Liminality and the social functions of Akkadian Wisdom Literature (ca. 1200 - 458 B.C.E.)

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Introduction

The present thesis examines the liminal aspects of four Akkadian wisdom compositions from the first millennium B.C.E., specifically: *Babylonian Theodicy*, *Counsels of Wisdom, Dialogue of Pessimism* and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*. Indirect textual references suggest that these four compositions were either produced or have reached their "canonical" form in the Late-Kassite or the Second Isin Dynasty period (ca. 1200-1100 B.C.E.).[1] However, the texts are only attested by manuscript evidence from the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C.E..[2]

The aim of the present study is to explore the social functions fulfilled by these four texts. I claim that they were not merely reflexive or stylistic exercises but each composition was produced with a practical objective in mind,[3] and that, at a later period, they played an important role in scholarly education and professional scholarship. During this period, the texts circulated within Assyrian and Babylonian scholarly circles and served as base-texts to the production of further scholarship.

To understand the social functions of these texts it becomes necessary to explore their connections with the scholarly context and in what sense they conveyed "scholarly wisdom". To achieve that end, I will be using the socio-anthropological concept of liminality by identifying liminal elements and liminal situations in the content and structure of the compositions.

The concept of liminality relates to the social functions performed by these wisdom texts i.e.: addressing periods of societal and personal change, during which criticism towards the established values may arise, and reaffirming the discourse of social authority.[4]

Accordingly, the liminal situations portrayed by the compositions were directly related to the educational and professional realities of Assyrian and Babylonia scholars. Liminality entails a two-fold learning process based on instruction and living experience. First millennium Mesopotamian scholars acquired their knowledge and wisdom in a similar way: by direct teaching of senior scholars and professional apprenticeship.

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[1] For the wide academic consensus see e.g. Clancier 2009:290-291; Frahm 2011:320-321.

[2] The youngest manuscript, BM33851, belongs to *Counsels of Wisdom* and dates from the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (ca. 458 B.C.E.) according to colophon information. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 106.

[3] e.g. The idea of a practical purpose in *Counsels of Wisdom,* namely in the education and training of a royal official has been suggested by Wilfred Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96 and more recently by Alan Lenzi, forthcoming.

[4] See Perdue 1981: 114,118.

Liminality refers to an intermediary phase of a ritual of passage that briefly removes an individual from society. This is important because it allows the individual to criticize the moral and social values without posing a threat to social structure.[5] From Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage*,[6] Victor Turner extrapolated a model of liminality applicable to complex societies.[7] The model frames liminality as any transitional period during which an individual or group exists "in-between" social structure and anti-structure. As Turner argued, these liminal periods have creative potential for society and for the individual.[8]

The concept was first applied to Ancient Near Eastern instructions by Leo Perdue in 1981.[9] Perdue argued that the narrative settings of some Egyptian (e.g. Ptah-hotep, Kethy), Aramaic (Aḥiqar) and Hebrew (e.g. Tobit) wisdom instructions contained descriptions of liminal situations, and therefore liminality would be instrumental in clarifying the social setting in which those compositions were produced. The same author suggested that metaphors and aspects of liminality could, in theory, be identified in other Ancient Near Eastern instructions which lack a narrative prologue, such as Akkadian wisdom compositions, but he did not explore that possibility.[10]

Therefore, my research applies, for the first time, the concept of liminality to Akkadian wisdom compositions, which belong to different literary genres and lack a narrative prologue clearly stating a liminal situation. As a method, I propose to analyse their structure, plot, dramatic characters, stylistic devices and literary motifs to identify liminal aspects and experiences. In this thesis, the concept will be understood both as a phase of a ritual of passage and as a description of the process of human experience.

Furthermore, I suggest that liminality can be used as a new theoretical perspective for the holistic study of wisdom in Ancient Mesopotamia. Wilfred Lambert considers wisdom literature to be a misleading, though convenient, term and argues that no other criterion distinguishes wisdom texts than thematic similarity.[11] The establishment of a precise and useful definition of wisdom literature as a genre revealed itself to be

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[5] Perdue 1981:116.
[6] van Gennep 1909.
[7] See Turner 1969:93-130.
[8] For the relation of this model with traditional and critical wisdom in the Ancient Near East see Perdue 1990:457-478.
[9] Perdue 1981:114-126.
[10] Perdue 1981: 126.
[11] See Lambert 1996 [1960]:1-3.

unattainable considering the wide variety of texts it tries to cover.[12] The proposed concepts have been either too narrow or too broad to be applied effectively to Mesopotamia. For that reason, the present work uses the expression wisdom literature as a broad thematic label that refers to a collection of compositions that explore issues of human experience, such as religious, ethical and existential questions.[13]

The main problem rests on the definition of the concept which has no specific native formulation. Sara Denning-Bolle successfully demonstrated that the Akkadian notion of wisdom covered a multidimensional reality, concerning both technical and ritual ability, ethical and moral advice, practical living experience and existential questions. [14]

New interpretations of wisdom compositions have been more concerned with the social setting of these compositions. Paul-Alain Beaulieu described how powerful elites, composed by priests, exorcists, scribes and scholarly advisors, controlled both the political and religious systems and the production of wisdom literature.[15] Recently, Alan Lenzi reiterated the same idea and suggested that some texts were instrumental for the education of high officials and of scholars who were experts in specific disciplines (e.g. incantation priests, exorcists, physicians, omen-experts, diviners), some of whom served as scholarly advisors (*ummânus*) to the king.[16] However, these new perspectives have not yet been systematically harmonized with Akkadian wisdom compositions. Neither their textual strategies nor their literary settings have been explored as effective means to explore functions of wisdom literature.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, *Scholars and Scholarship in first millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia*, outlines the historical background of our four compositions and their contexts of production and use. Additionally, the chapter will look at scholarly specialization and the education of scholars.

In chapter two, *The sapiential phenomenon,* I will characterize the cultural phenomenon of wisdom in Ancient Mesopotamia, review the previous approaches applied in Assyriology and the terminological problems associated with the research of Mesopotamian wisdom.

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[12] Denning-Bolle 1992:56-57.
[13] Beaulieu 2007 :3. The problematic of wisdom as a genre and as an operative concept will be discussed on chapter 2: 18-26.
[14] Cf. Denning-Bolle 1992:65-67.
[15] see Beaulieu 2007:3-20.
[16] Lenzi, forthcoming.

Chapter three, *Liminality: concept and approaches*, presents the socio-anthropological concept of liminality and its development in the works of van Gennep and Turner. Further, this chapter examines previous applications of that concept and of the connected theoretical model of Rituals of Passage, in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Assyriology and explains the perspective in which liminality is applied in the present thesis.

The fourth chapter, *Liminality in four Akkadian wisdom compositions*, is structured in five sections. Each of first four sections deals with one composition introduced by a discussion of relevant secondary literature, presumed date of production or canonization, authorship, manuscript evidence and their connection with cuneiform scholarship. Furthermore, each text will be analysed with respect to its external and internal structure, plot, dramatic personae and pertinent stylistic devices based on the more recent critical editions. A fifth section will examine the interpretations proposed by Assyriologists to explain from a historical perspective why each composition was produced. I shall argue that these explanations had liminal aspects of their own.

The fifth chapter, *Liminality and the social functions of scholarly wisdom,* debates the liminal aspects present in the social setting of these compositions, and what liminality may tell us about the educational and professional functions of scholarly wisdom.

In conclusion, I will argue that liminality applied to Akkadian wisdom literature allows a better understanding of the sapiential phenomenon and of the social settings of Mesopotamian scholarly wisdom. Moreover, I suggest that liminality constitutes a unbiassed theoretical frame useful for the study of the phenomenon of wisdom in its entirety, across its different sources, forms and historical contexts.

1.   Scholars and Scholarship in first millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia

Babylonian Theodicy, Counsels of Wisdom, Dialogue of Pessimism and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* were not central to the work of Assyrian and Babylonian scholars, in the sense that they were not a central part of their technical literature.[17] However, as I will attempt to establish, these four wisdom texts were copied and used in the same institutional context as the technical literature of the *kalû, bārû, asû, āšipu,* and *ṭupšarru.*

I argue that these four compositions, assembled by Assyriologists under the modern label of Akkadian wisdom literature, constituted for ancient scholars an auxiliary corpus comprising their lore and advocating the values and norms of their professional class.[18] Moreover, these texts were also important for the education of the scribes who began vocational training in one of the five disciplines of first millennium B.C.E. Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship, after completing their basic scribal education.[19] Consequently, their audience was mainly composed of scribes and scholars.[20]

In that sense, understanding Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship and the activities of scholars is relevant for the discussion of the compositions and their liminal aspects. Therefore, the present chapter is a background to the social setting and the audiences which used, copied and read the four wisdom texts.

1.1. The limits of manuscript evidence

The reconstruction of the geographical, chronological and social contexts of the compositions is severely hampered by factors of modern and ancient origin. The impossibility of establishing precise find-spots, even when tablets were found *in situ,* casts doubt over the origin, ownership and the exact use of specific tablets. Early archaeological practices are accountable for this problem, namely the absence of a

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[17] The contents of this technical literature differed from one scholarly discipline to another. As we shall see below in this chapter, each expert relied on reference series and manuals appropriate to its functions. For a description of technical literature see Parpola and Reade 1993: xiii-xiv.

[18] Lenzi, forthcoming. Beaulieu 2007:17-18.

[19] See below section 1.4. See also Gesche 2001:213-214.

[20] Circumstantial evidence, such as ruling lines dividing compositions into sections, have been interpreted as indication of a putative oral performance of some of the compositions. See Oshima 2014:32; 143. However, the blurred distinction between public oral performance and the use in educational dictation, the presence of rare learned vocabulary and the graphical relevance of some stylistic resources such as the acrostic prevents further speculation into the existence of a wider audience. For oral and aural features of Akkadian poetry see Alster 1992:23-71.

systematic archaeological register.[21] In parallel, administrative displacement resulted in the mixing of tablets from different sites or in the loss of some objects.[22] Illegally excavated tablets are also part of this problem.

Another issue which limits our knowledge of the geographical and temporal distribution of the witnesses derives from archaeological hazard, i.e. the randomness of archaeological excavations and their results. For instance, in some early explored sites the method of digging was extensive since excavating whole mounds and unearthing large institutional building complexes as in the case of Kuyunjik at Nineveh was possible because that city was destroyed and never fully reoccupied. In other sites excavations developed from strategically placed prospection trenches.[23] For that reason, we have knowledge of a large institutional archive and library in Nineveh but not private ones, while in Babylon archives and libraries are known both from private houses and temples.

Ancient practices of writing and record-keeping are equally accountable for the inaccurate image of the sources, their relevance, and distribution through time. Eleanor Robson states an important characteristic of the chronology of the available witnesses: cuneiform culture was gradually losing ground to a culture based on alphabetic scripts.[24] Moreover, as Paul-Alain Beaulieu argues, the process of cultural Aramaization was potentiated by the conquests of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the consequent absorption of Aramaic-speaking population.

Among the effects of this process, we find the rise of a double-script administration; the incorporation of Aramaic elements Neo-Assyrian onomastics and propaganda;[25] the impact of Aramaic on vernacular culture; and the linguistic influence of Aramaic over Akkadian.[26] Consequently, Beaulieu presumes that an independent oral culture was by the Neo-Babylonian period mostly conducted in Aramaic while Standard Babylonian was surviving on written cuneiform culture only.[27]

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[21] Pedersén 1998:4.
[22] Reade 1986: 214.
[23] E.g.: Merkes at Babylon. See Pedersén 1998:189-190.
[24] Robson 2013:39.
[25] Evidence for this impact is gathered from personal names and from one royal inscription describing the promotion of the god Amurru as a close supporter of the god Aššur in the battle against Tiamat in the Akītū-temple of the god Aššur which Sennacherib proclaims to have built at Nineveh. see Beaulieu 2006:187-189. For the interpretation of the royal inscription see Beaulieu 2005:44-45.
[26] For an overview of the linguistic Aramaization of the Babylonian dialect see Beaulieu 2013: 358-378.
[27] See Beaulieu 2006: 190-191.

This is clearly in conflict with the textual records available but is visible on the archaeological record through the existence of clay bullae and metal scroll rings, once attached to papyri and leather scrolls, and as short epigraphs on cuneiform tablets written for example in Aramaic.[28] In addition, textual and iconographic evidence supports the existence of a double script administration in the Neo-Assyrian empire.[29]

The same cannot be said for literary texts. Is it conceivable that cuneiform scholarly tradition would have also branched out to alphabetic languages?[30] An indication of cultural dialogue can be gathered from the story of Aḫiqar,[31] found at Elephantine, with a Neo-Assyrian narrative setting.[32] However, the transmission of Neo-Assyrian elements might have taken other means than textual ones.

A second ancient factor is the use of perishable materials, such as ivory and wood waxed writing-boards, for cuneiform scholarship. The practice is attested by plates of wood and ivory retrieved from the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu with traces of an astrological series.[33] It seems plausible that other scholarly texts would have received copies on writing-boards. Moreover, as Robson suggests, this perishable media gradually become more used than clay tablets during the late-Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods.[34]

Finally, the method of textual transmission and the practicalities of the creation of clay tablets as objects also contributed to a distorted view of the diffusion of our compositions. Copying texts was a common and recurrent scribal activity which was used to move knowledge from one city to another, for the self-study of scholars, or for use in professional context.[35] Moreover, since the process of baking tablets was rarely used intentionally,[36] recopying old tablets was essential both to the maintenance and renovation of an existent library or archive's funds and to textual proliferation of

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[28] E.g. BM78707. See Clancier 2009:247.
[29] See Beaulieu 2006:188 n. 3.
[30] E.g. the "Graeco-Babyloniaca" tablets attesting the use of the Greek alphabet to transliterate cuneiform signs. See de Breuker 2011: 639; For fuller description of these tablets see Clancier 2009: 248-255.
[31] On the hypotheses of untraceable direct influence of cuneiform script on some Aramaic texts and, on the contrary, the possible autonomic origin of other Aramaic texts see the references given by Clancier 2009: 246. Perdue 1981: 120-121. On Aḫiqar's presumable Neo-Assyrian context of production see Beldsoe 2013: 123 n.10; 2015:242 n.7.
[32] However, Beldsoe remarks that this narrative setting had a metaphorical function as political memory within the Elephantine Jewish community rather than it was an accurate historical context of production. See Beldsoe 2015: 244-245.
[33] see: Pedersén 1998: 147-150.
[34] Robson 2011:566-567.
[35] See Pearce 1993: 185-188.
[36] Reade 1986: 218-219.

canonical texts and series.[37] The process of copying tablets relied partially on the professional activity of scribes, working with the explicit objective of renovating or proliferating the funds of a library, and partially on copies made in an educational context, which is more visible in the case of private libraries.[38]

There are several examples of the reuse or recycling of old tablets, especially in the case of administrative and school texts.[39] The tablets which were found were either reused or the site was destroyed,[40] while other tablets being recycled were lost. Therefore, the actual level of geographical and chronological dissemination of the four compositions might have been higher than what the witnesses attest for since these manuscripts only represent late versions of the compositions.

1.2. Chronological and geographical distribution of manuscript evidence

The chronological distribution of manuscript evidence for the four wisdom texts ranges from the Neo-Assyrian to the Late-Babylonian periods between the eight and fifth century B.C.E..[41] In contrast, textual references place the production context of the four compositions in the Late-Kassite Period.[42]

Modern academic consensus assumes that the compositions were a result of a long tradition and that they were part of a "canonical" corpus.[43] Phillipe Clancier argues that this "canonical" corpus was intentionally preserved and had internal cohesion and that archaeological hazard is not responsible for its configuration, as Leo Oppenheim had suggested in reference to the royal libraries of Nineveh.[44] Clancier, having the advantage of new data, observes that several Late-Babylonian libraries had a similar proportion and

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[37] Clancier 2009: 225-229.

[38] Clancier 2009:225-226.

[39] Reused e.g. as floor filling, but mostly archive tablets. See Pedersén 1998: 110-111. See also Robson 2007: 70 on the recycling of tablets.

[40] e.g. Nineveh, Kalḫu, Ḫuzirina.

[41] Based on a reconstructed colophon, Lambert dates the youngest manuscript of *Counsels of Wisdom* to 458 B.C.E. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 98.

[42] Lambert 1996 [1960]:97, 141; Annus and Lenzi 2010: xviii; Oshima 2013: xv, based on onomastic references, proposes a somewhat more recent period, specifically the Second Isin Dynasty.

[43] i.e. the scholarly and literary canon created by the "stream of tradition". See Oppenheim 1977:13; 255. The concept has been deconstructed in part by recent research on knowledge and scholarship. In fact, Oppenheim concept holds true in that there was a central body of texts which was transmitted during a long period of time with some degree of stabilization. However, contrary to Oppenheim and Lambert's suggestion, scholarly and literary innovation continued during the first millennium. For instance, a few new compositions were created, minor revisions and additions continued to be made to the "canonical" corpus and a commentary tradition arose around that corpus. For a brief overview of the question see Robson 2011: 557-558.

[44] Oppenheim 1977: 15-17.

configuration of scholarly and literary texts. [45] This signifies that these texts were widely considered as canonical and, probably, such canon was established around the 12th and 11th centuries B.C.E.. [46]

Niek Veldhuis argues that this notion of a "canon" was a first millennium B.C.E. development connected with the increasing importance of writing in scholarship. Moreover, Veldhuis contends that cuneiform scholarship proves that a Sumero-Akkadian authoritative "canon" was established by the mid-first millennium B.C.E.. The emergence of a commentary tradition and the existence of textual parodies of other literary genres required some degree of textual stability and popularity of its base texts.[47]

Although the attribution of the production context to the Late-Kassite period is accepted, Alan Lenzi adverts that tangible evidence is lacking and the assumption is based on textual references from later sources and manuscripts.[48] To a large extent, the attribution relies on theoretical criticism which assumes the existence of several stages of transmission (oral folklore, forerunners, early compilation, and fixation) before a text reaches its final form. For example, this theory was partially proven in the case of the *Epic of Gilgameš* and most of the theorised textual stages were attested with manuscript evidence. It was possible to connect a cycle of Sumerian poems, an Old-Babylonian compilation and to hypostasize a Late-Kassite fixation known only from Neo-Assyrian manuscripts.[49] Once more, as in our sources, the Kassite date of canonization is only conjectural.[50]

In any case, several political and cultural factors of the Late-Kassite and Second Isin periods make the canonization of those texts around that period plausible, as Eckart Frahm explains, such as the decline of several ancient learning centres or the loss of native monarchy to the Kassites, which paradoxically might have generated fears for Babylonian cultural decline while engaging a policy of cultural protectionism of that same culture.[51]

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[45] Clancier's work analysis the cases of the temple of *Esagil* in Babylonia and of the Urukean temples *Bīt Rēš*, *Irigal* and *Eanna*. For a reconstruction of these Libraries see Clancier 2009: 200-213; 33-44, respectively. The author also mentions the libraries found at Sultantepe/Ḫuzirina and of the temple of Nabû at Kalḫu. See Clancier 2009: 291, n.1268 for further bibliography on these two cases.
[46] Clancier 2009:291.
[47] Veldhuis 2003:19-22; 26-27.
[48] Lenzi 2015:164-165.
[49] Tigay 2002 [1982]: 10-13.
[50] Tigay 2002 [1982]: 131 and n.3.
[51] According to a Neo-Assyrian tablet, KAR 177 (VAT 9663), the Kassite king Nazimaruttaš (ca.1307-1282 B.C.E.) was credited to have promoted the compilation of the seven tablets of the hemerological tradition. Frahm recognizes that there is no other evidence to support the claim, but the choice of

The geographical range of the manuscripts is not particularly extensive with witnesses hailing from seven sites: Nineveh (25), Assur (13), Sippar (12), Babylon (13), Ḫuzirina (3), Kalḫu (1), Nippur (1) and Borsippa (1). Fifteen witnesses are from uncertain provenience.[52] Among these, there are three commentaries: a Late-Babylonian commentary on the *Babylonian Theodicy* is probably from Borsippa;[53] and two commentaries on *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh.[54]

There seems to exist a tendency to associate wisdom literature with important cultural centres associated with the production of scholarship. The findings at Ḫuzirina, a small town, seem to contradict the tendency. However, as Robson has pointed out, Ḫuzirina represents a special case, it should be understood in connection to the provincial, and later royal, capital of Harran and the presence of school tablets and the attestation in colophons of several apprentice scribes reveals that Ḫuzirina was a learning centre during the late Neo-Assyrian period.[55] Consequently, the social setting within which the texts were used and copied can be identified with first millennium B.C.E. Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship.

1.3. Context of use: Assyrian and Babylonian Scholarship

Recent studies have emphasized the scientific character of cuneiform knowledge,[56] but ancient scholarship and its disciplines also dealt with wisdom and esoteric arts.[57] Ancient scholars were responsible for the body of strictly technical texts, the canonical corpus of cultural and literary texts and for the scholia which were produced and collected in cuneiform script. In this sense of the word, every non-administrative text (e.g. literary compositions, records of astrological data, of omens, reports on divinations, astrological series, chronological lists, chronicles, etc.), over which further scholarly production was written (e.g. commentaries and other explanatory texts), should be considered part of cuneiform scholarship.

Nazimaruttaš (ca. 1307-1282 B.C.E.), who was not a notorious king, as the authoritative figure of a later tradition is also intriguing. See Frahm 2011: 322-323 n.1544.

[52] See Appendix A – Manuscripts by Provenance.

[53] BM 66882+. The provenance is under debate. See below p.34. BM 40987 may be a second commentary. See below p.33 n.182.

[54] K 3291; BM 123392.

[55] Robson 2013: 49-50.

[56] E.g.: Ossendrijver 2012; Rochberg 2016.

[57] See Parpola 1970: 12.

It follows that those scribes which were not solely employed in royal or temple administration or in the replication of monumental inscriptions but were invested in working with this corpus for professional or educational reasons should be considered scholars.[58] However, the Akkadian term *ummânu,* generally translated as "scholar" or "master-scholar", registers diverse connotations.[59] On the one hand, *ummânu* may refer to any expert or scholar who has mastered a given discipline.[60] On the other hand, *ummânu* can also be used as a title distinguishing the personal scholar of the king who acted as close advisor and embodied the tradition of the mythological and the ancient *apkallus.*[61]

In his study of Neo-Assyrian scholarly letters, Simo Parpola states that a restricted group of scholars served as close advisors to the king and that they bore the title of *ummânu* for that reason.[62] Although other experts can be considered scholars in the modern sense of the word, they did not serve the king directly in the capacity of advisors. In any case, all scholars, seldom exhibiting priestly titles,[63] developed their activities in an institutional context or were in some way connected either with a temple or with the royal court.[64]

Parpola states that the specialization of scholars in one discipline was strictly observed at the Neo-Assyrian court,[65] however, for later periods specialization was not necessarily the rule.[66] Five fields scholarly specialization existed and experts were identified by the following designations: *ṭupšarru; bārû; āšipu; kalû* and *asû.*

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[58] Although some palace scribes serving in some administrative roles or others writing inscriptions, and other compositions related to kingship propaganda and could sometimes be also referred as wise they were not scholars. see Sweet1990b :103-105.

[59] For the range within the notion of expert see CAD U/W, *ummânu (*2): 111-115.

[60] see Parpola and Reade 1993: xiv and his reference to SAA 10 160. This is a letter directed by a babylonian *ṭupšarru*, that is an astrologer, presumably to Sargon II, in which "twenty able scholars" are presented to the king.

[61] See Lenzi 2008: 137-169; see also Denning-Bolle 1992: 48-50.

[62] see Sweet 1990b: 106.

[63] For a brief overview of the discussion on the priestly or profane identification of Mesopotamian scholars see Parpola 1970: 10-11.

[64] This was certainly the case until 539 B.C.E. when the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings were the main sponsors of cuneiform scholarship. During the late-first millennium the Temple appears to become the solely institutional setting of cuneiform scholarship and kinship groups connected with it also become more visible. See Robson 2013:55-56.

[65] Only three exceptions were identified by the author. See Parpola 1970: 12 n. 2.

[66] For example, Eleanor Robson comments on the multi-disciplinary education within the scholarly families at Hellenistic Uruk. See Robson 2011: 565-566.

The *ṭupšarru* was specialized in the observation, recording, and interpretation of omens.[67] These omens were collected from various sources such as celestial and terrestrial observation, observations based on malformed animal births and on hemerology. These experts are to be identified with astrologers and their work on celestial observations and on the prediction of solar and lunar eclipses was the forerunner to later mathematical astronomy.[68] Because these experts relied on reference series, i.e. compilations of different types of omens, for their work some experts used the title of "scribe of the series *x* ", for instance, *ṭupšar Enuma Anu Enlil* meaning "scribe of the series *Enuma Anu Enlil*". Besides this series, we find others such as *Šumma alu ina mele šakin, Šumma izbu, Iqqur īpuš* and *Enbu bēl arḫim*. Additionally, the *ṭupšarrū* used and produced scholia based on those series such as commentaries and surveys of the reference series.

The *bārû* was a haruspex or diviner who specialized in performing and interpreting induced divination by way of extispicy (inspection of entrails), or hepatoscopy (liver reading). [69] The technical literature of the diviners included several reference series (e.g. *Šumma martu, Šuma padānu, Šumma ubānu, Šumma ḫašû, Šumma kakku arki amūti)* and some educational and explanatory texts on the performance of rituals (e.g. *Šumma multābiltu, Enūma mār bārê nīqē ukān*).[70]

The third discipline of ancient scholarship was the field of the *āšipu.* These exorcists preformed magic rituals (spells; ritual purifications e.g. *bīt rimki;* ritual substitutions e.g. *šar pūḫi*) to prevent or deflect the malicious effects signaled by omens. This discipline also had a vast technical literature.[71]

The main activity of the *asû*, often translated as "physician", was in a way like modern pharmaceutical medicine since it was based on the empirical observation of patients and on the prescription and application of medicinal treatments. The reference literature of the *asû* was composed by series of standard recipes instructing on how to

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[67] Simo Parpola explains that the designation was not etymologically connected with the Akkadian word *ṭupšarru,* literally "scribe", but it derived from a Hebrew loanword **ṭapsār* and its later Akkadian equivalent *kasdî* which came to be translated as "Chaldean". See Parpola 1970: 12.

[68] In fact, Parpola argued that the preciseness of Neo-Assyrian omen experts would have implied, if not mathematical thought, at least a systematic study based on empirical observations. See Parpola 1970: 16, 18.

[69] Induced or provoked divination as opposed to divination via the observation of natural phenomena, which was the specialty of the *ṭupšarru*. Both forms are part of what Bottéro called deductive divination. See Bottéro 1992 [1975]: 130-134.

[70] See Parpola 1970: 3.

[71] Parpola notes that KAR 44 = VAT 8275, relates to the *āšipu* since it contains a list of reference-texts on incantations and ritual handbooks. See Parpola 1970: 14-16.

prepare and apply medication. Such medical activity was complementary to the apotropaic activity of the exorcists and, in some cases, experts from both fields worked together.[72]

Finally, the fifth field of Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship was dominated by the *kalû,* a designation which is usually translated as lamentation-expert or lamentation-priest. Like the *āšipu*, the work of the *kalû* consisted in deflecting the effects of evil portents, however, the *kalû* took a different perspective in the sense that his intervention was based on the performance of rituals of atonement using hymns accompanied by musical instruments such as the kettledrum.[73]

1.4. Scholarly education

These scholars followed a similar educational path structured in three stages.[74] In the first two stages, they received basic scribal training which was common to all scribes regardless of their future employment: either as administrative scribes, officials or scholars. Specialization would only start on the third level described by Petra Gesche as vocational training.[75]

During phase one of the basic scribal education, students would copy extracts of sign-lists, syllabaries, and thematical bilingual lists of nouns, god-lists, proverbs and small extracts or formulas from administrative or literary texts. [76] In the second phase, Gesche recognized that students used longer single-column tablets and copied more extensive extracts, which were only labelled with a date without any other colophon information.[77]

Though the copied texts are of a similar typology as those excerpted in first phase tablets, there seems to exist more emphasis on copying compositions, such as bilingual incantations, than on copying lists.[78]

From findings at Ḫuzirina (modern Sultantepe), Robson concluded that basic scribal training was not restricted to institutional contexts, but that it was also conducted

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[72] Parpola 1970: 15 n.1.
[73] See Parpola 1970: 15. See also Gabbay 2014: 115-144 for a detailed discussion of the technical literature of the *kalû* in Assyria.
[74] Robson 2011: 563.
[75] see Gesche 2001: 213.
[76] Gesche 2001:213-216. For a summary of Gesche's description of the two phases of basic scribal education see Robson 2011: 562-565.
[77] See Gesche 2001:213-214.
[78] Gesche 2001: 213-216; Robson 2011: 563.

in private schools. However, the instructors at Ḫuzirina were seemingly connected to temples themselves. In addition, based on colophon information, Robson pointed out that some student scribes were not related to the instructors by kinship.[79]

The opposite was true for the third stage. Vocational training of scholars was controlled by the temple or the royal court and most trainees shared a filial relationship with their instructors.[80] From Neo-Babylonian evidence, we can see that the specialization of scholars was done by a system of apprenticeship.[81] This situation was similar to what happened in other professions for which apprenticeship contracts have been found.[82]

No similar contract was yet found for the vocational training in scholarship. Possibly, because the filial relationship between instructor and trainee would make such a contract unnecessary. Additionally, as we have already seen above, it seems that although specialization existed experts had knowledge in other fields as well, especially in later contexts such as Hellenistic Uruk.[83]

As Uri Gabbay remarks, during this third phase the production of commentaries was part of the educational process of scholarly apprentices, who would write them under the supervision of a senior scholar, in order to better understand the canonical corpus of scholarship. Furthermore, Gabbay uses the technical information on the subscripts of the commentaries, to describe the context and process of learning concluding that scholarly education would be conducted partly by lessons in which a senior scholar would direct an oral enquiry to the apprentices on a given composition. The oral lesson would later be compiled into the written commentary proper.[84]

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[79] See Robson 2013: 55.
[80] However, exceptions may have occurred. Note, for instance, the case of the relation between the master and his presumably orphan apprentice as portrayed by the *Babylonian Theodicy*. For historical cases see Robson 2013: 49-50.
[81] Gesche 2001: 213-216.
[82] e.g. as bakers or cooks. See Cohen and Kedar 2011: 238-242.
[83] Robson 2011: 566.
[84] See Gabbay 2016: 13-24.

1.5. The scholarly connections of four Akkadian wisdom compositions

The four wisdom texts explored in the present study are related to the social setting described above. Firstly, as we have previously seen, their manuscripts were retrieved from locations connected with scholarship and scribal education.

Secondly, the existence of secondary witnesses, such as commentaries and extracts, reveals that the four compositions were treated as base-texts of scholarship. For instance, commentaries have been produced on the *Babylonian Theodicy* and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.[85] An extract of *Counsels of Wisdom* was inscribed in a tablet containing bilingual incantations.[86]

Dialogue of Pessimism opens an exception since no secondary witnesses were identified for this text. However, this composition may be read as textual parody imbedded with several references of erudite literature and therefore only an advance scribe would be able to produce it.[87]

Likewise, the content of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, namely the description of rituals such as the purifications performed by the dream characters, themselves identified as exorcists, and the mention of plasters, links the composition to the arts of the *āšipu* and of the *asû*; while its style resembling a *šuilla* prayer or a hymn, connects it with the *kalû* and its technical literature.[88] The content of the *Babylonian Theodicy* and *Counsels of Wisdom* also links these texts to a scholarly context. The strong instructional tone and the perceived pedagogical setting, as well as, the reiteration of the accepted social values suggest their connection with the scholarly elite.[89]

In conclusion, the four wisdom texts were produced and used in an institutional and scholarly context. Their literary settings were inspired on the professional and educational realities of scholarship and, furthermore, they contained the values of the restrict class of Assyrian and Babylonian scholars.

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[85] See below pp. 33-34; 49.
[86] CBS 4507. See below, p. 39 n.213.
[87] See below section 4.3.3.
[88] Tablet III, ll. 25, 42. On style cf. Oshima 2014: 341-342.
[89] See below sections 4.1.3; 4.2.2.

2.   The Sapiential Phenomenon

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship worked and how a scribe would become a scholar through vocational training. In addition, we also saw in what sense our sources were related to the scholarly and literary "canon" and with scholarship, namely as a sort of auxiliary corpus containing the values and the viewpoint defended by the socio-professional class of Assyrian and Babylonian scholars. The present chapter explores the multi-layered notion of wisdom and how scholarship was but one of its diverse manifestations.

2.1. Approaches, problems and solutions

When researching wisdom, assyriologists seem invariably compelled to redefine their object and to propose solutions for the perceived terminological problems. These solutions either convey a broad notion of wisdom;[90] apply a limited concept to a specific context;[91] circumscribe a corpus based on thematic, chronological and linguistic criteria;[92] or survey the diverse manifestations, sources and semantic fields of wisdom.[93]

Early Assyriologists used Biblical notions and terminology in the study of Akkadian or Sumerian material. In fact, the treatment of wisdom in Mesopotamian context evolved in parallel with Assyriology's own development into an independent discipline. A result of the 19th century intellectual environment, Assyriology originated as an auxiliary discipline of Biblical Studies and only from the mid-20th century onwards did Assyriologists work on asserting the singularities of their research field. Consequently, several discussions on wisdom arose in Assyriology, namely: the adequateness of terminology; the existence of a native concept; and the usefulness of wisdom literature as a generic label.[94]

This change of intellectual attitude becomes clearer if we compare the approaches of earlier and later publications. The first approaches to Mesopotamian literature were heavily influenced by the methods and terminology of Biblical studies and subordinated Mesopotamian texts to the analysis of Biblical books.[95] Later articles and anthologies

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[90] See for example Van Dijk 1953: 3.
[91] e.g. "royal wisdom in Sweet 1990b: 100.
[92] e.g. Lambert 1996 [1963]; Cohen 2013.
[93] Buccellati 1981; Denning-Bolle 1992; Sweet 1990a.
[94] see full discussion in Cohen 2013: 7-12.
[95] e.g. Smith 1876; Langdon 1923.

accept the autonomy of both Biblical and Mesopotamian sources, even when establishing a comparative approach.[96] Langdon's publication *Babylonian Wisdom* constitutes a good example of the first attitude.[97] The author saw no need to define or review the concept of wisdom, clearly approaching the Akkadian texts as important parallels for the study of Biblical wisdom books, instead, he assumes uncritically the Biblical concept of wisdom.[98]

Thirty years later, J. van Dijk could apply a more complex theoretical approach to the problem of wisdom. On the one hand, the author described wisdom as an intellectual attitude opposed to modern science in that it assumes a subjective appreciation of reality based on experience and concerned with social and moral values. On the other hand, van Dijk recognizes that both subjective and objective attitudes are documented in Sumero-Akkadian tradition and that the ancient notion of wisdom did not distinguish between them.[99] The author lists eleven genres of texts that in his view contained wisdom: proverbs, instructions of Ninurta, the story of the three friends, fables, wisdom letters to gods and men, paraenetic texts from the edubba, wisdom disputations (adaman-du$_{11}$-ga), wisdom essays in eme-sal based on female archetypal characters (caractères), paraenetic exhortations, maxims and righteous sufferer compositions.[100] Although van Dijk only explores five of these categories in depth,[101] the systematization makes clear that in his perspective wisdom was not restricted to a specific literary genre. Instead, the author identifies wisdom in several genres and, within some of them, thinks it is necessary to discriminate specific texts containing wisdom from other compositions under that literary genre, e. g. wisdom disputations from ordinary disputations.[102]

In his review of van Dijk's publication, Edmund Gordon does not provide a concept of wisdom, choosing instead to improve upon van Dijk's categories and defining wisdom literature as any literary text concerning life and nature.[103] Both authors underline the generic multiplicity of wisdom and, consequently, the broad range of the sapiential phenomenon.

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[96] e.g. Léveque 1993; Hallo 1997.
[97] Cohen 2013 : 8.
[98] Langdon 1923: 1-2.
[99] van Dijk 1953: 3-4, 19.
[100] See van Dijk 1953: 4-5; see also Denning-Bolle 1992: 10.
[101] Namely: disputations (29-86), *caractères* (89-99), paraenetic exhortations and maxims (100-117); righteous sufferer compositions (118-133).
[102] van Dijk 1953: 33-34.
[103] Gordon 1960: 123; Denning-Bolle 1992: 11.

Adopting a more restrained perspective, Wilfred Lambert perceives the existence of a terminological problem and proceeds to establish a limited corpus. Lambert recognizes the inadequacy of wisdom as an operative concept for the Babylonian context since the endogenous notion of wisdom had slightly distinct connotations from those of its Hebrew counterpart.[104] Lambert understood the Hebrew concept of *hokma* to have a stronger existential and moral dimension than the Akkadian term *nēmequ*, more focused on skill.[105] In spite of that, he admitted the existence of thematical affinity among both contexts and selected a Babylonian wisdom corpus by identifying themes and motifs similar to those present in Biblical wisdom books. In a later article, the same author, while insisting on the distinction between Akkadian and Hebrew terms, converged with van Dijk's viewpoint in that different wisdom themes may be found in Akkadian literature outside the conventional corpus. For example, Lambert accepted that existential wisdom, in the sense of "living philosophy", could be detected in the dialogue between Gilgameš and Siduri.[106]

Giorgio Buccellati attempted to analyse wisdom in a holistic manner, merging erudite and folk sources, addressing themes, forms, and settings in a diachronic evolution of the phenomenon from the Sumerian (ca. 2470-2004 B.C.E.) to the Late-Babylonian linguistic context (ca. 600-100 B.C.E.). His effort of systematization was valuable, not as much as in defining wisdom as a coherent cultural tradition, but in opening the enquiry to a larger domain by equating wisdom with a cultural phenomenon which assumed multiple forms.[107]

Sharing Buccellati's conceptualization of wisdom as a complex phenomenon, Sara Denning-Bolle, who centred her work on the dialogic nature of Akkadian wisdom, starts her research for an endogenous notion with a philological survey of Akkadian vocabulary and expressions related to wisdom and knowledge.[108] This is followed by a second survey of characters – Ea, Marduk, Atra-ḫasīs, Gilgameš, Adapa, and the primeval and human *apkallus* - that were considered as wisdom authorities by Mesopotamian tradition and a brief typology of unconventional sources including literary, non-literary

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[104] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 1-2.
[105] See Lambert 1995: 30; see also CAD N/2: 160-163.
[106] See Lambert 1995:31-32. For the text see George 2000: 76-79 Gg. X.
[107] Buccellati 1981: 35-44.
[108] Denning-Bolle 1992: 34-38.

and onomastic material.[109] These surveys lead the author to conclude that a native notion of wisdom existed and was perceived as a complex reality in Ancient Mesopotamia.[110]

Following a similar strategy, Ronald Sweet conducted a three-fold study of wisdom in Akkadian literature. On the first part, the author offers a survey of substantives and adjectives denoting the semantic field of wisdom. The second part enumerates those professionals which are qualified as wise from kings to craftsmen.[111] The third part of Sweet's approach, published as another article, explores wisdom as an attribute of the king and how his scholarly advisors contributed to that notion.

Buccellati, Sweet, and Denning-Bolle used a diverse array of sources in their surveys and, in doing so, they extended the conventional wisdom corpus established by van Dijk and Lambert. Their work established wisdom as a complex phenomenon rather than an operative concept or literary genre, and, as a result, the notion of wisdom literature became void.[112] Paul-Alain Beaulieu stressed the inexistence of a Mesopotamian wisdom genre and, following Lambert, explains that the modern conventional corpus derives from thematical affinity and constitutes an intuitive category.[113] Differently, Beaulieu recognizes the complexity of the ancient notion of wisdom in the Mesopotamian context by accepting the "inherent fluidity" of wisdom in Sumerian and Akkadian sources.[114]

In the introduction to his collection of Late Bronze Age wisdom texts, Yoram Cohen surveys how wisdom has been used as a modern literary category and how texts have been subjectively included or excluded by modern editors.[115] Revising the evolution of the modern concept since Lambert's work, Cohen disagrees with Beaulieu's position and argues that, on the absence of a strictly defined native genre, at least some connection was perceived between some wisdom compositions judging by their contiguous presence in school tablets and position in ancient catalogues.[116]

Alan Lenzi, in a recent paper, acknowledges the diversity of the native notion of wisdom by suggesting that it refers not to a single operative concept but rather to a conglomeration of several concepts which differ in accordance with the context to which they are applied. For instance, *Counsels of Wisdom* represents a managerial type of

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[109] Denning-Bolle 1992: 39-56; 56-64.
[110] Denning-Bolle 1992: 65.
[111] Sweet 1990a:45-65.
[112] Cohen 2013: 12.
[113] Beaulieu 2007: 3.
[114] Beaulieu 2007: 18.
[115] Cohen 2013: 8-12.
[116] Cohen 2013: 12.

wisdom.[117] Despite increasing criticism, wisdom and wisdom literature are still frequently used in Assyriology if only to be negated. I think this fact shows that the problem is not simply a defective terminology, as has been suggested by Lambert and Vanstiphout,[118] rather the difficulty resides in that they have been used to attempt an objective definition of an object which defies coherence and logical boundaries.

Definitions of wisdom will necessarily be many, subjective and will hardly exhaust the nuances of the reality they try to define. Therefore, any research on the topic of wisdom is heavily dependent on the approach taken by the enquirer. A comprehensive concept of wisdom is not feasible because wisdom stands for a diverse and vast reality testified by different types of sources. Consequently, wisdom in Mesopotamia should be understood as a complex cultural phenomenon which can only be described instead of defined.

2.2. A typology of wisdom

As seen above, the works of Buccellati, Denning-Bolle and Sweet were significant steps in the development of a descriptive typology of the sapiential phenomenon in Ancient Mesopotamia. Presently, I will resume that typology under the following categories to the following classes: origin, audience, function, form and sources.

According to origin, both in the sense of the material context of production and of the traditions of alleged authorship, wisdom manifestations are popular, scholarly or divine. Some proverbs and personal names are examples of wisdom of popular origin in that they sprang from oral tradition and encapsulate common sense maxims.[119] Other compositions, including some proverbs, derive from scholarly or scribal production - being not only lengthier but also more complex in their treatment of wisdom themes. Texts of scholarly origin include both types of wisdom distinguished by Denning-Bolle as practical and speculative wisdom,[120] a distinction that can be somewhat equivalent to what Perdue calls traditional and critical wisdom.[121]

Divine origin, on the other hand, is not directly related to material production but with moral authority both over a given text, corpus or type of manifestation and as the

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[117] Lenzi forthcoming.
[118] See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 1. See also Cohen 2013: 12.
[119] Denning-Bolle 1992: 63-64.
[120] Denning-Bolle 1992: 31-32.
[121] Perdue 1990: 473.

primordial source of wisdom. The divine origin of wisdom is explored in myths, in epics, in oracular reports, in hymns, in the attribution of specific text-series to Marduk and Ea, and in the *apkallu* tradition.[122]

The term audience is applied to the present typology in a broader sense and used to differentiate between active use and transmission from passive circulation and reception of the sapiential phenomenon and its manifestations. An active audience is certainly identifiable among the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian scholarly elites who were not only receivers of previous scribal and popular traditions but were its compilators and transmitters as well.[123] Passive audiences are harder to identify and only the traces of orality of some of these wisdom compositions, the collections of proverbs and onomastic evidence constitute arguments for the existence of both popular and courtly passive audiences.

Function relates to the aims wisdom was expected to achieve. From practical uses, such as scribal training, to political and social purposes, wisdom was expected to fulfil different objectives according to each of its diverse manifestations. For instance, scholarly wisdom had a practical role of training advanced scribes into scholarship;[124] at the same time, it accomplished a secondary political objective of endorsing the status quo and a social one, namely to promote the relevance of the scholarly elite.[125] Other forms of wisdom display different functions which, not being central to scribal wisdom, are nonetheless portrayed in some compositions. Wisdom as a life philosophy aimed at teaching how a person should behave to be prosperous and successful in life constitutes the background of instructions such as *Counsels of Wisdom.*[126] Such practical advice would be of general interest and may have reached diverse audiences other that scholarly, judging by the traces of potential orality,[127] although the main objective of the composition was probably the preparation of officials to the royal administration.[128]

On the other hand, some compositions had a broader objective, but their plot betrayed affinity with a specific scholarly discipline. Such is the case of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, a composition with the main objective of promoting the importance of reverence

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[122] Cf. Denning-Bolle 1992: 48-56; 56-64.
[123] See above section 1.3 p.12.
[124] Beaulieu 2007: 9-11.
[125] Beaulieu 2007: 15-17.
[126] Lenzi forthcoming.
[127] e.g. the sectional division and the epigrammatic style, see Lambert 1996 [1960]: 97.
[128] ll.81-94. See also Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96; Lenzi, forthcoming.

toward the gods by way of cultic duties, but which has a plot with strong ties to the *kalûtu* literature evident in ritual descriptions.[129] Thus, it can be said that, besides the defence and promotion of Marduk's cult, indirectly the composition served other purposes such as to acquaint younger scribes with ritual skills or to serve as an apology of eventual ritual failures.[130] These alternative functions portray wisdom as a technical and ritual skill.

Wisdom could take the following manifestations or forms: professional or technical skill and knowledge; success in life as a result of what may be called "life philosophy";[131] ability to receive revelation or perform mediation from and for the divine; display of sagacity ("tricks of Ea");[132] display of piety, obedience, and acceptance of status quo.

Finally, by types of sources of wisdom, I mean the specific format of the available documentary evidence. Though, only attested by written sources, wisdom would also have had an oral component. Furthermore, other types of sources could be accepted as manifestations of wisdom. For instance, if wisdom is technical skill then iconographic evidence should be a source for the study of the wisdom phenomenon not only for the eventual depiction of wisdom themes but for its inherent technical prowess.

Within written sources, diverse types of texts can also contain wisdom manifestations. For example, as ritual skill wisdom is seen in the *kalûtu* literature; as mediation and revelation in oracular reports and in divine letters; as sagacity in myths and epics; as philosophy of life in instructions and in epics such as the *Epic of Gilgameš;*[133] wisdom as obedience, piety, and acceptance of social values is present, not only in the four compositions studied here but also in letters to the king, hymns, oracular reports and myths.

2.3. Characteristics of wisdom

A general appreciation of the sapiential phenomenon reveals some features or characteristics common to its several manifestations. The first characteristic is the universality of wisdom. Wisdom is present in several Ancient Near Eastern contexts sharing similar thematic issues and exhibiting compositions which are morphologically

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[129] Oshima 2014: 28. See above 1.5.
[130] Lenzi 2012: 61-63.
[131] See Lenzi forthcoming; Lambert 1995: 31-32.
[132] Denning-Bolle 1992: 40.
[133] Lambert 1995: 31-32.

alike. Naturally, the emergence of these connections with Egypt or with the Biblical context can be explained by direct textual transmission of literary motifs through economic and political contacts among these geographically close settings.[134] On the other hand, wisdom is also present in literature and folklore of other contexts with which cultural contacts are not to be expected. The reason for that is a simple one namely, that the connection resides in the common subject matter, namely: human experience.[135]

This ultimate topic constitutes the second characteristic of the wisdom phenomenon: wisdom takes the perspective of humanity in its relationship with society, nature and the divine. Wisdom is anthropocentric even when mankind is masked as animals or gods in fables, proverbs or disputations. In disputations, for instance, the arguments for one or other contender are based on their utility to mankind, even though the opposites are mostly inanimate beings and the sentence is professed by a god.

The third characteristic of wisdom is its frequent use as an attribute, as something someone (a king, a scholar, a common man or woman, the gods) possesses or embodies.[136] This characteristic may seem at odds with some critical wisdom compositions of late periods such as the *Dialogue of Pessimism* or the *Babylonian Theodicy* in which the comprehension of wisdom is described as unattainable to man. However, to be unable to understand wisdom is not the same as not having wisdom.

The fourth characteristic of wisdom is its neutrality relative to social values. Despite being portrayed as something inherently good, which man should wish for and pursue, wisdom maintains a certain independence from social norms that allows wisdom compositions to both endorse and criticise them.[137]

A fifth and final characteristic of wisdom is its dialogic nature. Denning-Bolle demonstrated the prevalence of dialogues - and pseudo-dialogues - in Akkadian literature and their relevance to the communication of wisdom.[138] Going further, van der Toorn sustains that the dialogic form was not only important to communicate wisdom but to allow the discussion of social values and norms by texts of critical wisdom.[139]

As already stated above, our four texts were part of an auxiliary corpus of scholarship which was not primarily concerned with skill or knowledge, as the technical

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[134] For Egyptian wisdom see Laffont 1979: 9-30; Lichtheim 1996: 243-262. For Biblical wisdom see Murphy 1981: 21-24; von Rad 1970: 13-30.
[135] On the role of experience in wisdom tradition see Buccellati 1981: 37-37.
[136] Cf. Denning-Bolle 1992:32-38.
[137] See Perdue 1990: 473-475.
[138] Denning-Bolle 1992: 186-187.
[139] van der Toorn 1991: 69.

literature of each of the five scholarly disciplines was, but rather with the lore, values, and norms of scholarship. Thus, our four texts convey teachings that surpass knowledge and empirical training. They are more comprehensive and can be identified as conveying scholarly wisdom. It is to those comprehensive teachings that liminality is applicable.

3. Liminality: concept and approaches

The present chapter describes the concept of liminality and its evolution from its first definition by Arnold van Gennep, in the context of *Rites de Passage*, to its reformulation by Victor Turner. In addition, I will resume how liminality has been applied to other fields of research, including Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Assyriology.

At the end of the chapter, I will explain how liminality is being applied to the four wisdom texts which will be presented on the ensuing chapter.

3.1. Liminality in *Rites de Passage*

In his work *Rites de Passage,* Arnold van Gennep developed a three-fold model to describe the process of rituals of passage or transition based on data from different historical and anthropological contexts.[140] By rites of passage the author understood rituals that entailed a change of status.[141] Though always having social effects, the transition from one state to another could be triggered by different kinds of stimuli. For instance, van Gennep explored rituals connected with social change (death, birth, puberty, marriage); seasonal change, and political installation.

A ritual of passage consists of a tripartite sequence: 1) phase of separation; 2) phase of the margin or limit; and 3) phase of reaggregation.[142] In the first stage, rituals of separation, or preliminary rites, are conceived to disconnect the subject – either an individual or a group – from his or her previous social position or state. The severing of these social ties is achieved symbolically by the loss of official titles or by disrobing the subject's previous clothes and the issuing of plain garments signifying both the purification and the subjugation into humbleness of the subject. When the ritual of passage involves a collective subject, e.g. a group reaching adulthood, the acts of separation such as these gain an equalizing value. That is, because all members of the party are clothed in the same way, preform the exact same actions and are treated in the same manner a notion of social equality is created among the group which facilitates the creation of strong inner ties during the liminal phase, i.e. a sense of "communitas". These strong ties can be dangerous or beneficial for society depending on the perspective the group takes of the societal structure after its reaggregation.[143]

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[140] van Gennep 1909.
[141] van Gennep 1909: 3.
[142] van Gennep 1909: 14.
[143] See Turner 1967 : 96-97; 128-129.

The separation is an essential prerequisite for the success of the second phase and, for that reason, it is intensified by the temporary physical and social isolation of the liminal subject. In the marginal or liminal phase, the ritual of passage proper happens: during this second stage the subject transposes the margin (related with Latin *limes*) and with that changes his social state.[144] In some cases, the symbolic limit can be materialized as a physical boundary or threshold, such as walls, porticos or itineraries. [145]

The forced isolation of the subject, which is a form of passive abuse, is reinforced via other forms of active abuse, such as verbal abuse, in the form of uttering profanities or addressing the subject with titles which are unbecoming of his social standing, and corporal abuse in the way of beatings or the forced performance of menial or degrading tasks. The objective of such abuse is to further separate the liminal subject from his previous moral and social points of reference, consequently facilitating the acquisition of new values. Throughout this period, the subject is controlled by an authoritative individual, who Turner characterized as a "ritual leader".[146] This figure serves an important role, since he is the only connection between the subject and the outside world and is accountable for successfully moving the subject throughout the ritual. Likewise, the "ritual leader" oversees the indoctrination of the values and norms the liminal subject needs for his or her new social position. During the third phase, ceremonial acts are performed with the objective of reintroducing the subject into normal social life. Often, reaggregation is accompanied by status elevation. In ritual performance, this phase is concretized by actions opposed to those of the separation phase. For example, the subject may receive new titles and garments which are becoming of the higher social status.

3.2.Turner's liminality

Another anthropologist, Victor Turner confirmed the validity of van Gennep's theory in the field when applied to the rituals of the Ndembu tribe.[147] His empirical observations led him to devote more attention to the second phase of the model. In doing so, Turner developed the concept of liminality as part of his social model of structure and anti-structure.[148] According to this model social development and replication takes place

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[144] van Gennep 1909: 14.
[145] van Gennep 1909: 20.
[146] Andrews and Roberts 2015: 135.
[147] e.g. Turner 1969: 98-108.
[148] Perdue 1981 115.

via the conflict between the social structure (established social norms and values) and the anti-structure (unorthodox values and challenges to the accepted norms).

Turner argued that these confrontations happened during the liminal phase of the rites of passage. The author describes the phase as ambivalent and dangerous since the subject, having lost his points of reference within the social structure, is exposed to diverse stimuli that make the outcome of the liminal phase unpredictable.[149] This potential danger is resumed in the archetypal character of the "trickster". The trickster can reveal himself to be either the liminal subject or the ritual leader, and, because he has a subversive nature, the trickster may make the liminal phase permanent and keep the group or society in a state of permanent crisis i.e. schismogenesis.[150] Therefore, for Turner three archetypal characters are involved in the liminal phase, namely the subject, the ritual leader and the trickster. Each is the embodiment of distinct aspects of the liminal status: humility, authority, subversion; ignorance, knowledge, doubt.

In addition, Turner coined the notion of "communitas" as a possible result of the liminal phase between the members of a collective subject. These members may develop strong and lasting connections during the liminal period, that sense of community, may continue after reaggregation and contribute either to the replication, the reform or the overthrow of the social structure.[151]

Turner's view of liminality as a creative phase for societal structure led him to distinguish a second type rituals of passage. Besides rituals of status elevation, already described above,[152] rituals of status reversal had an important role for the stability of society. In these rituals, a social superior (e.g. a king) temporarily loses his status while social inferiors are allowed to humiliate him and to act themselves as superiors. Performed at fixed feasts marking seasonal change (e.g. *akītu*) or in response to periods of calamity (e.g. *šar pūḫi*), rituals of status reversal stress the need for hierarchy and reinforce loyalty of inferiors towards social structure.[153]

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[149] Thomassen 2015: 46.
[150] Szakolczai 2015: 26-27.
[151] Turner 1969:108-111.
[152] See section 3.1. See also Turner 1969:170-171.
[153] See Turner 1969: 175-177. On the *šar pūḫi* cf. Ambos 2010: 47-48. Note that Ambos prefers the term "ritual of return" coined by V. Crapanzano.

3.3. Liminality elsewhere

The concept of liminality, as a tool of research, has been used elsewhere beyond anthropology. Ideas of limit or boundary have long been used as hermeneutical techniques in Philosophy.[154] Similarly, researchers of Sociology and History have called upon terminologies semantically connected with liminality.[155] Concepts of "transition" and "crisis" are commonly applied to characterize periods of drastic political change, or in other socially formative periods that explain the emergence of new societies or structures.[156] In Political Sciences and International Law, the concept of border possesses liminal significance evident in the statuses of migrants and refuges and on the modern legal construct of the "non-place", which serves as context for physical places, such as demilitarised zones and refugee camps.[157]

Liminality has evolved from Van Gennep's and Turner's models to become a broad concept. The three ritual stages identified by van Gennep remain relevant, because they describe a transitional process. Therefore, liminality can be used as an analytical instrument elsewhere. For instance, rituals of passage can be understood as a description of the process of human experience. Further, the insight of a limit or margin as a point of orientation when describing the sequence of complex rituals is also necessarily present in the systematization or analysis of other fields of study. [158]

3.4. Liminality in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Assyriology

The model of *Rites de Passage* has been frequently applied to the study of Ancient Near Eastern rituals. Van Gennep himself has used data from the Egyptian and Babylonian contexts, referring, for instance, to Kassite *kudurrus* as magical boundary stones,[159] and to the pharaonic ritual of instalment.[160]

Recent examples are the article of Claus Ambos on the Assyrian *šar pūḫi* and *bīt rimki* rituals;[161] Angelica Berlejung's analysis of the Babylonian ritual for the

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[154] Szakolczai 2015: 11-13.
[155] Szakolczai 2015: 14-16.
[156] Szakolczai 2015: 27-29.
[157] Andrews and Roberts 2015: 134.
[158] see van Gennep 1909: 275.
[159] van Gennep 1909: 20. However, archaeological information disproves the use of classical kudurrus as demarcation stones. See Kuhrt 1997: 337.
[160] van Gennep 1909: 157-158.
[161] Ambos 2013: 39-54.

consecration of cult statues;[162] Julye Bidmead's article on the *akītu* festival;[163] or Dina Katz's suggestions on the liminal aspects of the conception of the human body after death.[164] To my knowledge, only Leo Perdue has overtly applied liminality as a tool to examine Ancient Near Eastern literature, specifically to explain the social setting of didactic texts.[165]

3.5. Present application of Liminality

In the present study, I apply liminality as an analytic instrument to: the learning process of wisdom; the content of wisdom compositions; and their contexts of production and use. To that avail, I will examine the description of the characters, the perceived situational context and the presence of imagery invoking ambivalence or representing physical boundaries and social limits.

Furthermore, I suggest that liminality as a process of learning by experience provides insights on the multifaceted nature of the sapiential phenomenon and on the functionalities of wisdom literature.

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[162] Berlejung 1997: 45-73.
[163] Bidmead 2014: 147-158.
[164] See Katz 2014: 419-437. See also Katz RlA 14:72-73.
[165] Perdue 1981: 114-126.

4. Liminality in four Akkadian wisdom compositions

The current chapter presents the sources and explores their liminal aspects. The corpus is composed of four compositions thematically established as part of Akkadian wisdom literature: *Babylonian Theodicy*, *Counsels of Wisdom*, *Dialogue of Pessimism* and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.[166]

The *Babylonian Theodicy* has a total length of 297 lines and is attested by nine manuscripts. One commentary on this composition is currently known.[167] *Counsels of Wisdom,* with a total extension of 166 lines, is known from eight manuscripts.[168] *Dialogue of Pessimism,* having 86 lines, is attested by five witnesses.[169] *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi,* with an estimated extension of 600 lines distributed over five tablets, is attested by more than sixty witnesses and two commentaries.[170]

Apart from the surveys presented by Lambert, Annus and Lenzi, and Oshima,[171] I am not aware of any other recent comprehensive survey of manuscripts and critical editions of these wisdom compositions. The present work uses the latest available critical editions of each composition. For the *Dialogue of Pessimism* and *Counsels of Wisdom* I am using Lambert's editions of 1960.[172] For *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* and *Babylonian Theodicy*, I will follow the two new editions, with updated manuscript partitures and transliterations, which were published in 2014 by Oshima.[173]

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[166] For a comparison of the structure and liminal aspects see below Appendix B – Overview of Compositions.
[167] BM66882 + 76506. See Frahm 2011: 120-121.
[168] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 98.
[169] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 143.
[170] The information on the number of tablets and lines accepts Oshima's five-tablet theory. Compare the difference in the partitures of Annus and Lenzi 2010: xlvii-xlix; and of Oshima 2014: 376-438. On the doubts about commentary BM 123392 see Frahm 2011: 119 n.662.
[171] Lambert 1996 [1960]; Annus and Lenzi 2010; Oshima 2014.
[172] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96-97; 139-141.
[173] Oshima 2014: *Ludlul*: (comm.) 3-77; (text) 78-114; (notes) 169-342; (partiture) 376-438; *Theodicy*: (comm.) 115-149; (text) 150-167; (notes) 343-375; (partiture) 439-464.

4.1. *Babylonian Theodicy*

The *Babylonian Theodicy* is a reflexive text on social injustice presented as a dialogue between two characters commonly known as "sufferer" and "friend". The central problem is the incoherence of divine retribution in relation to social conduct.

4.1.1. Manuscripts and early publications

The production of the composition may be credited to the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E.,[174] but the text is attested by nine witnesses from the Neo-Assyrian to the Late-Babylonian period, four of which from Babylon, two from Nineveh, one from Assur and the origin of two other fragments is unknown.

From the late 19th century until 1960, seven primary witnesses and one commentary were published and used by Lambert in his critical edition, while the two remaining witnesses were published more recently by Takayoshi Oshima, who is responsible for the latest critical edition of the *Babylonian Theodicy*.

The first manuscripts of the *Babylonian Theodicy* where published in 1895 by James A. Craig.[175] The author was hesitant on whether these manuscripts represented one or several hymns.[176] A drawing of a new manuscript, KAR 160,[177] was published in 1919 by E. Ebeling, who classified it as an "ethical fragment" under the heading "Chokmatext" (*sic.*). Ebeling was already considering the text to be a wisdom composition in the style of the Hebrew '*hokma*. Only in 1952, further fragments were published as part of an article by Ronald Williams which included hand-copies of three new manuscripts by F. W. Geers.[178]

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[174] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 63. The author suggests the date of composition around 1000 B.C.E.

[175] BM 34773, K 8463, K 9290+9297, BM 40124, BM 40098 (partial), K3452, and K8491. Craig also published a small fragment K 14022 as being potentially part of the same composition. See Craig 1895: vii; pl.53). A photograph of the fragment is published in CDLI and bears five ll. with the same initial sign: RI with syllabic readings ri/re. However, Lambert identifies the fragment as a part of an acrostic prayer. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 67.

[176] See Craig 1895: pl. 44-53. Simultaneous publications of the same were assigned by S. A. Strong and Zimmern as part of studies on alliteration (see Strong 1985: 141-151) and metric structure (see Zimmern 1895: 1-24) respectively.

[177] VAT 10567.

[178] Specifically: K 5932, K 10301 and K 13929. See Williams 1952: 2-3.

Besides establishing new joins and publishing new copies, Lambert did not add any new witness in his 1960 edition.[179] More recently, Oshima used two new manuscripts as part of his 2013 edition, later publishing copies in his 2014 publication.[180]

A commentary possibly from Borsippa was partly published by René Labat in 1933,[181] however, the author did not recognize the *Babylonian Theodicy* as being the commented text, erroneously proposing that it referred to a supposed omen series entitled *mašaialtu* (*sic.*) *(amēl) ummânu*.[182] Differently, Ebeling published the full commentary of what he called the "Babylonian Kohelet".[183]

The commentary, BM 66882+, was later published by Lambert in subscript to the composite transliteration and more recently as part of the partiture by Oshima.[184] Both date and provenance are under debate. Thought it was catalogued as found at Sippar,[185] Frahm argues that the commentary was most probably written in Babylon or Borsippa considering the mention of the gods Marduk and Nabû in its heading. For the same reason, the author suggests a Late-Babylonian date of production.[186] In addition, Lambert associated a fragment from Assur belonging to an earlier composition, dated from the Middle-Assyrian period, with the *Babylonian Theodicy* due to similar thematical content and the existence of textual references suggesting a dialogue. However, the author does not venture to identify it as a forerunner of the later composition, due to its fragmentary state.[187]

Early on it was understood that the composition had a religious character and that it had some sort of ethical or didactic content. However, agreement on other points was yet to be achieved. For instance, in 1903 François Martin, who identified the acrostic, cast doubts on the hymnal nature of the composition. Nevertheless, he recognized that some

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[179] See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 69. Twelve manuscripts are listed by Lambert. Since then several joins (BM 40098+; K1743+) have reduced the number of witnesses to nine. Cf. Oshima 2013: lii.

[180] See Oshima 2013: lii; Oshima 2014: pl. XIV (BM 68589); XV (BM 47745).

[181] BM 66821+. However, Oshima suggests that a second commentary may exist. See his publication of the fragment BM 40987: Oshima 2014: 168. See also Labat 1933: 102-109.

[182] Cf. Labat 1933: 13. Also erroneous was the assertion that such series existed. It is now clear that the expression *maš-a-a-al-tu₂ lu₂ UM.ME.A* found in the subscript of the commentary should be normalized *maš'altu ummânu* meaning "(materials for) the questioning (by) a scholar". See Oshima 2014: 343, note to line 1. For the expression see Frahm 2011: 53-54. See also Gabbay 2016: 22-24.

[183] See Ebeling 1933: 27-34. Only transliteration and German translation of both BM 66882 and BM 76506.

[184] Respectively: Lambert 1996 [1960]: 70-89, pl.26; Oshima 2014: 439-463, pl. xxv-xxx.

[185] See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 63. It might be possible that the fragments were mixed by administrative error during their transport.

[186] Frahm 2011: 120-121. Oelsner 1986: 227 suggested that the commentary could even be Hellenistic, see the reference by Oshima 2014: 117 n. 16.

[187] VAT 9943, see Lambert 1996 [1960]: 90-91; pl.25.

expressions did seem to convey a hymnal style. However, Martin was not yet able to form an idea about the topic of the text.[188] Only by 1936, B. Landsberger could establish several features which are to date commonly accepted, including the full reconstruction of the acrostic, the dialogic form, a correct idea of the total extension of twenty-seven stanzas and the modern title of the composition.[189] This modern title appropriately describes the main theme of the dialogue which deals with the problem of divine retribution at odds with the perceived human injustice.[190]

4.1.2. Structure, Authorship, and date of Production

The *Babylonian Theodicy*, is not in a complete state. However, thanks to the acrostic, we have a fair idea of its extension and structure. The formal structure is divided into twenty-seven strophes of eleven lines. Lambert points out that the number of lines per strophe is peculiar in relation to other Akkadian compositions that usually constructed stanzas in an even number of lines. This peculiarity results from the existence of one odd line which occupies a variable position within the strophe and is used to deliver an emphatic effect[191].

As Oshima explains, the same starting sign is repeated over the eleven lines of each strophe. These twenty-seven different signs form the following acrostic: "I am Saggil-kīnam-ubbib, an incantation priest, the one who worships the gods and the king".[192] This is an eminently graphical device and its effect is only visible in written signs. Since the polyphony of signs was used rendering them with different syllabic values, when the poem is declaimed the acrostic is not perceptible.[193]

The acrostic conveyed important information on the question of authorship and the presumed date of production. Saggil-kīnam-ubbib is hypothesised as being the

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[188] Cf. Martin 1903: 190-194.

[189] See Landsberger 1936: 32-76.

[190] The incipit, used as its ancient designation, reads: *ašīš [...] gana luqbīka* - "Wise one, […] come, let me tell you,". See Oshima 2014: 151, l.1; Denning-Bolle 1992: 136 n.1. On its reconstruction see Oshima 2014: 343, n.1.

[191] Lambert, 1996 [1960], p. 66; see also Denning-Bolle, 1992, p.139. This is not always the case. E.g. line 278 forms a tristich with the two previous lines. Cf. Lasor, 1980, p.105, n.18.

[192] Three stanzas are still missing. The graphic nature of the acrostic is further stressed by the fact that each stanza repeats the same initial sign in every line. The transliteration of the 27 signs is as follows: *a-na-ku sa-ag-gi-il-ki-[i-na-am-u]b-bi-ib ma-áš-ma-šu ka-ri-bu ša i-li ú šar-ri.* see Oshima 2014: 121; Lambert 1996 [1960]: 63.

[193] Note, however, Oshima's remark on the limited used of this polyphony. See Oshima 2014: 117. Of the twenty-four reconstructed stanzas ten use polyphony and, in some cases only in one line.

material author or commissioner of the composition. Oshima argues that the ancient author's name is to be identified with the names of two *ummânus* or, more precisely, personal scholarly advisors to a king, who are mentioned in the Uruk List of Kings and Sages from the Hellenistic period.[194] These scholars, Esagil-kīnī-ubba and Esagil-kīnī-ubbalu, are respectively associated with the kings Adad-apla-iddina and Nebuchadnezzar I of the Second Dynasty of Isin. The identification of at least one of these scholars with the author of the *Babylonian Theodicy* has been consensually accepted and it strengthens the assumption of a Late-Kassite or Second Isin date of production.[195] Alternatively, this may be a case of posthumous attribution to a scholarly authority.[196]

4.1.3. Literary and Social setting

Two characters, the "sufferer" and his "friend", intervene in systematic alternation each one speaking a strophe. Written as a dialogue, the poem has no proper prologue nor any narrative setting. The first seven lines, though already part of the sufferer's speech, serve that introductory purpose. In them, the protagonist calls the attention of his interlocutor and announces the motif of their conversation, namely his "plight", confiding that the first of his grievances was his orphanhood. On the second strophe, acknowledging the grief of the sufferer, the friend makes a compassionate and orthodox response. The first point of it being the inevitability of death and the second argument being the fundamental justice of divine retribution. This second point, meant to be a comforting thought, remains the main argument of the friend during the entire dialogue.

Yet, his conservative response triggered a strong debate between the two characters. By the third strophe the sufferer starts to question his friend's orthodox position. In the following twenty-three stanzas, the protagonist develops his antithesis while the friend rebukes his arguments and criticizes the sufferer's words of doubt.

The dialogue runs very much as a dispute. Disputation poems were a native genre of both Sumerian and Akkadian literature, they had a tripartite structure generally composed by a mythological introduction, the disputations between two objects, animals or human archetypal characters, and a conclusion or adjudication scene, in which a victor is pronounced by a god or a king.[197] In his recent monograph on Babylonian disputation

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[194] See Lenzi 2008: 142-143 for a translation of the text.
[195] For the discussion see Oshima 2014: 123-125; see also Lambert 1996 [1960]: 63.
[196] See Oshima 2014: 124 and n.48.
[197] Jiménez 2017: 69-72. The author remarks that, because of their fragmentary state, it is not certain that Akkadian disputations had the same adjudication scene.

poems, Jiménez established several similarities between the Theodicy and some disputations namely, the dialogical nature with two antagonistic characters defending the merits of their positions, direct quotations and allusions such as the use of the same rebuttal formula to introduce speech – *gana luqbīka* meaning "Come let me talk to you!".[198] However, the *Babylonian Theodicy* diverges from disputation poems on several aspects e.g.: on tone and subject matter;[199] on the absence of a prologue; and on the lack of a solution based on superiority.[200]

In the text, the characters are not named nor their occupation is mentioned. The first one, taken to be the protagonist since he speaks the first and the last strophe and drives the dialogue, is described in modern editions as "sufferer". The second personage is simply addressed as "friend". However, both characters address each other in the respectful tone which befits wise and learned men, as Denning-Bolle points out.[201] Besides this conversational tone, the characterization of the speakers as learned men is reinforced by the mutual compliments which draw on synonymy and in metaphors related to wisdom.[202]

Based on these and on secondary textual references, Oshima identified the characters with scholars. [203] Following his suggestion on the type of ancient "readers" of the *Babylonian Theodicy,* I think that the liminal relation between both characters may identify the friend with a senior scholar or *ummânu* and the sufferer with his apprentice or a junior scholar under his supervision.

The sufferer would have been in his latter stages of training and the friend would have been instructing him on several matters.[204] Oshima attributes the function of the composition to religious indoctrination of scholarly apprentices who are known from colophons as *šamallû* or *ṭupšarru ṣeḫru.* More precisely the *Babylonian Theodicy* would serve to teach the importance of maintaining piety towards the gods.[205]

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[198] Note, despite the popularity of the expression, that its similar position in disputation poems strongly suggest direct borrowing, as explained by Jiménez 2017: 85; 89-91.

[199] see van der Toorn 1991: 63-65. For other perspectives see Jiménez 2017: 69 n. 179.

[200] Vogelzang 1991: 51.

[201] Denning-Bolle 1992: 140.

[202] e.g. ll.54, 78; 200; 254. See also Oshima 2014: 126-127.

[203] Namely, the commentary gloss to ll. 160 and 202 seemingly explaining two occupations ("bird-catcher" and "fowler") with the semantically unrelated "*ṭupšarru*". Oshima assumes that the commentator gives the profession of the sufferer as identification to whom the terms are referring. See Oshima 2014: 126-127. As Oshima notes, van der Toorn 1991: 72 made the same suggestion.

[204] Oshima 2013: xxxvii-xliii.

[205] Oshima 2013: xlvi.

4.1.4 Liminality in the *Babylonian Theodicy*

The characters of *Babylonian Theodicy* seem to share a pedagogical relationship in which the friend has seniority over the sufferer. Their relationship agrees with the frame of a liminal situation between a ritual leader and a liminal subject.

However, their relationship diverges from the ideal liminal experience in two points. First, the authority of the "friend" over the liminal subject is severely questioned by the latter. Secondly, the "friend" only asserts his authority at a very late stage of the discussion when he is forced to do so. As a ritual leader, he failed to correctly administer the rites of separation and to make his apprentice humble and submissive in order to accept his guidance.[206]

At any rate, the sufferer is clearly living through a liminal experience which is made tangible by constant parallel constructions expressing opposition and his overall stance towards societal values. The sufferer's attitude, though not overtly disrespectful, is critical of the norms and values of the social structure.[207] His stance serves two objectives, namely: to accommodate a subversive or critical voice in the composition, that would otherwise be absent; and to represent ambiguity and "inbetweenness", typical of the liminal phase.[208] During his discourse, the sense of inbetweenness is reinforced by opposing imagery, particularly that which entails the sufferer's transition from the acceptable to the unacceptable social norms and values.[209]

4.2. *Counsels of Wisdom*

The second composition, *Counsels of Wisdom,* is fashioned in a strict instructional style in which a figure of authority advises a younger character on several matters. There is no narrative framing of the text, at least it was not preserved, and dialogue is also absent, which, apart from some formulaic expressions introducing speech, reduces the composition to a list of norms. The latest critical edition of the text has been published by Wilfred Lambert in 1960.[210]

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[206] Note, curiously, the friend's compliment to the sufferer on l.166: "the humble and submissive one".
[207] See for example his discourse on ll.133-139.
[208] Perdue 1981: 121.
[209] Cf. Appendix B – Overview of Compositions.
[210] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96-107.

4.2.1. Manuscripts and early publications

The composition is known from seven witnesses.[211] Four manuscripts came from Nineveh and were probably part of Ashurbanipal's Library.[212] One other fragment was found at Assur and a further four-column tablet at Babylon. An extract of four lines was found in a Late-Babylonian tablet of bilingual incantations from Nippur.[213] Lambert mentions another possible quotation in a Neo-Assyrian letter, from the king's exorcist Adad-šumu-uṣur, but it is unclear if it represents a direct textual quote from *Counsels of Wisdom* or if the sender was simply reproducing an oral proverb.[214]

Copies and transliterations of the seven witnesses have been published between 1901 and 1927. A. Sayce had already published an English translation of manuscript K3364 in 1876, suggesting it was part of the supposed "Chaldean account of Genesis" specifically the instructions given to the "to the first woman with her duties toward her partner" on the obverse and the duties of the first man towards deity on the reverse.[215]

A similar opinion, connecting K 3364 to *Enūma Eliš*, was expressed by L. W. King in 1901 when he published hand-copies of the tablet and considered it as part of the creation series for lack of sufficient evidence.[216] In the following year, King dispelled his former attribution due to the identification of a new manuscript, BM 33851, which he assumed to be a duplicate of previous.[217]

Commenting on the composition, King refers to several features which made the text on the fragments incompatible with *Enūma Eliš,* namely: the extension was too long, the layout of the text was divided into columns and there was a reference to the god Šamaš instead of Marduk. [218] King concludes that the text was an independent didactic composition with a "high standard of morality".[219]

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[211] Recently, Henrique Jiménez suggested that the unpublished K 8638, found at Nineveh, may be part of this text. See Jiménez 2017: 91 n. 240.
[212] see: Lambert 1996 [1960]: 98.
[213] CBS 4507. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96, pl. 29. Lambert's copy only reproduces the extract.
[214] See: Lambert 1996 [1960]: 97,315, note on ll. 143-147. For the full letter, K 1152= SAA 10.188, ll. r9-10 see Parpola and Reade 1993: 154-155.
[215] See Smith and Sayce 1876: 78-80. The authors identified the reverse and the obverse of the tablet wrongly. See King 1902a: 202 n.1.
[216] See King 1901: pl. 29-30.
[217] See King 1902b: pl. lxix-lxvi. This was not case, BM 33851 is a Late Neo-Babylonian (458 B.C.E.) manuscript from Babylon, while K3364 was found at Nineveh. See also Lambert 1996 [1960]: 98.
[218] See King 1902a: 201-204. The mention to the god is on l. 60 of Lambert's composite text.
[219] King 1902a: 203.

Accordingly, S. H. Langdon, following Zimmern, included *Counsels of Wisdom* in his volume on *Babylonian Wisdom* assuming it was a parallel to the Hebrew *Proverbs of Salomon* or to the Aramaic *Story of Aḥiqar*.[220] Langdon correctly identified several features of the instructional genre in the composition, e.g. the address "my son", and connected the Babylonian text to the Egyptian *Instructions of Ani* and possibly to the Sumerian *Instructions of Šuruppak.* At any rate, when, in 1943, Thorkild Jacobsen cited a passage of *Counsels of Wisdom,* he classified it as a proverb.[221] Lambert in his critical edition harmonized both views establishing that the text presents an instructional frame, though it reads as a collection of proverbs.[222]

4.2.2. Structure and Setting

Of an estimated total of 166 lines the standard text has reconstructed 94 lines while 29 fragmentary lines can only be partially translated and about 44 lines are completely missing or only exhibit unreadable traces. Because the incipit is not preserved, the work is known by the modern title suggested by Lambert, probably on the grounds of the recurrent exhortation: "in your wisdom study the tablet".[223] It is plausible that information concerning the identification of the characters and of the reason for the instruction could have been stated on its first lines, but a longer narrative prologue in the fashion of Egyptian instructions is less likely.

Seemingly, a filial relationship is at play in the monologue judging by the expression *mārī* "my son".[224] However, the expression's formulaic nature could have been used in other pedagogical relationships. Alan Lenzi emphasises that such a relation could be found in the context of scribal education or scholarship, especially if the fragment K 13770, which mentions an *ummânu,* should ever be confirmed as the beginning of the composition.[225] Denning-Bolle argues that, despite being formally a monologue, *Counsels of wisdom* acquires a dialogical quality since its admonitions are

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[220] See Langdon 1923: 88-99.
[221] Specifically, ll. 31-36 on litigation. See Jacobsen 1943: 163-164.
[222] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96-97.
[223] ll.142, 154, 159. Differently, Lenzi forthcoming and Denning-Bolle 1992: 127 translate the line as "in your learning read the tablet"; "by virtue of your learning/training, read in the tablet", respectively.
[224] l.81. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96; Denning-Bolle 1992: 126.
[225] See Lenzi forthcoming; Lambert 1996 [1960]: 106, pl.27.

not only directed to the dramatic character of the "son", but are addressed to anyone who listens or reads the composition.[226]

Traces of horizontal rulings dividing the text into sections are visible in two fragments and are the only graphical devices marking external structure.[227] At the same time, aspects of internal structure, namely thematical change and metrical variation, divide the text into eleven sections of variable length ranging from a minimum of six up to a maximum of eighteen lines. For instance, in terms of metric sections three and nine have three stresses per line while the rest of the sections exhibit four stresses per line.[228]

Generally, each section concerns a specific topic about which the authoritative figure elaborates his advice. However, as we will see below, on sections six and eight two distinct topics are entangled together.

The first section would probably constitute a brief introduction containing the beginning of the father's speech. The following section is very fragmentary and, for that reason, its subject is unclear. The next section is better preserved and has been labelled by Lambert as "avoidance of bad companions".[229] The fourth section concerns speech. Somewhat related to the previous, the fifth section, with about 17 lines, advises on disputes and litigation.

The sixth section can be divided in two parts. The first one concerns respect in social relations while the second has a more productive sense of charity and generosity. Another double section targets questions of marriage and household establishment. Both halves advise on the dangers of choosing specific partners, namely a slave girl and a prostitute. The eight section concerns public service and the need of a public servant to be reliable. The public servant in question is identified by Lambert to be a vizier.[230] The next seven lines are once again concerned with speech. The tenth section elaborates on the importance of cultic obligations. Finally, the last section is devoted to loyalty towards friends. The last line would probably consist of a brief conclusion whishing prosperity to the "son".[231]

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[226] Denning-Bolle 1992: 128.
[227] BM33851 and K8282, Lambert 1996 [1960]: pl.27.
[228] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 97.
[229] For Lambert's division see: Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96.
[230] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96-97; Lenzi forthcoming.
[231] l.166.

4.2.3. Liminality in *Counsels of Wisdom*

Liminality is present in *Counsels of Wisdom* both as a setting and as a state. Although there is no narrative frame, the content and the internal structure make clear that an elevation of status is eminent. Of the two characters only the father has and active voice, while the son merely listens. This stylistic differentiation represents the ideal pedagogical relationship between a ritual leader and a liminal subject.

The first exerts dominance over the second. The father provides advice judicially by presenting the benefits and dangers of a given action to his son, effectively preparing him for the responsibilities he is about to embrace. Meanwhile, the passivity of the second character, who is made impersonal via the lack of action or description, is associated with a state of submissive acceptance and constitutes the empty vessel ready to be filled or reshaped under the guidance of the ritual leader.

The son's elevation of social status could take place inside the familial household with the son becoming the head of the family, or it can consist of his entrance into royal service as a mid-level official or both.[232] Lenzi suggests a further plausible liminal situation by reading the prayer of Išme-karābu to the god Ea as referring to the conclusion of the son's scribal training.[233] Either way, the pedagogic relation should be understood under the frame of an apprenticeship.

The archetypal character of the "trickster" in *Counsels of Wisdom* takes a collective form, being composed of those individuals who are portrayed by the father as potentially harmful to the liminal subject. These undesirable persons include idle friends, taletellers, litigious people, slave-girls and prostitutes. They have trickster features in their power to subvert the authority of the ritual leader and lead astray the liminal subject. Furthermore, they also epitomise the negative counterparts of the values the father recommends.

Through dichotomic imagery and parallelism between positive and negative actions, the composition depicts the ambivalence of the liminal phase. The condition of "inbetweenness" of the son is augmented by the fact that the subsequent reaction of the

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[232] Lenzi, forthcoming.
[233] See Lenzi, forthcoming. See also ll. 165-166 Lambert 1996 [1960]: 106. Išme-karābu's name means "he heard my prayer". In an inscription of Erišum I it refers to one of the "Seven Judges of the Step Gate" of the temple Aššur at Kaniš, a location possibly connected with swearing of oaths. Cf. Grayson 1987: 19-21 ll.26-29 = A.0.33.1; See also CAD Š/2 *šemû* 3': 285.

son is not recorded. The audience is left wondering if the son heeded the advice of the father or not.[234]

4.3. *Dialogue of Pessimism*

Dialogue of Pessimism, also known as *Dialogue between Master and Servant*, is a satirical composition, on which two archetypal characters sustain a repetitive dialogue that discusses the "vanity" theme, without any narrative interlude.

4.3.1. Manuscripts and interpretations

The composition is attested by five witnesses.[235] Two recensions of the text are known, share the thematic content but have a slightly different sectional order.[236] Older and better preserved, the Assyrian recension is attested by four Neo-Assyrian manuscripts found at Nineveh and Assur.[237] The Babylonian recension is represented by only one witness, namely a single-column tablet from Babylon.[238]

G. Reisner published a hand-copy of the first manuscript, VAT 657, under the classification "ritual regulations". This is not surprising since the tablet includes, among others, section eight on the performance of sacrifice to the personal god.[239] In 1917, Ebeling published a copy of another manuscript VAT 9933 as KAR 96 and classified it under a more correct designation. The author recognized that the text was a dialogue with a philosophical tone.[240]

In 1923, Langdon, already using the modern title *Dialogue of Pessimism*, interpreted the theme of the composition as "one of complete pessimism and despair".[241] Similarly, Thorkild Jacobsen considered the text to be a serious philosophical treatise on scepticism and the "utter negation of all values, denial that a "good life" existed (…)". Moreover, Jacobsen considered the composition to be the product of an "aging

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[234] Cf. Appendix B – Overview of Compositions.
[235] VAT 9933, K 10523, K 13830, VAT 657. The fifth witness joins two unnumbered fragments from Assur (A…1, A…2.) found by Lambert at Istanbul's Museum of the Ancient Orient. Lambert1996 [1960]: 143 and pl.37-38.
[236] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 143.
[237] Respectively: K 10523 and K 13830; VAT 9933 and fragments A…1 and A…2.
[238] VAT 695.
[239] Reisner 1896: 143. The tablet was published under a different museum number VAT367.
[240] See Ebeling 1917: 170-173.
[241] See Langdon 1923: 67-81.

civilization" whose decline was being signalled by the disenchantment of individuals with its core values.[242]

A contrasting view was formulated by E. A. Speiser who classified the text as a full-blown satire, which was conceived to be dramatized, lacking any serious philosophical content.[243] Speiser defends his perspective with the mechanical responses of the servant based on popular proverbs and literary quotations.[244]

Although Speiser's arguments were accepted by later scholarship, his position was not fully followed. Bottéro and Lambert agreed that the composition was humorous and even satirical, but they understood that the existence of a serious purpose was not incompatible with parody.[245] Lambert insists that the text conveyed a serious philosophical message, specifically "the futility of all human endeavour".[246] Bottéro agrees with this balanced perspective but ventures a different explanation for the satirical nature of the dialogue.

Bottéro notices the allusions to various proverbs and suggests that the social satire was criticizing the acritical use of proverbial wisdom as ready-made life philosophy.[247] In addition, the section about sacrifice and religious duties was probably intended as a critique of a religious outlook which understood divine retribution under a logic of profit alone.[248]

4.3.2. Structure and sectional themes

The text is divided in ten, possibly eleven, thematic sections structured around the actions that the master wants, and immediately does not want, to perform.[249] Though sectional divisions are clearly marked by ruling lines, the identification of the topic of each section have generated nuanced perspectives.

Lambert describes each section based on the activity proposed by the master: visiting the palace, dining, hunting, having a family/litigation, insurrection, love,

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[242] Jacobsen 1946: 216-218.
[243] Speiser mentions that Liagre Böhl had suggested a similar interpretation before him, viewing the composition as a caricature. See Speiser 1954: 104 n.13.
[244] See Speiser 1954: 104-105.
[245] See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 139-141; Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 260-261.
[246] What is commonly called the 'vanity' theme. See Lambert 1995: 36.
[247] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 258.
[248] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 266.
[249] The third section on house establishment and litigation (ll.29-38) apparently results from two separate sections which may have been mixed due to an error of transmission. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 147, 325 n. to ll. 29-39.

sacrifice, big business, charity, and finally the conclusion.[250] Bottéro remarks that these topics alternate in opposition to each other regarding the type of venue (e.g. indoors vs. outdoors) or the nature of the action (e.g. profitable vs. charitable).[251]

Claudio Saporetti argues that the sections demonstrate the indecision of the master. Consequently, the author suggests that the modern titles should emphasise the two opposing activities which are implied in each section: private life or politic activity; hedonism or not; isolation or socialisation; to resist or to desist; to defend oneself in litigation or to remain silent; to live against or with society; cohabitation or not; to preform religious cult or not; to conduct business or not; to fund or not the state; charity or egotism the difficulty of choosing.[252]

I fail to see the advantage of Saporetti's proposal, since in some cases his labels introduce activities which are never considered by the master. Furthermore, Saporetti's titles convey the erroneous idea that the problem of the master is simply indecision between engaging in different activities. In other words, Saporetti argues that the master is in a constant dilemma between two choices of life and suggests this is the central topic of the composition.[253] However, I do not think this is the case, the master is not alternatively active and passive, rather he is incapable of engaging in anything at all. Instead of indecision the problem of the master is better described as irresolution since the master has a passive stance throughout the dialogue.

The master only proposes eleven activities, not twenty-two. For each strophe, the master changes his intention of doing a certain activity. Rather than shifting from one activity to another, he expresses the intention to do or not do the same activity never in truth doing any of them. In that sense, the internal conflict of the master is between his positive intentions and the inactive reality. As I will expand below, this internal conflict which is expressed in opposing parallelisms, constitutes the liminal aspect of "inbetweenness" in which the master as liminal subject is immersed.

4.3.3. Literary and social setting

The composition is a satirical dialogue and it uses humour to express social critique with a serious purpose. Accordingly, I believe that the two characters are in fact

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[250] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 143.
[251] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 252.
[252] Saporetti 2012: 114.
[253] See Saporetti 2012: 111.

caricatures. The master, given his wishes such as hunting or riding a chariot, is possibly modelled on the military and political elite. On the other hand, the servant, while no doubt in an inferior position, can be placed in several social levels from a slave, to a servant, to a scholarly advisor.

The question emerges out of the duality of the word used to identify the second character: *arad*. The term has two connotations that, although similar in expressing subordination, differ in the social status they are applied to. The term *arad* is a *status constructus* in the vocative case of the noun *(w)ardum* which derives from the verb *arādum* meaning "to serve".[254] Hence, the term does not express a specific social status. However, the double standard is seen in modern translations. For instance, Lambert translates it as "slave" while Bottéro prefers "servant".[255] At any rate, both authors, to stress the satirical nature of the dialogue, assume the second character to be a menial servant who answers his master with a set of witty remarks based not on erudite knowledge but rather on traditional popular sayings.[256]

However, satire is not dependent on the menial nature of characters. The subversion of social conventions and of common ideology, or better, the exposure of social practices to ridicule also constitute satire. Therefore, though a wider social gap between characters does magnify the satirical effect, such distance is not necessary for satire to exist. In *Dialogue of Pessimism* humour and social critique are not only on the mechanical responses of an unusually well-versed slave but rather when this pattern is unexpectedly broken with his rebellion against the master. [257]

Knowing if *Dialogue of Pessimism* qualifies as a textual parody (i.e. a text which clearly quotes another base text and transforms its content with comic intent),[258] would clarify its social setting. For that it would be crucial to decide if the servant's quotations are from oral popular tradition, as Bottéro claims, or from scholarly tradition. The question is difficult, given that oral lore was also an important component of Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship.[259] However, since the manuscripts were found within institutional context and the quotations reveal a considerably high level of erudition, I

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[254] See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 323 n.1; CAD A/2: 243-247.
[255] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 251-257.
[256] See Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 258-259.
[257] On the elements of satirical discourse see Simpson 2003: 69-72.
[258] For the definition of parody see Jiménez 2017: 97 (citing Glei 2000: 346). Note also his overview of parodies in Ancient Mesopotamia, which makes no mention of the *Dialogue of Pessimism*, in Jiménez 2017: 100-103.
[259] Therefore, scholarly origin would not require a direct textual quotation. See Gabbay 2016: 20-21.

suggest that the text was a satire which was internally targeting the scholarly class. The servant was the caricature of the subservient advisor.

4.3.4. Liminality in the *Dialogue of Pessimism*

The sense of ambivalence and "inbetweenness" is self-evident in *Dialogue of Pessimism*. The dysfunctional relationship between master and servant is a resource for social critique in that it subverts social norms. In their sarcastic aspect, both characters are to be understood as mockeries of the roles of the liminal subject and of the ritual guide. If the liminal subject should present himself as a humble receiver of knowledge and moral instruction, the master is neither submissive nor accepting of the servant's counsel or guidance.[260] Similarly, the servant falls short of being a proper ritual leader because he lacks material authority over the subject and his moral superiority is non-existent.[261]

Though the servant is equipped with erudite or popular wisdom and quotes literary texts and proverbs, his advice is simply a reflection of the master's instable requests. He does not make an independent assessment of the activities. Instead the servant supplies void arguments and twists them in accordance with the master's position. This is made clear using parallelism, which presents the same arguments first on a positive (i.e. indicative) and then on a negative construction (i.e. vetitive).[262]

Therefore, the servant's advice offers no guidance and, for that reason, he is a failed ritual leader. Unable to maintain an authoritative discourse and instill the desirable social norms upon the master, the servant fulfils better the subversive role of trickster. Consequently, master and servant are locked in a liminal stage without purpose or solution.

To the lack of a threshold to cross or any change of status to be achieved, the master proposes a radical solution: death.[263] Death is frequently portrayed as a limit which requires an inevitable change of status. Here the same imagery is present, but with a twist: the master is not proposing to perform suicide, instead he proposes to kill the servant. Similarly, the solution of *Dialogue of Pessimism* is the critical part of the composition.

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[260] Szakolczai 2015: 18.
[261] Perdue 1981: 118.
[262] e.g. *epuš* (l.71) vs. *lā tepuš* (l.75).
[263] Dietrich 2016: 178-181.

However, the tone and context of the solution is debatable. It can either be seen as a cynical existential outcry, a textual parody of the "vanity" theme.

Following Bottéro, I offer a third interpretation based on liminality. The master's intention to kill the servant aimed to resolve the impasse between the two characters and end the period of "inbetweenness". Forcing the failed ritual leader to transpose the limit of death first would make the servant skilled to lead his master out of the liminal state afterwards.

The idea is strongly suggested by a literary parallel. Bottéro remarked that the last section of *Dialogue of Pessimism* might contain a reference to the eschatological Tablet XII of the *Epic of Gilgameš* or its Sumerian forerunner *Bilgameš and the Netherworld.*[264] Enkidu, here a servant, is sent to the underworld to recover a ball and mallet. He dies in the journey, but his spirit is allowed to return for a brief period. Against this background, Enkidu instructs his master on the Netherworld.

Under the perspective of liminality, this would be the only possible solution. If the master simply killed the servant without any hope of later receiving proper guidance from him, though he might become free from his subversive influence, he would continue to live in "inbetweenness" disconnected from society and with his inner dilemma unresolved.

Perhaps the final uttering of the servant reverberates the notion that continuing in such a liminal state the master would remain a danger for society and for himself: "And my master would certainly not outlive me by even three days."[265]

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[264] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 266. For both texts see George 2000: 175-195.
[265] l. 86. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 149. See also Appendix B – Overview of Compositions.

4.4.*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi resembles a hymnal composition in that it is dedicated to the god Marduk and has a strong first-person voice.[266] The protagonist, Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan, was identified by Oshima as a historical governor of Nippur during the reign of the Kassite king Nazimaruttaš (ca.1307-1282 B.C.E.).[267]

4.4.1. Manuscripts

The composition received considerable ancient attention and as a result several witnesses were found.[268] Tablet I is attested by twenty-seven witnesses found at Nineveh (7), Sippar (7), Assur (5), Babylon (4), Kalḫu (1), Ḫuzirina (1) and two tablets from uncertain provenance. Fifteen manuscripts attest Tablet II. Six were excavated at Nineveh, three at Sippar, three at Babylon and one at Ḫuzirina. The provenance of two further witnesses is unknown. Tablet III is represented by seven manuscripts: four from uncertain provenance, two from Sippar and one from Nineveh.

The new Tablet IV proposed by Oshima was mainly based on seventeen unattributed lines of commentary BM 123392 and three other fragments,[269] while the now renumbered Tablet V is attested by thirteen manuscripts. The origin of five witnesses is uncertain.[270] The remaining witnesses were found at Assur (4), Babylon (2), Ḫuzirina (1) and Nineveh (1). Some of these are secondary witnesses, namely ten school tablets, two extracts and two commentaries.[271]

4.4.2. Early interpretations

In 1882, J. Halévy published a Hebrew translation of K 3972 and classified the text as a "magical incantation".[272] By 1912, R. W. Rogers describe the composition as a

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[266] see Foster 1983: 123-124.

[267] The name is extant in Tablet V, l. 110. On the identification see Oshima 2014: 15-17. The historical Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan is also attested by a petition concerning a legal dispute: BM38611. See Oshima 2014:465-469, pl.21.

[268] See below Appendix A – Manuscripts by Provenance

[269] Annus and Lenzi 2010: xli-xlvi do not refer to this hypothetical tablet. They don't use fragments BM 123392 and Si 728. From fragment K9724 the authors only accept that one line is related to the composition. See Oshima 2014: 423-424; pl. 46, 48.

[270] However, tablet Ashm 1924-1795 is probably from Kiš.

[271] Cf. Appendix A – Manuscripts by Provenance.

[272] See Halévy 1882: 195-198. This was the first manuscript to be published by Henry Rawlinson under the designation of "Assyrian prayers". See Rawlinson 1875: pl.67, no.2.

"(…) fragment of wisdom literature, the so-called Babylonian Job, (…)".[273] Furthermore, he thought to have identified the protagonist with an "ancient king" named "Ṭâbi-Utul-ellil" base on a commentary to the composition.[274]

Langdon presented a more comprehensive edition of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* in 1923, which included transliteration, translation and copies of four manuscripts and one commentary.[275] In addition, Langdon wrote an interpretative a summary of the composition and an extensive commentary on the "righteous sufferer" theme establishing comparisons with various parallels including the Biblical Job.[276]

Thorkild Jacobsen forwarded a historical explanation for the composition's theme. For Jacobsen this was the first case of moral questioning against divine justice and against obedience, which he considered to be the central moral value of Ancient Mesopotamia.[277] In his view, the religious problematic relates to a shift on Mesopotamian world-view as a result of the presumed increase in political centralization and social stability at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E.. As Jacobsen argues, the Mesopotamian man, who had become accustomed to order in his society, entered in conflict with the randomness and the injustice of divine retribution.[278]

In 1956, Leo Oppenheim called upon Tablet III of the composition as one of the materials for his monography on oneiromancy in the Ancient Near East. Specifically, the author offered a partial English translation of one manuscript and several comments on the interpretation of the dreams received by the protagonist.[279] Oppenheim described the text as "an original creation of Mesopotamian religious lyrical poetry". Furthermore, he argues that the three dreams classify as message dreams, however, their function is only stylistic since their revelation is unconnected to the development of the plot.[280]

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[273] Rogers 1912:164-169.

[274] See Rogers 1912:164, n. 1. The identification was incorrect. In the commentary, K3291, Ṭabi-utul-Enlil glosses the name of the second dream character Larulalima (tb. III, l. 25). See also the online publication of the commentary at Yale University's *Cuneiform Commentaries Project* (CCP1.3 rev. l.5). See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 296 n. l. 25.

[275] Namely: DT 358, K 3323, K 8386, Sm 1745, and the commentary K3281. The commentary was first published by Rawlinson and Pinches 1884: pl.47.

[276] See Langdon 1923: 3-66. Copies of the manuscripts: pl. iii-v; for the ancient commentary: pl. i-iii; transliteration and translation: 35-66; commentary and parallels: 3-32; summary: 33-35.

[277] See Jacobsen 1946: 202-207.

[278] See Jacobsen 1946: 212-215.

[279] KAR 175, ll. 8-44. See Oppenheim 1956: 250.

[280] See Oppenheim 1956: 217. Seemingly, the putative Tablet IV would serve to better integrate the dreams with the plot. The prophesised rehabilitation of the protagonist is likely to occur in that tablet.

4.4.3. State of reconstruction and recent interpretations

Modern academic consensus accepts that *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* had an extent of 4 tablets or 480 lines. However, Takayoshi Oshima recently suggested that a further table existed. The idea of a five-tablet composition is not new. Lambert expressed that possibility when he was not able to harmonise a fragment with the reconstruction of the old fourth tablet. Lambert's problem was that the number of lines per tablet was intentionally limited to 120. Therefore, the lines of the fragment belonged to a different composition or they were part of a hypothetical fifth tablet.[281] Based on the same argument, Oshima observes that the seventeen unidentified lines on the commentary cannot be placed within the ten missing lines of the third tablet. Hence, he suggests that the solution is the existence of a new tablet between the third and the fourth tablet.[282]

Accordingly, the present state of reconstruction of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* is as follows: the first two tablets are complete; from Tablet III sixteen lines are missing or in a very fragmentary state; Tablet IV remains lost, the only evidence for it are the seventeen unidentified lines of the commentary and three fragments;[283] from Tablet V only two fragmentary lines remain untranslated by Oshima.[284] The introduction of a new tablet is a not radical change to the structure of the composition.

Moreover, Oshima's hypothesis strengthens recent interpretations of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*. For example, Benjamin Foster proposed that the internal structure was closely connected with the style and the message of the composition. Foster argued that the structure of some sections was symmetrically constructed. These "poems within the poem" were marked by semantic actions and parallel verbal patterns. Foster argues that the objective was to create dramatic emphasis and to stress the first-person voice of the text.[285]

A similar poetic circularity and symmetric structure exists on the overall composition. First, the beginning and end of the text use their similar content and style to enclose the entire composition. Both sections directly praise Marduk in a strict laudatory style. Secondly, circularity exists in the use of the verb *dalālu* in the first and in the last sentence.[286] In first line of Tablet I the verb is employed in the precative *ludlul* expressing

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[281] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 30.
[282] Oshima NABU 2012/2, no. 22: 28-30.
[283] About 43ll. are attested in this manner. See Oshima 2014: 6-7.
[284] ll. 24-25. This was the old Tablet IV in Lambert's and Annus and Lenzi's editions.
[285] Foster 1983: 127-129.
[286] CAD D:46-47.

a future wish. Conversely, in Tablet V line 120, the same verb is inflected in the preterite, hence defining a concluded action.[287] Thirdly, circularity is stressed by the plot with Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan's journey from and his return into Marduk's grace.

On the one hand, the protagonist lost his wealth, social standing and health, as he recounts in tablets I and II. On the other hand, in tablets IV and V he narrates how he regained his health, wealth and social standing. At the end of the composition Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan is once again where he had stood in the beginning. A five-tablet structure singles out Tablet III as the central point of the composition and strengthens the circularity of the plot and the symmetry of the structure.

The hypothesis also reinforces Annus and Lenzi interpretation. The authors suggested that the internal structure of the composition was related to the double epithet of the god Marduk. Accordingly, they have divided the internal structure into two equal parts. Tablets I and II, portraying the descent of the protagonist into isolation and sickness, represent the first half of the epithet: "angry". Tablets III and IV, which describe Marduk's intervention and Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan's social rehabilitation, would stand for the second half of the god's epithet "then relenting".[288] Once more, the addition of a new tablet is not prejudicial for this interpretation. Tablet III becomes the core of the text and the turning point of the plot. Consequently, Marduk's change of attitude towards the sufferer is better emphasised and becomes more relevant to the plot.

The new structure can be resumed in the following way. In Tablets I and II the protagonist is abandoned by Marduk and endures sufferings; in Tablet III he dreams three prophetic dreams announcing he will be redeemed by Marduk; in Oshima's tablets IV and V his physical and social rehabilitation is completed and Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan preforms cultic obligations at Babylon to show his gratitude towards Marduk.

Finally, I accept this five-tablet hypothesis because the resulting external structure directly corresponds to a tripartite structure of a ritual of passage, as I will explain below. Yet, as Lenzi pertinently remarked, the evidence for this extra tablet is circumstantial and we still require manuscript evidence to confirm it and prove Oshima's hypothesis.[289]

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[287] *idlula dalī[līka…t]anittaka ṭābat* "(has) extolled [your (Marduk's)] glo[ry …] your praise is gratifying" See Oshima 2014: 112-113, l. 120 of Tablet V. Oshima's reconstruction of this line is based on VAT 10538 and the unpublished VAT 10650. Note also that Oshima identifies ll.119 - 120 with formulaic expressions used in the conclusion of other Akkadian prayers. See Oshima 2014: 13; 341-342 n. 119, 120.
[288] Annus and Lenzi 2010: xix-xxxiv.
[289] See Lenzi 2017: 184.

4.4.4. Liminality in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*

Since *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* was written in a hymnal style and structured as a monologue, Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan is the only character with an active voice and only through his account we are informed of other minor characters. Although Marduk is omnipresent in the composition, he is passive and voiceless. Therefore, it is not the god who fulfils the role of ritual leader, but the *āšipus* acting on his behalf.[290] The role of liminal subject is to be identified with Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan given his itinerary across the plot, his loss and recuperation of status, and his growing humility and piety.

Moreover, the structure of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* can be correlated with the three phases of a ritual of passage. This is not surprising, considering the connection of the text with Assyrian and Babylonian ritual practitioners.[291]

Rituals of separation are described in the first and second tablets. Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan is gradually isolated from society and deprived of his possessions, dignity and health. The liminal phase is to be identified with Tablet III. Faced with death as a material boundary, the protagonist lives through an experience of "inbetweenness" and ambivalence which distorts his perception of reality.[292] Finally, an oneiric sequence introduces the characters who on behalf of Marduk will instruct him and operate his return to society. These reaggregation rituals take place on tablets IV and V.

Effectively, Šubši-mešrâ-Šakkan is rehabilitated and re-joins society with the same status he enjoyed before. In that sense, his liminal experience is better understood as a ritual of status reversal than a ritual of status elevation.[293] Nevertheless, a transition of social status occurs. This is similar to the king's temporary loss of royal status in the context of the *šar pūḫi* and the Babylonian *akītu* rituals.[294]

4.5. Liminality and interpretation

Liminality can be used to explore the social contexts of production and usage of these compositions. Conversely, it is possible to identify liminal aspects on modern

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[290] i.e. the envoy of Laluralimma of Nippur (l. 23) and Urnintinugga of Babylon (l.40).
[291] See Beaulieu 2007: 9. See also section 1.5 above.
[292] e.g. l. 8: "dreams and waking dreams were equally difficult [for me]". Cf. Appendix B – Overview of compositions.
[293] See above p.29.
[294] See Ambos 2013: 39-54; Bidmead 2014: 147-158.

interpretations of those settings. If these historical explanations have been diverse in their perspective, their arguments have been based on exceptional conditions.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, Dialogue of Pessimism and *Babylonian Theodicy,* have been explained as manifestations of a society in decline after the Kassite fallout when societal values were presumably threatened.[295] In other words, a period of schismogenesis.[296]

Lambert's suggestion that a psychological explanation for *Dialogue of Pessimism* should be found on the pathology of the author also presupposes liminality on account of the author's "abnormal personality".[297] Bottéro´s approach to the same composition is more structural in nature. He proposes that the ancient author uses of humour as a tool to criticise the observance or non-observance of social rites and the subversion of norms, but he does not anchor this interpretation on a period of schismogenesis.[298] Differently, exceptional arguments have not come forward in the interpretation of *Counsels of Wisdom,* a traditional wisdom text. In that regard, the use of exceptional or liminal arguments seems to relate to compositions which are seen as extraordinary themselves. In other words, liminal arguments are only connected with texts of critical wisdom.

These identifications, though plausible and supported by the topics of the compositions, call for caution since the date of production of the sources to the Late-Kassite period has only been deduced by indirect textual references. For that reason, it cannot be affirmed that the texts were produced by a society in crisis, nor is it possible to connect our texts to specific political events. These are literary sources and do not require the stimulus of contemporary events to be produced. I am rather inclined to accept van der Toorn's assertion of the "time of unrest" as a literary motif.[299] The idea of inversion of moral standards and of the decline of political order is a useful literary background for staging a debate on social values.

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[295] E.g. van der Toorn 1991: 68; Jacobsen 1946: 212-215.
[296] Thomassen 2015: 51-53.
[297] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 141. Cf. the criticism by Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 260.
[298] Bottéro 1992 [1966]: 266.
[299] van der Toorn 1991: 68.

5. Liminality and the social functions of scholarly wisdom

The four compositions circulated within an institutional context, more precisely Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship. Therefore, in their written form the texts represented scholarly wisdom and served the purposes of cuneiform scholarship.

These texts of scholarly wisdom fulfilled to main functions. An educational function, in the sense that they were used in scribal and scholarly education; and an institutional function, in the sense that they served to foment a relationship with institutional patrons by maintaining the cultural prestige of the scholarly elite.

Both functions can be assumed with a degree of certainty in view of the types of manuscripts and their provenance. Firstly, the educational function is attested by the presence of copies and extracts of the compositions in exercise tablets, the existence of commentaries and the transcription of an extract in the professional context.[300] Consequently, we may conclude that our texts were used to teach basic scribal skills and to transmit professional skills and scholarly knowledge on the highest levels of education. Secondly, the fact that scholarly wisdom had an institutional function becomes evident by the cities in which most of the manuscripts were found, namely: royal capital cities, prestigious temples and private schools with institutional connections.

This data places into perspective the themes and arguments of the compositions and reveals their institutional alignment with temple communities and royal courts. This explains the conservative stance of the texts. The compositions aimed to support the traditions and the social values that both institutions represented. If criticism of them is present in some texts it is only uttered by characters undergoing dramatical liminal experiences. Ultimately, the intention of critical wisdom texts was to refute such arguments and promote the accepted social values.[301]

A subsidiary institutional function can also be hypothesised, this time on an individual level specifically, regarding self-promotion within the scholarly elite in the eyes of the patrons. The paraphrase or quotation of texts from the scholarly corpus in letters directed to Assyrian kings to display knowledge and erudition was no doubt a tool of self-promotion and a way for a given scholar to distinguish himself before the monarch in hope of receiving royal favour. An example of the use of our texts to display erudition

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[300] A tablet of bilingual incantations, CBS 4507. See Lambert 1996 [1960]: 96, pl. 29.
[301] Beaulieu 2007: 3.

before the king was identified Lambert, namely an instance of a scholar paraphrasing the *Counsels of Wisdom* in a letter to a king.[302]

The possibility of oral performance of at least three of these texts has been suggested by Lambert and Oshima. Lambert remarks that the division of *Counsels of Wisdom* and *Dialogue of Pessimism* into sections, by horizontal ruling lines and thematical change may be regarded as an indication for their use in the public or courtly performance. In his commentary to *Ludlul Bēl Nemeqi*, Oshima explores the possibility that the original function of the text was very specific, having been commissioned to be uttered as part of a personal ritual and pilgrimage to Babylon, as the composition itself narrates.[303]

Liminality is to be recognized on the two main functions of scholarly wisdom. It may be described as two pedagogical relationships: the first connecting student and teacher and the second connecting scholarly elite and the king.[304]

On the one hand, elements of liminality are easier to identify on the first relationship since the relationship is unidirectional and the liminal roles of subject and ritual leader are constant. On the other hand, the second relationship is more complex because those liminal roles are shifting between the person of the king and his advisors making the relation multidirectional. The problem is entangled with the definition of wisdom itself and its origins. Thus, the question would be more visible in theory than in political practice. Both king and scholars are described as possessing wisdom,[305] but each claimed a different origin for their wisdom and consequently, each would manifest wisdom in different ways.[306]

The king's wisdom was understood as being of divine origin both by birth and by coronation. In royal inscriptions and oracular reports, this divine origin of the king´s wisdom and power is emphasised as direct and unique. Ideologically, the monarch's wisdom develops in a two-fold relationship which exhibits liminal aspects. On the one

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[302] Lambert 1996 [1960]: 97; Lenzi, forthcoming.

[303] Oshima 2014: 31.

[304] This second pedagogical relationship is mostly visible in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods (ca. 911-539) when cuneiform scholarship was directly sponsored by the monarchs and scholars held advisory positions to those kings. In any case, in later periods the interaction of cuneiform scholarship with foreign rule still proportioned some cases of pedagogical relationships even if only as one-sided historiographic interest as was eventually the case of Berossus *Babyloniaca* and of the *Nabonidus Chronicle*. On historiographic interest of these two texts in Hellenistic Babylonia see Waerzeggers 2015: 110-117.

[305] Sweet 1990a: 45-65.

[306] Beaulieu 2007: 16.

hand, the king is a liminal subject and looks to the gods for guidance. Especially in prophesy, the king is portrayed in situations of peril, being beyond hope and often being or feeling totally isolated or abandoned, the god or goddess then enters the action, affirms authority over him and shows him the way to proceed.[307]

This type of liminal relation is not visible in our sources, and its incidence is more evident during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal who have used it conspicuously in their royal inscriptions and oracular reports as a rhetoric of legitimation stressing their divine election by the goddess Ištar.[308] On the other hand, the king, being endowed with wisdom by virtue of his divine election, becomes the ritual leader who is expected to guide the people entrusted to him by the gods.[309] Therefore, we have a ritual leader and a collective liminal subject, but we apparently lack a liminal situation.

However, royal ideology furnishes a constant liminal situation, a fact very clear in the Neo-Assyrian case according to which the land of Assur is constantly threatened by chaos hence the king, by his military and apotropaic functions, delivers the land of Aššur from it.[310] Again, our four compositions do not deal with this liminal relationship overtly.

In practice, a different situation existed, royal wisdom was in fact mediated. The monarch needed the help of scholarly experts and advisors, administrative officials and craftsmen to communicate with the gods and to govern in accordance with their ordinances.[311] Both to receive divine instruction and to apply his wisdom to government, the king relied on scholars and priesthood. His contact with the gods was reported to him either directly by agency of ecstatics (*maḫḫû*), prophetesses (*raggimtu*) or deduced divination based the report and interpretation of omens done by the omen-experts (*ṭupšarru*) or indirectly by induced divination performed by the diviners (*bārû*). Likewise, his action would require the mediation of other scholars (such as the *kalû* or the *āšipu*) and high officials.

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[307] For a full discussion of the relation between prophecy and the imagery of divine election see Parpola 1997: XXXVI-XLIV.

[308] See, for instance, the role of Ištar in Esarhaddon's apologetic inscription (Leichty 2011:6-26 = RINAP 4.001) and on the collections of prophetic reports directed to both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (Parpola 1997: 4-11; 14-19 = SAA 09.001; SAA 09.002).

[309] Sweet 1990b: 100-101.

[310] See *Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn* (Livingstone and Reade 1989: 26-27 = SAA 03.011). See also Bedford 2009: 48; Liverani 1979: 299.

[311] See Sweet 1990b: 100-101.

Importantly, the mediation of scholars developed in the execution of their expertise and in the offering of advice.[312] Regarding this advice, the liminal relationship between king and scholars, changes and a reversal of roles takes place.

In practice, the king was expected to hear the advice of his scholars and officials, whose role was one of authority over the king while the king himself was momentarily placed in the role of liminal subject being instructed on a given matter. Such authority of the scholarly elite also rested on the notion that they were endowed with divine wisdom but in their case, its acquisition took a different path and the legitimation of their socio-political relevance was also based upon different arguments.

Instead of divine sanction, the wisdom of the scholars clearly focused on knowledge, its practice, the acquaintance with its corpus, and the acquired domain of the technical skills related to their expertise. These technical arguments were seconded by the *apkallu* tradition and the genealogy of human sages who were referred as having moral authorship of the texts. [313] Bringing together both sets of arguments, the scholarly elite kept a power of prestige which grants them proximity to the monarch and even a certain degree of authority over him.

The four compositions, comprising elements of positive/traditional and negative/critical wisdom, took part in this logic of power. They were used in education, as part of the ostentation of scholars' knowledge to the king,[314] as part of the ostentation of their skill in composing these and similar texts, and they were connected with the role of scholars as royal advisors or ritual practitioners.

In short, their strategy of prestige was based on the premise that they held privileged knowledge, represented the voice of tradition and were custodians of moral and social values. For such a premise to be translated unto royal patronage and effective power, scholars must keep a position of ritual leaders in their relations towards the king and society in general.

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[312] For a brief introduction on the activities of these scholars see above section 1.3. For further information on their influence in the Neo-Assyrian royal court see Parpola 1970: 16-24.
[313] See Denning-Bolle 1992: 48-56.
[314] For the importance of letters in keeping royal patronage see Radner 2015: 66-67; 70.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, aspects of liminality are present in the social settings, plots and literary motifs of the four compositions, in the functions of scholarly wisdom and in other manifestations of the sapiential phenomenon as well. Liminality can contribute towards a better understanding of wisdom as a diverse phenomenon in its forms but coherent in its subject matter and attitude from a socio-anthropologic perspective.

On the one hand, liminality takes the same subject matter as wisdom, that is human experience, and, in so doing, explains one of the characteristics of the sapiential phenomenon, namely its universality. On the other hand, since it describes the process of growth and learning by living experience and knowledge reception, liminality explains both the two-fold structure of the learning process of wisdom and the multiplicity of manifestations of the phenomenon. Because wisdom entails both technical knowledge and ethical or behavioural qualities, liminality describes how scholarly wisdom was acquired by way of a two-folded process: passive reception of know-how and by active living experience under apprenticeship.

Accordingly, the diverse forms of wisdom portray different aspects of liminality as formative or learning process, such as the importance of the guidance of a ritual leader or elder; the dangers and necessity of living experience; the required disconnection and outreach for the formation or growth of an individual. [315]

These compositions were connected to cultural hubs of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires. Manuscript evidence, spanning more than four centuries, was probably produced and used in an institutional context, either religious or royal. Consequently, we may assume that the responsible scribes were under institutional employment.[316]

Moreover, it is commonly accepted that the four wisdom compositions had a similar transmission: their literary motifs were explored by Sumerian forerunners, they were presumably fixated around the end of the second millennium B.C.E., and they are attested by manuscripts from eight to the fifth century B.C.E..

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[315] I am simply referring to the individual formative aspect. Though, a normative and formative dimension, in the sense of shaping cultural identity, has been attributed by Eckart Frahm to a restricted number of Mesopotamian, such as *Enūma Eliš*, the *Epic of Gilgameš* and "certain wisdom compositions", which may be relevant to a fuller appreciation of liminality in the historical context, the present research did not pursue that notion. See Frahm 2011:320. For normative and formative dimension of commentary traditions see Assmann 1995: 21-22.

[316] Robson 2013: 40.

After the end of the "native" states and their cultural sponsorship, these compositions were presumably preserved by cuneiform scholarship which persisted for at least four centuries into the Achaemenid, Hellenistic and Parthian periods.

The four compositions share stylistic and thematical features. The homogeneity originates from a common social setting of production, presumably Kassite scholarship, and of utilisation, i.e. Assyrian and Babylonian scholarship, which resulted in the treatment of similar issues by using a similar literary style.

Despite their different morphological genres (two dialogues, and two monologues), the four texts are alike both in the fact that they are structured and represented as direct oral communication and in their aim of teaching social values. Finally, as we have seen, the four compositions also exhibit elements of liminality by presenting characters in transitory moments of life or experiencing moments of doubt and disbelief towards the accepted system of values.

Liminality has evolved from van Gennep and Turner's models to become a useful instrument in analysing the process of empirical learning and of learning by instruction. The storyline of the compositions is highly dependent on the depiction of human experience, not just as a mere stylistic effect or frame used to relate to the audiences, but as a recreation of the process of learning which is indissociable from the content itself, namely moral values and social norms and their subversive counterparts.

I understand liminality as a descriptive model of human experience and of the empirical learning process. Both are indivisible parts of the phenomenon of Akkadian wisdom and of the functions of scholarly wisdom. The notion of wisdom has originated from the Biblical and Hebrew concept but has developed into a term with new connotations as Assyriology itself gained independence as a discipline. In Assyriology, the terminological problem of wisdom has neither been solved nor understated but has been a drive for discussion of the cultural and intellectual history of Ancient Mesopotamia, with the advantage of intersecting various other topics of the field and a good base for comparative research in Ancient Near Eastern contexts.

Researchers have realised that they are dealing with a complex reality that cannot be adequately resumed in a general concept or a generic label, but that it remains a useful label to congregate researchers working with the sapiential phenomenon. In the meantime, some of the questions previously studied in relation to wisdom have gained a certain independent nature as perspectives grounded in other types of material evidence are gaining momentum, e.g. thematic of knowledge and scholarship.

Presently, a general notion of wisdom exists and Assyriologists accept that wisdom stands for a multifaceted reality which includes different manifestations attested by a vast array of sources. I suggest that Mesopotamian wisdom may be better studied via the use of the socio-anthropological concept of liminality. I argue that it is a useful concept to that avail because it is not charged with historical connotations as the notion of wisdom itself is; it allows for a processual analysis of different sources regardless of genre, form or support; it provides insight not only into the social setting of specific texts[317] but, also on the nature and connection of the diverse manifestations of wisdom and on the functions of scholarly wisdom.

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[317] Perdue 1981: 125.

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Appendix A – Manuscripts by Provenance

Assur (13)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
VAT9933	P369077	Primary	DP	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.37
A...1, A...2	-	Primary	DP	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.38
VAT 10567	P369128	Primary	BT	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.23
KAR 329	P369293	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.29
VAT 11100	P404976	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl. 3
VAT 11565	P404980	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.74
VAT10522	P382528	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	Horowitz & Lambert 2002: 239
VAT 10756	P381794	School	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl. 73
VAT 10071	P381770	School	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl. 73
VAT 10538+	P404972	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl. 18
VAT? (KAR 116)	P369096	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 911-612 BCE	KAR 116
VAT 94942	P369003	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.57
VAT 9303	P369002	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl. 57

Nineveh (25)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
K 9290+	P398019	Primary	BT	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.21
K1743+	P395025	Primary	BT	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.19-23, 25
K8282 +	P397355	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.27-29
K3364	P365298	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.28
K8231	P397549	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.28
K10652	P398806	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.29
K8638	P397710	Primary	CW	ca. 911-612 BCE	unpublished
K10523	P398733	Primary	DP	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl38
K13830	P400491	Primary	DP	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.38
K 9237	P397986	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.3
SM 2139+	P398719	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.3
K9392+	P382529	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.74
79-7-8,225	P404878	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	unpublished
K1757+	P394033	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.5
SM 0089	P425230	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.6
K 2518 +	P394482	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.4
K 3972	P395335	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.5
K 3323 +	P394941	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.6
DT 151	P404881	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.6
SM 1745	P404880	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.4
K6935	P396913	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.7
K 3291	P394923	Commentary	Lbn I-V	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.15
BM123392	P286080	Commentary	Lbn IV	ca. 911-612 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.48
K9724	P398276	Extract	Lbn IV	ca. 911-612 BCE	BWL pl.17
K8576	P397684	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 911-612 BCE	unpublished

Babylon (13)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
VAT657	P404965	Primary	DP	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.38
BM 34773	P404898	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.19-24
BM 35405	P404899	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.20
BM 34633	P404896	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.19-25
BM 40098+	P404906	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.20,21,23
BM33851	P404895	Primary	CW	ca.458 BCE	BWL pl.27,29
BM37695	P404901	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.3
BM32208+	P404893	Primary	Lbn I/II/V	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.4
BM36386 +	P349431	School	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.6
BM37576	P404900	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.09
BM38067	P404902	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.08
VAT17489	P347243	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	van Dijk 1987: n.124
BM37596	P499552	Extract	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.06

Borsippa (1)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
BM 66882+	P404917	Commentary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.26

Nippur (1)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
CBS4507	P260821	Extract	DP	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl.29

Ḫuzirina (3)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
SU 1951, 10	P338349	School	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	Gurney & Finkelstein 1957: n.32
SU 1951, 015A +	P338350	School	Lbn II	ca. 911-612 BCE	Gurney & Finkelstein 1957: n.33
SU 1952, 212+	P338437	School	Lbn V	ca.911-612 BCE	BWL pl.57

Kalḫu (1)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
ND5485+	P363615	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 911-612 BCE	Wiseman & Black 1996: 201

Sippar (12)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
SI.1D.4	-	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	George & Al-Rawi 1998: 188-189
BM66345	P404916	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.4
BM68444	P404918	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.3
BM73592	P404919	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.4
IM124633	P225263	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	George & Al-Rawi 1998: 202
BM61433	P404913	School	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.07
BM93079	P247823	School	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.07
SI 37 +881	P404961	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Williams 1952 pl.1-2
BM65956+	P404915	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.10
BM54794	P404910	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014: pl.09
IST SI 55	P404964	Primary	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl. 13
BM54821	P404911	Primary	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	BWL pl. 74

Uncertain Provenance (15)

Museum Nº	CDLI	Type	Text	Date	Copy
ASHM 1924-1795	P348934	Primary	Lbn I/V	ca. 626-539 BCE	Gurney 1989 pl.48
BM47745	P499554	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.15
BM68589	P499555	Primary	BT	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.14
A.3115_1982	P382252	Primary	Lbn I	ca. 626-539 BCE	Horowitz & Lambert 2002: 241.
BM82957	P404920	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.8
BM55481	P491226	Primary	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.11
BM77093	P491227	Primary	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	unpublished
BM99811	P491228	Primary	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	unpublished
BM68435	P349702	School	Lbn III	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.11
BM34650	P404897	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.12
SI 728	P491229	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	unpublished
BM74201	P349786	School	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.12
BM77253	P491231	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	Oshima 2014 pl.13
BM38022	P491232	Primary	Lbn V	ca. 626-539 BCE	unpublished
BM33861	P491225	Primary	Lbn II	ca. 626-539 BCE	unpublished

Abbreviations:

BT – *Babylonian Theodicy*
CW – *Counsels of Wisdom*
DP – *Dialogue of Pessimism*
Lbn – *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*

Periodization:

Neo-Assyrian (ca. 911-612 B.C.E.)
Neo-Babylonian (ca. 626-539 BCE)
Achaemenid (ca.547-331 BCE)

Appendix B – Overview of Compositions

Liminality in Akkadian Wisdom Literature (ca. 1200-458 B.C.E.)				
Composition	*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*	*Babylonian Theodicy*	*Counsels of Wisdom*	*Dialogue of Pessimism*
Genre	Hymn	Acrostic Dialogue	Instruction	Satiric Dialogue
Extension	5 tablets = 600 lines	297 lines	166 lines	86 lines
Topic	Social justice	Social justice	Ethical advice	Meaning of life
Type	Status Reversal	Status Elevation	Status Elevation	Status Elevation
Structure and Plot	Separation • Tablet I - social isolation • Tablet II - physical illness Liminality • Tablet III – «dreams and walking dreams» Reaggregation • Tablet IV – physical and legal rehabilitation (?) • Tablet V - Social rehabilitation	• 13 stanzas criticizing social values • 13 stanzas defending traditional social values • 1 stanza: conclusion	• 8 sections of advice • Internal dichotomy between good and bad actions	• 10/11 sections • Activities opposed on regard to space • Systematic internal opposition over each action
Characters				
Liminal Subject	Šubši-mešrâ-šakkan	sufferer	son	master
Ritual Leader	dream characters and Marduk	friend	father	servant
Trickster	Marduk («angry then relenting»)	lawless sufferer	undesirable influences	master and servant
Stylistic devices				
Imagery	death (tb. II 114-116) prison (tb. II 95-98) isolation (tb. I 89-92)	death/boundary (ll.16-17); lawlessness/isolation (ll.133-141)	boundary (l.39); threshold (l.83)	boundary (ll. 51; 76); death/prison (ll. 44-45; 52; 81-82)
Parallelism	tb. II 117-118 – tb. V 21-22	ll. 267-274	ll. 127-128	ll. 17-18