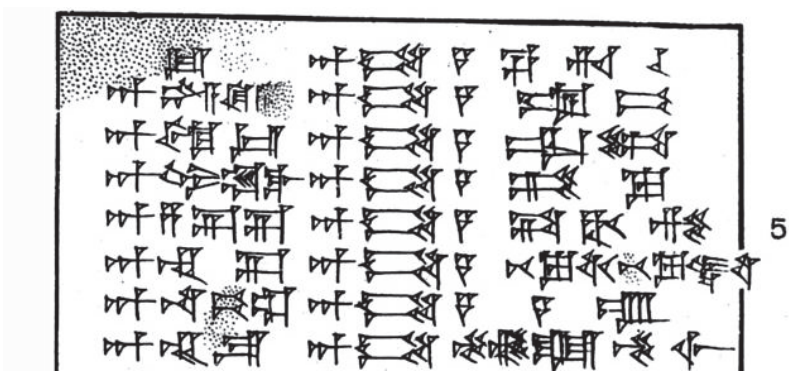
[6] As perhaps first observed by Oppenheim, 'Zur keilschriftlichen Omenliteratur', 200: "[D]ie listenweise Zusammenstellung ist die charakteristische Darstellungsform wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten im keilschriftlichen Schrifttum."

grammatical and theological elucubrations. For instance, a famous list from the first millennium BCE equates the Babylonian Marduk with other gods of the Babylonian pantheon, in an apparent monotheistic move: each major god of the pantheon (in the first column) is said to be Marduk (in the second column) in a specific capacity (in the third column)—thus, Ninurta, a god traditionally related to agriculture, is Marduk of the pickaxe; Nergal, a warrior god, is Marduk of battle:

(1) BM 47406[7]

Ninurta	*Marduk*	*ša alli*
Nergal	*Marduk*	*ša qabli*
‘Ninurta	Marduk	of the pickaxe
Nergal	Marduk	of battle’

Figure 1: BM 47406 (drawing from King, *Cuneiform Texts*, pl. 50.)



This monotheistic agenda was by no means the predominant one in the Mesopotamia of the first millennium BCE, but rather a mar-

[7] King, *Cuneiform Texts*, 24, pl. 50. Edition in Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 264.

ginal view that only rarely surfaces in our written documentation.[9] The list must therefore reflect the theological elucubrations of an individual or a small community, yet these elucubrations are only given in the contrived, succinct style of a list. General principles ('all the gods are aspects of Marduk in a specific capacity') are typically never formulated in Mesopotamian scholarship: instead, the results of these principles are given ad nauseam. The absence of general principles was once seen as a major weakness in Mesopotamia scholarship, reflecting the incapacity of the Mesopotamians to think abstractly (their *Listenwissenschaft*)[10] and, therefore, the inferiority of their cultural products to those of

[9] As noted by Lambert, 'Babylonien und Israel', 78, "ein derartiger Monotheismus [war] im alten Mesopotamien eher ein Zeichen von religiöser Bigotterie und Fanatismus als von Aufgeklärtheit." On the marginality of monotheistic ideas in first-millennium Mesopotamia, see Lambert, 'Historical Development', 198; Lambert, 'Ancient Mesopo-tamian Gods', 121; Lambert, Babylonian Creation Myths, 265; Fadhil and Jiménez, 'Syncretistic Hymn to Marduk'.

[10] The expression was coined by von Soden, 'Leistung und Grenze', who states (p. 431) that the absence of general principles reflects the absence of abstract thinking: "Das zur genauen Beschreibung grammatischer Tatsachen und zur Aufstellung grammatischer Regeln notwendige Abstraktionsvermögen fehlte den Akkadern gänzlich; infolgedessen mangelte es auch in ihrer Sprache an Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten für grammatische Formulierungen in ganzen Sätzen." On the concept of 'Listenwissenschaft'—which Hilgert, 'Von "Listenwissenschaft" und "epistemischen" Dingen', 278, notes is one of the few neologisms coined by Assyriology that has found echo in other fields in the humanities—see, in addition to Hilgert, Visi, 'A Science of Lists?', 12–17; Veldhuis, *Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*, 19–23; Young, *List Cultures*, 27–30.

Western scholarship. As modern research sees the question, it is obvious that sophisticated general principles underlie lists such as the monotheistic Marduk list; the fact that these principles are not formulated is, therefore, just a matter of convention, a consequence of the prestige of the list format in ancient Mesopotamia.[11]

The prestige of the lexical tradition is perhaps best perceived through the uses that texts from other genres made of it. Numerous literary texts used lexical lists as a mine for rare words, unusual meanings, and recherché synonyms. As the "fullest repositories of a world viewed through the gauze of writing,"[12] lists provided readily accessible, well-arranged material suited to the needs of the Mesopotamian scribes. In particular, the heightened language of royal inscriptions is often peppered with rare words excerpted from lexical compilations. In the following example, from an inscription of King Sargon II of Assyria (721–705 BCE), the scribe has managed to use three extremely rare words to replace the nouns 'east', 'Šamaš' (the sun god), and 'Adad' (the storm god):

(2) Sargon II no. 43 ii 53[13]

mehret PÌRIG ŠU.DU$_7$ *ana* ^{d}SIG$_5$.GA *u* ^{d}LUGAL.DINGIR.RA (…)
talīmānī ina tēmīqi ušaqqī-ma

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[11] See, e.g., Machinist, 'Self-Consciousness in Mesopotamia', 200: "lack of explicitness in itself is not a method of thinking, but a mode of expression." See also Veldhuis, 'TIN.TIR = Babylon', 50.

[12] Michalowski, 'Negation as Description', 134.

[13] Frame, *Royal Inscriptions*, 229. The interpretation is due to Cavigneaux, 'Une crux sargonica'.

> 'Facing "east" (lit. "the perfect lion," PÌRIG ŠU.DU$_7$) I raised my two hands in prayer to "Šamaš" (lit. "the good god," ^{d}SIG$_5$.GA) and "Adad" (lit. "the king of the god(s)," ^{d}LUGAL.DINGIR.RA)'[14]

The first of these words translates literally as 'perfect lion'; its meaning 'east' is attested only in lexical lists, where it first appears in the archaic period and is transmitted throughout the entire cuneiform tradition, until Sargon II's scribe picks it up and uses it for the first time, hundreds of years after its incorporation into lexicography. The scribes of Sargon II were particularly fond of lexical *rarae aves*,[15] and found in the tradition of the lists a fertile ground for their poetic musings.

Lexical rarities were, however, also borrowed in the opposite direction: literary texts were excerpted by lexicographers, and the explanations they added entered the lexical tradition and were transmitted from generation to generation. For instance, a hymn to Marduk that was particularly popular in elementary education contains, towards its beginning, the hapax legomenon *abūšin*:

(3) 'Marduk 1' ll. 5, 7[16]

> *ša amāruk šibbu gapuš abūšin*

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[14] Throughout the translations in this chapter, elements in parentheses indicate authorial additions.

[15] For other quotations from lexical lists in inscriptions of Sargon II, see Hrůša, 'Die akkadische Synonymenliste malku = šarru', 17.

[16] Fadhil and Jiménez, 'Two Babylonian Classics', 167.

> ‘(Marduk), you whose stare is a dragon, an overwhelming *abūšin*’

The word *abūšin* may have originated as a corruption of ‘your strength’ *vel sim.*,[17] although this is far from certain. Be that as it may, it is known in the lexical tradition already in around the thirteenth century BCE; that is, only a few centuries after the composition of the hymn that contains it. In the first millennium BCE, two different lexical lists explain that *abūšin* means *abūbu* ‘flood’[18]—an ad hoc explanation that more or less works in the context of the hymn, but which appears to be incompatible with the rules of Akkadian morphology.[19] A rare word from a literary text, excerpted into a lexical list, was thenceforth transmitted within the lexical tradition.

On some occasions, lexicographers excerpted entire texts or sections thereof, and produced exegetical treatises that dealt with one specific text only. This practice is already attested in the first quarter of the second millennium BCE:[20] some lists from this period contain lemmata that come from specific sections of discrete texts with no extraneous material. These sorts of lists, however,

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[17] This is the belief of Lambert, ‘Notes on malku = šarru’.

[18] Jiménez, *Literary Texts*, no. 19.

[19] No other substantive ending in *-šin*, *-sin*, or *-šim* is known in Akkadian (all three endings are attested for *abūšin* in the manuscripts of the hymn and in the lexical tradition).

[20] For some cases, see Civil, ‘Mesopotamian Lexical Lists’.

remained something of a rarity throughout the second millennium BCE;[21] the most common forms of citation from a literary text in a lexical list were glosses to individual entries integrated into larger lexical lists, such as the *abūšin* entry examined above. However, towards the end of the second or the beginning of the first millennium BCE this form of bespoke exegesis became exceedingly popular, and evolved into the genre known as Mesopotamian commentaries.

2.0. List and Commentaries

Mesopotamian commentaries represent the world's earliest cohesive group of exegetical texts. There are some 900 of them, the earliest dating to the eighth century, the latest to around 100 BCE.[22] The main difference between commentaries and lexical lists is that commentaries have an identifiable base text, which they seek to explain. Lexical lists, on the other hand, may

[21] In addition to the cases studied in Civil, 'Mesopotamian Lexical Lists', one may note the almost verbatim quotation of the list of weapons from *Gilgameš* in a small bilingual fragment from Emar, Msk.74166b; see Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata*, 576. This was first noted by George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 813; see also Jiménez, 'La imagen de los vientos', 227–30.

[22] For an excellent description of the cuneiform commentaries, see Frahm, *Commentaries*. The Cuneiform Commentaries Project (CCP; https://ccp.yale.edu/) provides an introduction to the genre and annotated editions of a large selection of them. Almost all commentaries cited in this chapter are available on the CCP platform under the corresponding CCP number (e.g., CCP 3.7.2.J is found at https://ccp.yale.edu/3.7.2.J).

contain words excerpted from specific texts, such as *abūšīn*, but they are not geared towards one text only. In commentaries, the base text is often first cited, and then explained.[23] The origin of Mesopotamian commentaries in lexical lists is perceivable, in particular, in their laconism: words and phrases are simply juxtaposed, separated by a colon (:), but hardly ever is the connection between the two words explained.[24] The majority of Mesopotamian commentaries (ca 70 percent), and almost every commentary cited in this paper, are devoted to the explication of the rich corpus of divination literature.

Some Mesopotamian commentaries are thus, essentially, small lexical lists, but compiled on the basis of one text only. For instance, the following commentary excerpts some lemmata from several chapters of its base text, the physiognomic collection known as *Alamdimmû*. In the commentary, written in a tabular format,[25] each line explains a specific lemma of the text (on the left-hand column in bold) with a one-word explanation (on the right-hand column). The lemmata are either logograms (i.e., Sumerian words used to represent Akkadian words, in small caps) or rare Akkadian words explained by means of more common

[23] Quotations from the base text are marked in bold type in the transliterations below.

[24] In the translations below, this connection is made explicit by means of words added in parentheses.

[25] Commentaries in the tabular format are sometimes called by their rubrics *ṣâtu*, as in the present case. The term *ṣâtu* is, however, used as a rubric also for commentaries with other formats, as discussed by Frahm, *Commentaries*, 55.

terms (in italics). Each short section deals with a specific chapter of the collection *Alamdimmû*, and the title of that chapter is given as a short rubric at the end of the section:

(4) BM 38788 obv. 2–10 (CCP 3.7.2.J)

(2) **SAG.HA.MA.AL**	*šar-hu*
(3) ***ku-um-mu-su***	*ra-áš-bi*
(4) **UMBIN BABBAR**	*na-ba-li*
(5) **UMBIN GE$_6$**	*ku-ra-ru*
(6) *ṣa-a-tú u šu-ut pi-i šá*	GÚ GÍD.DA
(7) **HÁŠ**	*em-šu*
(8) **HÁŠ**	*šap-ri*
(9) **ŠÀ.⌜MAH⌝**	*kar-šú*
(10) *ṣa-a-tú u ⌜šu⌝-ut pi-i šá*	GABA DAGAL.AŠ

(2) '*sag.ha.ma.al* (means) "proud"'

(3) '"fearsome" (means) "terrifying"'

(4) '*umbin babbar* (means) "*namālu*-disease"'

(5) '*umbin ge$_6$* (means) "*kurāru*-disease"'

(6) Lemmata and oral explanations relating to 'If (his) neck is long' (= *Alamdimmû* IX)

(7) '*háš* (means) "abdomen"'

(8) '*háš* (means) "thigh"'

(9) '*šà.mah* (means) "stomach"'

(10) Lemmata and oral explanations relating to 'If (his) chest is wide' (= *Alamdimmû* X)

Some commentaries, such as this one, have all the appearance of being just another lexical list. Some were, in fact, perceived as just another lexical list: for instance, an excerpt from a commentary in tabular format was copied by a student on an elementary

school tablet. Elementary education was primarily concerned with the memorisation of the traditional lexical lists, and commentaries played no role in it, as far as we can ascertain from the surviving school exercises. The commentary excerpted on the school tablet is similar to the one cited above, in that it comments on a large collection of omens, and is divided into sections corresponding to the chapters of the base text. It has, however, a much larger scale: it contains more than 550 entries. Its tabular format and large size confers it the appearance of a lexical list, which in turn granted it access to the category of school text, as if it were another lexical list.[26]

The fact that tabular commentaries look like lexical lists is hardly surprising: as heirs to the venerable Mesopotamian lexical tradition, commentaries are bound to reflect its conventions, most importantly its tabular format. Moreover, many of the entries that appear in tabular commentaries represent in fact quotations from lexical lists. For instance, the entry '*háš* (means) "abdomen"' in the text above is known from several of the most important traditional lexical lists.[27] The ways in which commentaries cite lexical lists—their ancestors, so to say—is particularly

[26] The commentary referred to here is the so-called 'Principal Commentary' on the collection of teratological omens known as *Šumma Izbu*; the school tablet that excerpts it is VAT 10071 (BWL pl. 73 = CCP 3.6.1.A.l). As noted by Frahm, *Commentaries*, 206: "Commentaries normally played no role in elementary education, and it is likely that the 'Principal Commentary' owes its exceptional inclusion in [VAT 10071] to the fact that it could be used as a lexical list in its own right."

[27] See the references in Oppenheim et al., *Assyrian Dictionary*, E 153b.

interesting for the study of the ancient Mesopotamians' reception of their own lexical tradition.

3.0. Lists Cited in Commentaries

Few commentaries cite lexical lists explicitly, i.e., the quotation is only rarely followed by a reference to its source. A few commentaries, however, refer to their source using the terms *ṣâtu*, literally 'excerpts', and *lišānu*, literally 'tongue'. As noted by E. Frahm, these terms refer probably to "bilingual lexical lists" and "monolingual lexical lists" respectively.[28] Other commentaries quote the title from the list they cite: this is the case in the following example, in which the lexical list titled 'Erimhuš' is cited (underlined) in support of an interpretation of the relatively rare verb *šarāru* 'to advance' as 'to run':

(5) IM 74410 (W 22312a) r 22–23[29]

> (22) ***i-šar-ru-***[***ur*** :] *i-la-as-su-um* : sag-gíd-i : sag-gíd-gíd-i : *ša-ra-ra* (23) *ši-t[a]r-ru-ru* *ina libbi*(ŠÀ) *erim*-huš** : sag : *a-ri* : *a-la-ku* : gíd : *šá-ra-ra* : *šá a-la-ku*
>
> '"He advances" (means) "he runs," (because) "*saggidi*, *saggidgidi* (means) 'to advance' (and) 'constantly to advance'," (it is said) in the (lexical series called) "Erimhuš," (the word *saggidi* can be analysed as) *sag*, (which means) "to progress," (in the sense of) "to walk," (and) *gid*, (which means) "to advance," (said) of "to walk."'

[28] Frahm, *Commentaries*, 89–90.

[29] Hunger, *Uruk* (SpTU 1), 83 (collated). For another edition, see Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie*, 254–56.

The commentary first provides the explanation for a difficult verb in the base text: 'he advances' (*išarrur*), it states, means 'he runs' (*ilassum*). Then it proceeds to justify the explanation; the justification is based on a quotation from a lexical list, in which the verb *šarāru* and its form *šitarruru* are equated with the Sumerian words *saggidi* and *saggidgidi*. This quotation is stated to come from the lexical list 'Erimhuš'. Then the Sumerian verb is taken apart into its two constituents, which are explained individually: *sag* means 'to progress', in its meaning 'to walk', and *gid* means 'to advance', in its meaning 'to walk'. Both components of the Sumerian word, therefore, can be explained by means of verbs that mean 'to walk', whence the first connection offered ('"he advances" (means) "he runs"') is justified.

The passage from the lexical list 'Erimhuš' quoted in the commentary reads:

(6) 'Erimhuš' II 88–89[30]

sag-gíd-i	*ša-ra-ra*
sag-gíd-gíd-i	*ši-t[a]r-ru-ru*

The commentary, therefore, cites the lexical list 'in vertical', that is, first the entire left column and then the entire right column.[31] Other commentaries, such as the one excerpted in (7) below, cite them instead 'horizontally', that is, each Sumerian entry with its corresponding Akkadian explanation.

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[30] Cavigneaux et al., *Series Erim-huš = anantu*, 31.

[31] 'Vertical' quotations are particularly common in quotations from the series 'Erimhuš'. See Frahm, *Commentaries*, 88–89 and 91n456; and Boddy, *Erimhuš*, 26–31.

The commentary cited above states the source of its quotation, but more frequently quotations are given without any indication of the source. This is the case of an interesting entry in a commentary on a chapter of the omen collection *Šumma Ālu*. According to the omen explained in the commentary, a pig repeatedly opening its mouth in front of a man foretells the infidelity of that man's wife. Commentaries on divination texts often attempt to connect the protasis with the apodosis of an omen, frequently on the basis of abstruse, extremely contrived equivalences. In this case, the commentary shows that the Akkadian word for mouth, *pû* (from 'the pig's mouth'), is equated in a lexical list with the Sumerian word múrub, which in the same list is also explained as Akkadian 'buttocks' and 'vagina'. The obvious implication is that a woman will open her genitalia in the same way that a pig opens its mouth, which justifies the connection between protasis and apodosis:

(7) DT 37 obv. 16b–18[32]

(16b) *šumma*(DIŠ) *šahû*(ŠAH) *ana pān*(IGI) *amēli*(NA) (17) *pâ*(⌜KA⌝)-⌜*šú*⌝ *iptette*(⌜BAD*.BAD*⌝-*te*) *aššat*(DAM) *amēli*(LÚ) *it-ta-na-a-a-ak* : MÚRUB$^{mu\text{-}ru\text{-}ub}$ *pu-ú* : MÚRUB : *šu-uh-hu* (18) ⌜MÚRUB⌝ : *ú-ri šá sinništi*(MUNUS)

'"If a pig repeatedly opens its mouth in front of a man, the man's wife will repeatedly have (illicit) sex" (= *Šumma Ālu* 49–34′): MÚRUB, (to be read as) *murub*, (means) "mouth," MÚRUB (means) "buttocks," (and) MÚRUB (means) "vagina."'

[32] King, *Cuneiform Texts*, 41, 30–31; CCP 3.5.49.

The line in the commentary cites three entries of the lexical list titled 'Ura' in 'horizontal'. The entries can be found in the following passage from 'Ura':

(8) 'Ura' XV 21–24d[33]

^{uzu}ka	*pu-ú*	'mouth'
^{uzu}múrub	MIN (= *pu-ú*)	'ditto' (scil. 'mouth')
^{uzu}únu	MIN (= *pu-ú*)	'ditto' (scil. 'mouth')
^{uzu}un	MIN (= *pu-ú*)	'ditto' (scil. 'mouth')
^{uzu}múrub	*šu-uh-hu*	'buttocks'
^{uzu}múrub	*qin-na-tu*$_4$	'rump'
[^{uzu}múrub]	*bir-ti a-hi*	'armpit'
[^{uzu}múrub]	*ú-ru šá sin-niš-tu*$_4$	'female genitalia'

The entries from 'Ura' are quoted in the commentary without any specific indication of the source: given that lexical lists constituted the basis of schooling in ancient Mesopotamia, we may assume that they were quoted from memory and that the ancient audience would also have been able to identify them on sight.[34] Only three of the entries in the passage are quoted in the commentary, apparently the only three that were relevant for the discussion: with them, the exegete proves that the opened mouth of the pig in the protasis is connected with the infidelity of the man's wife in the apodosis.

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[33] Landsberger, *Series HAR-ra = hubullu*, 6–7.

[34] Some of the quotations in commentaries contain mistakes typically caused by citing from memory, such as substitution of words by synonyms, or use of the wrong tense in verbs.

The two entries in commentaries given above clearly cite from one text, which is either identified explicitly or at least identifiable. A very considerable number of equations in commentaries, however, have no identifiable source. The lexical lists from ancient Mesopotamia are still being reconstructed from scores of scattered, broken fragments, and many of the as yet unidentifiable entries no doubt stem from hitherto unrecovered sections of these lexical lists.[35] In some cases, the quotations from lexical lists are so distorted that they are difficult to recognise. Thus, a commentary that seeks to demonstrate that every syllable of each of the 50 names of Marduk can be found in the wording of the final verses of the 'Epic of Creation' often resorts to perplexing homonyms, similar-sounding words, and similar-looking signs, in order to establish connections that are not attested anywhere else.[36] The majority of these equations cannot be identified: one may assume that the distorted form of the text quoted in the commentary has not yet been recognised, or else that as yet unrecovered lexical lists are quoted.

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[35] For instance, it has been calculated that around 80 percent of the lexical series *Ea*, one of the most widespread in Mesopotamia in the first millennium BCE, has been recovered; whereas only 42 percent of the list *Aa* (an expanded version of *Ea*) can currently be reconstructed. See Civil et al., *Ea A = nâqu*, 152–54.

[36] As Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 167, puts it: "every conceivable trick had to be used to pull off this tour de force." See the almost always unsuccessful attempts to correlate the equations in this commentary with lexical lists made by Genty, 'Les commentaires', 659–713.

On the other hand, in many other cases, the equations cited in commentaries are clearly not quoted from lexical lists, but from other types of sources.

4.0. Other Texts Cited in Commentaries

Commentaries occasionally quote texts other than lexical lists: laments, divination treatises, and magic, ritual, legal, and literary texts.[37] As with quotations from lexical lists, quotations from other genres only rarely identify their source explicitly. The majority of the quotations come from texts that were also copied on elementary school tablets, and which were, therefore, probably memorised by scribal apprentices at an early age. Since some of the quotations are marred by mistakes, one may assume that they were made from memory.

The following entry contains a quotation from the compendium called in antiquity 'Sidu', a collection of Sumerian–Akkadian bilingual proverbs and other miscellaneous material, in order to provide a context for the explanation of the rare word *qêlu* as *hepû* 'to smash':

(9) CCP 3.6.3.A ll. 28–30[38]

> (28) ***qé-e-el*** : *he-pu-ú* : KU_5.DU : *qé-e-el* : KU_5.DU : *he-pu-u* (29) *lìb-bu-ú ṣu-uh-hu-tú kur-ban-né-e su-un-šú ma-li šá i-qer-ru-ba-am-ma* (30) *i-né-ši-qa-an-ni a-qé-él-šú šá ina* ÉŠ.GÀR ^{m}*si-dù* E-*ú*

[37] For an overview of the texts cited in commentaries, see Frahm, *Commentaries*, 86–110.

[38] Finkel, 'Izbu VII Commentary'. See also Jiménez, 'Proverb from the Series *Sidu*'.

> ‘(28) “*Crushed*” (= *Šumma Izbu* VII 164′) (means) “smashed,” (since) *ku*$_5$*.du* means “*crushed*,” (and) *ku*$_5$*.du* (also) means “smashed,” (29) as in “The dripping-eyed’s lap is full of clods; (he says), ‘Whoever approaches me and (30) kisses me, I shall *crush* him!’”—which is said in the Series of Sidu.’

The goal of the present quotation is to provide a context in which the rare verb *qêlu* is used, and in which its meaning ‘to smash’ is proved.

As stated above, in some commentaries the quotation is used for establishing a connection between the protasis and the apodosis of an omen. In example (7), the connection was established by means of a lexical list that provided some justification for the apparently arbitrary connection between the observed sign (a pig opening its mouth) and the given prognosis (infidelity). In another entry from the same commentary, the *explanandum* is an omen that states that if a pig is seen carrying a palm frond, the wind will rise. In order to justify the connection between the palm-carrying pig and the wind, the commentary cites a line from the anti-witchcraft series *Maqlû*, in which the date palm is described as ‘(the tree) that receives every wind’:[39]

(10) DT 37 obv. 12b[40]

> ***šumma*(DIŠ) *šahû*(ŠAH) *ari*(^{giš}PA) *gišimmari*(GIŠIMMAR) *naši šāru*(IM) *itebbi*(ZI)** : *gišimmaru*(^{giš}GIŠIMMAR) *lim-hur-an-ni ma-hi-ir kal šá-a-*[*ri*]

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[39] The epithet is probably due to the fact that palm branches sway with the slightest breeze; see Streck, ‘Dattelpalme und Tamariske’, 274.

[40] King, *Cuneiform Texts*, 41, 30–31; CCP 3.5.49.

> '"If a pig carries a palm frond, wind will rise" (= *Šumma Ālu* 49–48′)—"May the date palm receive it, (the tree) that receives every wind!" (= *Maqlû* I 22).'

The quotation from an incantation in which the palm is called '(the tree) that receives every wind' thus justifies the connection between the palm-carrying pig and the rise of the wind. The incantation is quoted as a source of lexical knowledge, in order to extract from it an epithet of the date palm, which is then used by the exegete. The source of the quotation is not specified—nor does it need to be, since the only important aspect of the quotation is the fact that it connects the palm and the wind.

In the following entry, from a commentary on the poetic dialogue known as the 'Babylonian Theodicy', the commentator explains a common word, 'sage'. The goal of the commentary is therefore not to explain the meaning of the word, since it is clear enough, but rather to explain to whom the word refers. First, it states that 'sage' might refer to a scribe; the scribe who wrote this commentary often tries to demonstrate that he and his guild are referred to in the 'Theodicy', if one reads the text in the correct way. Second, he adds an alternative interpretation: 'sage' might be a metonym for the god of wisdom, Ea, who, in the line quoted in the commentary, is said to be the 'ears' (*uznu*, which in Akkadian also means 'intelligence') of another god:

(11) CCP 1.4 rev. 9

> **[*mu-d*] *u-u*** : *tup-šar-ri* : [*m*]*u-du-u* : ^{d}⌜*é**-*a*⌝ ⌜:⌝ ⌜*uz*⌝*-*na-ka*
> ^{d}IDIM *u* ^{d}*dam-ki-an-n*[*a apkal nēmeqi* o o o o]

> "'[Sag]e" (refers to a) scribe; "[s]age" (refers to) Ea, (as in the line) "Your ears are Ea and Damkin[a, scholar(s) of wisdom…]"'

What is important in this quotation is, again, the fact that it provides the connection needed in the commentary: Ea equals wisdom, ergo Ea is the 'sage'. The context of the line quoted (a syncretistic hymn in which every god is said to be one body part of the god Ninurta), the fact that another god appears in it (Damkina, Ea's spouse), and the rest of the words of the quoted line are irrelevant; or relevant only inasmuch as they demonstrate that the line actually exists in a text. The only relevant aspect of the lines quoted is the one-to-one equation between Ea and 'wisdom', just as between 'palm' and 'wind' in the previous example.

5.0. Conclusion

The inescapable conclusion is that texts other than lexical lists are quoted in commentaries as if they were lexical lists, in order to extract from them the same information that lexical lists provide, namely one-to-one equations and, more rarely, contextualisation.[41] Since lexical lists are quoted far more commonly in Mesopotamian exegesis than texts from other categories, it seems safe to conclude that they represent the default source of commentarial explanations. Only if a particular equation was not

[41] Contextualisation, the goal of the quotation cited as (9), is also found in lexical lists. For instance, lexical lists occasionally have glosses, introduced by the determinative pronoun *ša* 'of' to distinguish between homonyms, or to indicate the semantic range of a given word. See Civil et al., *Ea A = nâqu*, 149–50.

available in the lexical tradition would Mesopotamian commentators resort to texts of other genres, and even then the texts would be quoted in order to extract from them the sort of information one would expect to find in a lexical list. The context of the lines cited, the character of the text in which they are contained, and even all words in the quotation not necessary for the explanation, are entirely superfluous: the only important aspect of the quotation is the lexical equation it provides.

The genre of commentaries had its origin in lexical lists, the time-sanctioned standard format of Mesopotamian scholarship. Even if not always expressed in tabular format, commentaries always betray their origins in their procedure: they explain A by B, occasionally adding C for contextualisation, but they never elaborate on the connection, nor do they express its purpose. Just as in the monotheistic list presented as (1), the lack of thematisation in commentaries does not mean that no underlying principle existed; rather, it reflects the conventions of the format. The principles and goals of the hermeneutic operations—the equation of all the gods with just one god; the demonstration that the predictions of the old divinatory treatises were justified—must have been discussed orally, but are never written down. Instead, only terse equations are given, a bare-bones version of an explanation. Centuries of transmission of lexical lists had taught the Mesopotamians that, if anything deserves to be recorded, it should be given the format of a list.