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“The Scribe Interrogates his Student…”

A Literary and Historical Contextualisation of the First-Millennium BCE Sumero-Akkadian ‘Exam Texts’

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Abstract

The so-called Exam Texts are four literary texts concerning scribal education in Mesopotamia. They style and contents seem to resemble scribal literature from the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 BCE), but they only survive on tablets much later in date. This paradox has remained unstudied, despite scholarly attention into their details about grammatical and musical terminology, lexicography, and into their bilingual format.

This thesis studies the contents and contexts of the Exam Texts and their manuscripts to determine their relation to OB scribal literature and how this intellectual heritage is integrated in their first-millennium historical, social, and cultural contexts. It argues that they are school texts that also function as epistemological treatises about the nature of the scribal art and the values of scholarship.

Keywords: Exam Texts, literature, bilingual, first millennium, scribal art, Eduba

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0. Introduction

gu$_2$-e dim$_4$-dim$_4$-ma i-si-iš ba-ra-ne-en
gu$_2$-e dim$_4$-dim$_4$-ma i-si-iš ba-ra-ne-en
annû masnaqtumma ul tanassus

This is only a test, do not lament![1]

0.1. Outline of the Topic

We are well informed about the activities and challenges in the life of scribal students in ancient Mesopotamia. Narrative texts falling under the umbrella term of 'scribal literature' or 'school texts' contain detailed information about ancient education. They mention the contents of curricula, the relationship between the students, their peers, and the supervisors, and the qualities and skills that a good scribe should possess. The stories are usually set in the scribal school (e$_2$-dub-ba in Sumerian, *bīt ṭuppi* in Akkadian) and provide the thousands of preserved exercise tablets with a lively and colourful literary context.

Most surviving scribal literature originates from the Old Babylonian (OB) period (ca. 1900–1600 BCE), dominating our understanding of scribal education. They were written in Sumerian, even though this language had already been replaced by Akkadian as the main spoken language. However, despite the abundance of OB material, the text cited above does not originate from this period. It was written in both Sumerian and Akkadian almost a thousand years later in Nineveh, then the capital city of the Neo-Assyrian (NA) Empire (911-612 BCE). Copies of the same text surive from the following Neo-Babylonian (NB) period (612–539 BCE) and Hellenistic period (323–63 BCE), while nothing of the OB scribal literature survived into the first millennium.[2]

This text is referred to as 'Exam Text A' in current scholarship, since it narrates an examination at a scribal school. However, there are more texts that discuss the topic of scribal education and the student's development towards achieving proficiency in the 'scribal art' (nam-dub-sar(-ra), *ṭupšarrūtu*). ET A shares its late date and bilingual composition with a small number of other 'Exam Texts' for a total of four: A, B, D, and what this thesis refers to as X. They can all be defined as Sumero-Akkadian bilingual literary narratives concerning the

[1] ET A: 50. See Section 2.1.
[2] The periodisation in this thesis is adopted from CDLI.

scribal school and the scribal art that are only known from manuscripts postdating the OB period. Despite these linguistic and chronological parameters, they are often cited as OB school texts, as their topics, style and vocabulary overlap to a large degree. This is a paradox that has not yet been solved, which is what this thesis attempts to accomplish.

0.2. State of Research

Some manuscripts were studied before Sjöberg's editions from the 1970s. In fact, the first reference was made by Bezold in 1889, concerning the reading of eme-gi$_7$ as *lišān šumēri* ('the Sumerian language').[3] In 1949, Falkenstein published a seminal article on scribal education in ancient Mesopotamia, offering editions of several texts belonging to the genre of scribal literature. Whereas the article focused on OB narratives, Falkenstein stressed that this type of literature also existed in the first millennium as a "Neugestaltung desselben Themas".[4] Nine of the bilingual fragments that he referenced were published almost ten years later by Gadd (1957). Here, they were edited individually but not synthesised into reconstructed texts.

These are the fragments from among which later authors compiled the Exam Texts. Sjöberg claimed to have received research notes from Benno Landsberger, allowing him to publish ET D in 1972 and ET A in 1974. In both their commentaries, he made sporadic references to ET B and the manuscripts that included it, which he cited from Gadd. Some of these references made their way into the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.[5] ET B itself remains unpublished because of its fragmentary state. ET C seems to have been an oversight. There are no tablet numbers attributed to it and its lines are never cited. For these reasons, ET C probably does not exist, and is not included in this thesis. This amounts to three Exam Texts.

An additional text, which was first published by Nougayrol in 1968, falls within the definition of an Exam Text as well: it similarly pertains to scribal education, is bilingual, and is only attested after the OB period. Its principal edition is Civil, 2000 as 'Letter from Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaŋ'.[6] Sjöberg was aware of the existence of this literary letter, as he cited one of its

[3] Bezold, 1889: 434–435.
[4] Falkenstein, 1949: 173.
[5] See for example CAD L: 183 s.v. *liginnu* (where it is called a "bilingual e$_2$-dub-ba text"); CAD Š/2: 225 s.v. *šaṭāru* and 430 s.v. *šikittu*; CAT T: 197 s.v. *tâpu* (as "Examenstext B").
[6] Civil, 2000: 105–118.

manuscripts in the commentary of ET A.[7] In this thesis, the letter will be included as ET X, bringing the total up to four Exam Texts.

Sjöberg's pair of articles is especially commendable for its philological commentaries. However, little to no attempt at historical contextualisation is made, except for the brief statement that the composer of ET A likely had a specific OB composition in mind when writing the Exam Text.[8] A more elaborate discussion is found in his 1975 article 'The Old Babylonian Eduba', where particularly ET A is contextualised with OB scribal literature – because the use of the term e_2-dub-ba-a allegedly shows that ET A's contents reflect the OB scribal school curriculum.[9]

Sjöberg himself admitted using ET A only when it showed parallels with OB texts about the eduba, despite his awareness of the late dates of its manuscripts.[10] This is rightfully criticised by Wolfgang Heimpel (1982: 155). He argued that Exam Texts A and D may just as well have kept a "fictionalized memory of the eduba" through the development of its instructional modes.[11] Thus, the relation between the Exam Texts and their OB predecessors became the main point of contention surrounding the Exam Texts. This debate is, however, almost never conducted outside of footnotes and explicit exchanges of arguments are exceedingly rare.

Instead, the state of the art must be characterised differently. The Exam Texts are not lacking in attention: their contents remain attractive sources for specialists dealing with scribal education, grammatical terminology, and lexicography. They provide a wealth of technical information on grammar and translation, and provide narrative descriptions that lexical lists lack. Because of these reasons, scholars reference the Exam Texts whenever the contents seem suitable for their specific purposes. Because of their similarities to OB scribal literature, the position of Sjöberg echoes in studies by, for example, Vanstiphout (2004: 238–244) and Volk (2011) on OB scribal education, and Pevear (2015) and Seminara (2022) on literary bilingualism. In such cases, the Exam Texts are used to strengthen the authors' conclusions on

[7] Sjöberg, 1974: 152, fn. 13. He did not refer to it as ET C. This manuscript (RS 17.10; 17.80) was published as Ugaritica 5, 15 by Nougayrol, 1968: 23–28. There are two tablets from Ugarit: one containing the Sumerian, the other containing the Akkadian version of the text.
[8] Sjöberg, 1974: 137–138: "Die Komposition "Der Vater und sein Mißratener Sohn" ist kein 'Vorlaufer' zu "Examenstext A"; ich halte es aber für warscheinlich, daß der 'Verfasser' von "Examenstext A" die ältere Komposition vom Vater und dessen Sohn, der nicht zur Schule gehen wollte, gekannt und im Auge gehabt hat." This other composition is part of the OB scribal literature and was published by the same author in 1973 – in between the Exam Texts. This offers context to his motivation to compare the various witnesses of scribal literature.
[9] Sjöberg, 1975: 160.
[10] Sjöberg, 1975: 160.
[11] Heimpel, 1982: 155. With 'instructional tools' he means the Neo-Babylonian Grammatical Texts, emesal vocabularies, and synonym lists.

OB phenomena, filling in the gaps that sources from that earlier period do not provide. The wide difference in historical context is obscured in the process, despite the fact that authors regularly note the 'problematic' late dates of the manuscripts of the Exam Texts in a short disclaimer. Alternatively, the texts are cautiously employed as illustrative examples of various different research topics, such as by Black on grammatical theory (1986: 72–74), Michalowski on musical terminology (2010: 200), Frahm on commentary texts (2011: 376, fn. 1804), Jiménez to explain a rare phrase (2017: 90–91), or Wee on student questionings (2019: 113–114). These uses of the Exam Texts are always accompanied by an extensive footnote that displays the author's awareness of the debate. Such references generally attempt to remain as neutral as possible, taking no sides.

Even in Gesche's monumental 2001 work on scribal education in the Neo-Babylonian period, Exam Text A rarely occurs – it is only used to illustrate the lack of information about examinations at schools. She does not take its descriptions to reflect a historically realistic examination, which may be correct. But the amount of nuance she applies to its interpretation, which may stem from her awareness of the debate, renders the Exam Texts practically useless in her discussions. Thus, their potential relevance is lost.

Evidently, this topic is considered too extensive to engage with when it is not essential for an author's wider argument. In conclusion, questions surrounding the relation between the Exam Texts and their OB predecessors are either plainly ignored or circumvented. Additionally, the Exam Texts are always cited as singular instances of late bilingual scribal literature, but never connected together as a corpus. Most attention has been directed to ET A, and to a lesser extent to ET D, but the intertextuality in this small corpus has not yet been part of the texts' interpretation.

0.3. Relevance

In recent decades, Assyriological efforts have moved away from publishing cohesive composites of literary texts, as is the case of Sjöberg's editions of ET A and D. Instead, editions are now centred on the individual manuscripts of which the texts consist. This is in a large degree facilitated by the rise of digital corpora such as the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) and the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus (ORACC) platform. Furthermore, adopting principles from the 'new historicism' movement of literary theory, a piece of literature is considered to engage in a discourse with the historical context in which it was produced. The relationship between texts is therefore crucial to their interpretation. Assyriologists have been

increasingly focusing on literature's diachronic development and the flexibility of ideas and knowledge.[12] An exemplary effort was made by Robson, who studied the mobility of intellectual life in Assyria and Babylonia by putting "the people and the objects back into the picture, (giving) it life and movement, depth and texture."[13]

The Exam Texts are a special corpus that deserves to be included in this effort. As stated above, they contain a multitude of technical terminology – grammatical, musical, and lexicographical, among others. Despite modern commentators' best efforts, these are still difficult to understand, but this is because the narrative context and the bilingual layout of the tablets have not been considered in their interpretation. A better understanding of the texts' historical setting would help to explain the development of these terms and concepts. On a broader level, the Exam Texts are the only post-OB sources to not only mention a scribe's education, but also to reflect on the social setting of education, educational programmes, and the process of becoming knowledgeable of the scribal art. However, every conclusion drawn about these subjects thus far has been plagued by the fact that their relation to the OB material and their position in first-millennium scribal literature still remains unstudied. Exam Texts A, D, and X have been analysed philologically, but their historical context have not been included in these discussions. The Exam Texts' contents cannot be properly valued and interpreted until this has happened.

0.4. Questions

The main goal of this thesis is to make the Exam Text corpus the focal point of a dedicated study in an attempt to solve the issues outlined above. Therefore, this thesis sets out to study how the Exam Texts engage with the intellectual heritage of OB scribal education and integrate it in first-millennium literary and historical contexts.

This research question can be answered by focusing on three aspects of the Exam Texts in particular. First, we must understand how the Exam Texts functioned in the various historical, cultural and literary contexts where they are attested. By studying the manuscripts on which they survive in their archival settings, Chapter 1 illuminates the students', scribes', and scholars' interactions with these texts. This helps to understand the various ways in which the corpus was

[12] Examples that are relevant to the topic of this thesis are Jiménez, 2015; Viano, 2016; Robson, 2019; Cancik-Kirschbaum and Schrakamp, 2022. The DCCLT project on the ORACC platform is a response to criticism to the series *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon* – essential for the study of lexical lists – that it was too generalising and created composites at the cost of the historical contexts of the manuscripts. Veldhuis, 2014: 17–19.
[13] Robson, 2019: 10, 43.

approached and engaged with at different moments in the first millennium. In answering this question, an up-to-date overview of all manuscripts is provided that will be useful for further research. In Chapter 2, previous assumptions regarding their relationship with OB scribal literature must be identified and evaluated to assess to what extent the Exam Texts compare to OB notions of scribal education and the tenets of the scribal art. Third, we answer the question how the Exam Texts can be characterised as products of post-OB literary traditions. This analysis, which is found in Chapter 3, focuses on the increasing level of creativity on behalf of post-OB scribes that manifested itself in the maturing of Akkadian literature, experimentation with bilingualism, and the inclusion of new themes and motifs.[14]

In his edition of the literary letter of Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaŋ (here ET X), Civil argued that the Assyrian and Babylonian scribes of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, "no longer capable of originality, put together "new" texts and tried, often ineffectually, to preserve a literary tradition."[15] This thesis will demonstrate the opposite. Instead of merely copying old texts, the scribes of the Exam Texts made creative and innovative compositions that allowed them to interpret the legacy of the OB scribes as it made sense to themselves. Instead of being school texts with an educational purpose, which the OB texts usually are, the Exam Texts seem more moralistic in nature. Their focus on unlocking hidden knowledge as a result of performing well in school places the corpus in an entirely different light: they were epistemological treatises on the nature of the scribal art that through time ended up in educational contexts again. Moreover, their creation was deliberate; their similarities to the OB scribal literature were no coincidence and carried a legitimising force.

0.5. Methodology

As outlined above, this thesis has a tripartite structure. The first chapter studies the individual manuscripts that the corpus consists of. Composites usually omit the aspects of a tablet that make it unique: most importantly the colophon. In the nine cases where a colophon is present, it can be used to determine the names of the scribe, owner, or archival context of the tablet. In some cases, the archaeological context is known as well. Additionally, extracts and incipits of ET D are preserved on other tablets. These contexts help to identify the compositions that ET D was associated with, thus providing it with further context about its literary and sometimes curricular setting. Finally, idiosyncrasies in the main text show variation in transcription and

[14] Foster, 2005: 21–22.
[15] Civil, 2000: 105.

orthography that originates from the writing and copying of each manuscript. This means that in some cases, words or phrases in one language are not fully written in the other, or exchanged with the sign MIN ('ditto'). Variation not only occurs on the level of individual words, but also in the layouts of the tablets, especially where scribes deviated from standard interlinear translations or columns. These three approaches serve to show choices and strategies made by historical agents in their presentation of the texts and the value attributed to important passages or phrases.

The second chapter studies the Exam Texts' relation to OB literature in search of similar and contrasting elements, such as theme, structure, and vocabulary. OB compositions that are suitable for comparison are the compositions known as Eduba A, B, C, D, and R. Intertextual approaches have already been used in previous studies with varying degrees of success, but focusing on the similarities has lead to incomplete conclusions.[16] Therefore, this thesis will also take into account the ways in which the Exam Texts are different from OB scribal literature, which leads to a more nuanced interpretation. In this way, this chapter identifies where these traditions may have been maintained and where innovation occurs.

The third and final chapter shifts the perspective to the first millennium. The bilingual nature of the Exam Texts is analysed according to models laid out by Jacobsen (1991) and Veldhuis (2018). These include the interpretation of vocabulary (including emesal) and syntax, which can be compared to contemporary sources like lexical lists that were standardised after the end of the OB period. Additionally, this chapter includes a thematic case study on a motif that proves to be a marker of first millennium pedigree: the notion of 'secret knowledge' that is unlocked by becoming proficient at the scribal art.

0.6. Texts

As mentioned earlier, the original Exam Text corpus includes four texts. Sjöberg published ET A (a narrative) and D (a hymn) in the 1974 and 1972 respectively. ET B (an instructional text) is known from scant references but is unpublished. However, based on Gadd´s manuscript editions and efforts made by the Electronic Babylonian Library (eBL) team, it can be partially restored in several segments. ET C likely does not exist. This thesis adds ET X – a literary letter – to the corpus. ET X is unusual in several regards. First, it resembles an OB text closest of all Exam Texts: it is almost a direct copy of the 'Letter from Inim-Inana to Lugal-ibila' (ETCSL

[16] In many cases, no arguments are given to explain the degree of similarity. See for example Vanstiphout, 2004: 238–239.

3.3.12), but adds multiple lines and changes the writer and addressee. Second, it is the only Exam Text of which manuscripts survive from the second half of the second millennium. These manuscripts are from Ugarit and Hattusha. Last, it is by far the shortest. For these reasons, this thesis features ET X less in the discussions of Chapters 1 and 3. Yet, it allows for some unique observations on possible trajectories of transmission in the final conclusions.

A full translation of every Exam Text is provided in their respective sections in Chapter 2. This thesis does not provide modern transcriptions of each manuscript, as they are currently still being incorporated in the eBL library, whose entries can be accessed through the index in Section 1.1 of this thesis. Because ET A and D share a close relationship, the texts are presented in the order A-D-B-X.

Exam Text A ('Exam at the Scribal School')

The narrative concerns a student who goes to school and is subjected to an oral examination by his teacher. The questionnaire starts with the beginning of scribal education: motor skills. It then follows the curricular sequence, moving from vocabulary and translation between Sumerian and Akkadian, to grammatical terminology, priests and their associated ritual texts, to technical terms for professions and administrative operations. After the student replies that he does not know the answers, the teacher proceeds to launch verbal abuse against him – ranging from personal attacks to implicit positive criticism. The text ends with a one-line appraisal of the scribal art.

Exam Text D ('In Praise of the Scribal Art')

ET D is a hymn that praises the tenets of the scribal art. The first half of the text stresses the benefits of pursuing this craft by listing the profits that it unlocks. A further characterisation of the nature of the scribal art follows and the text ends by stating various professional activities of a scribe.

Exam Text B

The reconstruction of ET B in this thesis presents three sections that are separated by unknown numbers of lines. At the start of the text, there is a brief dialogue between a student and a superior (his title is broken, but he may be a parent, teacher, or more experienced student). The student's ability to translate Sumerian is questioned. In section 2, instructions are provided to make clay tablets and to show proper behaviour at the scribal school. Section 3 forms the end

of the text and includes a sequence of well-wishes meant to persuade the student to perform well at school.

Exam Text X ('Letter from Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaŋ')

This literary letter is the only Exam Text that provides names for the characters. Lugal-ibila writes from Uruk to Lugal-nesaŋ, a teacher at a scribal school in Nippur. The letter consists of instructions on didactic methods and advice on topics to include in the curriculum, such as mathematics, palaeography, and using various writing materials. Finally, a prior agreement between the two is reiterated.

1. Sources

In order to contextualise the analyses of the Exam Texts in the next chapters, the conditions in which they were used and interacted with will be studied first. This chapter examines how the Exam Texts functioned in the various historical, cultural and literary contexts where they are attested. It approaches the corpus bottom-up from the perspective of individual manuscripts. Nine of them have a colophon, and four are supported by an archaeological context, which allows for observations on their archival contexts as well. Additionally, the variation that occurs in both the orthographic level of the texts and the material level of the tablets will be used to demonstrate the ways in which historical individuals interacted with them. Both methods help to understand the various ways in which the corpus was approached and engaged with at different moments in the first millennium. Before answering this question, this chapter starts by providing an up-to-date overview of all manuscripts that will be useful for further research.

1.1. Index of the Manuscripts

References to manuscripts are encoded as follows: Exam Text A, manuscript G becomes ET A/G. The links to the databases show the availability of online editions as of June 15, 2025.

ET A is preserved in 18 manuscripts. It is not the case that the sixteen manuscripts in Sjöberg's principal edition were supplemented by two new discoveries. Six manuscripts have been joined since 1974, three additional fragments were identified and included in the British Museum Catalogue (CT 58), and the Bilinguals of Late Mesopotamian Scholarship (BLMS) project added another two fragments from collections in Iraq. The Electronic Babylonian Library (eBL) team members contributed to this list with another heavily fragmented tablet. It is possible that more joins between these fragments are made in the future, and that further manuscripts of ET A are identified. The tablets come from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh and Ashur, Neo-Babylonian Babylon and Sippar,[17] and Hellenistic Uruk.

ET D is preserved in six manuscripts, four of which were included in Sjöberg's 1972 publication. Another manuscript was added by the BLMS project members following its publication in CT 58. In 2010, Stefan Maul published another fragment. ET D is not yet part of the eBL library, so more fragments may follow in the future. The manuscripts are from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh and Neo-Babylonian Kish, Nippur and Sippar. The Nippur manuscript stands

[17] These manuscripts have been numbered M_{1-4} to maintain the integrity of Sjöberg's original edition.

out because it only includes an excerpt of ET D. This makes it the only Exam Text that is excerpted and features in other contexts. Additionally, we have two incipits that are preserved in colophons of other texts: one is the Hellenistic ms. ET A/N, and the other is a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Nineveh that contains bilingual proverbs.

A total of five fragments are currently known to preserve ET B. Four of these are included in Gadd's 1957 article (two of his manuscripts are joined) and a fifth was added by eBL team members. Because it is unpublished, this thesis includes a reconstructed transcription in Appendix 1. All of the manuscripts are from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh.

There are seven manuscripts of ET X. Most of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian manuscripts were published by Civil (2000), another by Cavigneaux (1996). Importantly, this Exam Text also occurs in two other contexts: Late Bronze Age Ugarit and Hattusha. The two tablets from Ugarit are translations of one another: one is in Sumerian and the other in Akkadian. For this reason, they are designated mss. ET X/E_1 and E_2. The tablet from Hattusha is a Sumerian/Akkadian bilingual.

1.1.1. Exam Text A

Ms.	Publication	Collection number	Edition	Online reference
Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian				
A	ZA 64, 168a + 171	K 8843 + 10230 + Rm 148	Sjöberg, 1974 (mss. A + I)	CDLI + CDLI, BLMS, eBL
B	ZA 64, 138a + 169a + 170a + 138c	K 10125 + 2459 + 5946 + 6514 + 9240 + 10127 + 13331 + 14899	Sjöberg, 1974 (mss. A_1 + B + F + H_1)	CDLI + CDLI + CDLI, BLMS, eBL
C	ZA 64, 169b	K 14013	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
D	ZA 64, 169c	1881-7-27, 130	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
E	ZA 64, 168b	DT 147	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
G	ZA 64, 170b	K 9282	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
H	ZA 64, 138b	K 9345	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Ashur, Neo-Assyrian				
J	KAR 111	VAT 10382	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
K	KAR 367	VAT 10502	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
L	LKA 66	VAT 13843	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL

Babylon, Neo-Babylonian				
M	VS 24, 64	VAT 17071 (BE 35882)	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
M_1	Unpublished	BM 36397 + 36696 + 36897 + 36963 + 37181 + 37924 + 1880-6-7, 2372 + 1880-6-17, 2439	eBL	CDLI, eBL
Sippar, Neo-Babylonian				
M_2	CT 58, 63	BM 54636 + 55347 + F.59[18]	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
M_3	CT 58, 64	BM 54981 + 69265	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
M_4	CT 58, 65	BM 72228	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Uruk, Hellenistic				
N	ZA 64, 175	VAT 7853	Sjöberg, 1974	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
O	SpTU 1, 146	W 22317a	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Uncertain, Neo-Babylonian				
U	TIM 9, 57	IM 3263	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS

1.1.2. Exam Text D

Ms.	Publication	Collection number	Edition	Online reference
Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian				
A	TCL 16, 96	AO 9073	Sjöberg, 1972	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
B	BSOAS 20, 263b	K 5053	Sjöberg, 1972	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Ashur, Neo-Assyrian				
B_1	Fs. Donbaz, 206	VAT 13964	Maul, 2010a	CDLI
Kish, Neo-Babylonian				
C	OECT 6, 36	Ashm. 1936-376 + 1924-842	Sjöberg, 1972	CDLI, BLMS
Nippur, Neo-Babylonian				

[18] Another tiny fragment that may join to BM 54636 is 2024-6-4, 254.

D	PBS 5, 132	CBS 2266 + 2301 + 8803 + 8803a + 11300 + N 921	Sjöberg, 1972	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Sippar, Neo-Babylonian				
E	CT 58, 66	BM 38703	BLMS	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Incipits (Neo-Assyrian and Hellenistic)				
a	ASJL 28, 242	Sm. 61	Langdon, 1912	CDLI, eBL
b	See ET A/N, colophon.			

1.1.3. Exam Text B

Ms.	Publication	Collection number	Edition	Online reference
Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian				
A	BSOAS 20, 263d	1879-7-8, 49	Gadd, 1957	CDLI, eBL
B	Unpublished	Rm. 2, 244 + Sm. 947	eBL	CDLI + CDLI, eBL + eBL
C	BSOAS 20, 263a	K 14862 + DT 290 + 1883-1-18, 524	Gadd, 1957	CDLI + CDLI + CDLI, eBL + eBL + eBL
D	BSOAS 20, 263e	K 11856	Gadd, 1957	CDLI, eBL
E	BSOAS 20, 263c	K 4815	Gadd, 1957[19]	CDLI, eBL

1.1.4. Exam Text X

Ms.	Publication	Collection number	Edition	Online reference
Ashur, Neo-Assyrian				
A	LKA 65	VAT 10365 + 11777	Civil, 2000 (ms. C)	CDLI
B	Fs. Limet 1, 2	CBS 1642	eBL	CDLI, BLMS, eBL
Babylon, Neo-Babylonian				
C	Fs. Lambert 111a	BM 32300	Civil, 2000 (ms. A)	eBL
Ur, Neo-Babylonian				

[19] Note that the obverse and reverse should be switched, see its entry in the eBL.

D	Fs. Lambert 111b	BM 130460[20]	Civil, 2000 (ms. E)	-
Ugarit, Middle Babylonian				
E_1	Ugaritica 5, 15a	RS 17.10	Nougayrol, 1968 (Civil ms. D)	RSTI
E_2	Ugaritica 5, 15b	RS 17.80	Nougayrol, 1968 (Civil ms. D)	RSTI
Hattusha, Middle Bayblonian				
F	KUB 57, 126	BO 450	Civil, 1987 (ms. B)	TLHdig, Hetkonk

1.2. Colophons and Contexts

Some ET manuscripts have additional metadata that is not in the index. Table 1 presents the manuscripts that preserve (part of) a colophon, and those of which the archaeological context is known. This allows for a discussion about the archival texts of a selection of manuscripts. This section presents and analyses this information to determine by who and in which circumstances the tablets were used.

Ms.	**Provenance**	**Colophon**	**Archaeological context**
ET A/A	Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian	x*	
ET A/G	Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian	x*	
ET A/J	Ashur, Neo-Assyrian	x	
ET A/L	Ashur, Neo-Assyrian		x
ET A/M	Babylon, Neo-Babylonian		x
ET A/M_2	Sippar, Neo-Babylonian	x	
ET A/N	Uruk, Hellenistic	x	
ET A/O	Uruk, Hellenistic		x
ET D/A	Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian	x*	
ET D/C	Kish, Neo-Babylonian	x	
ET D/a	Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian	x*	
ET B/A	Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian	x*	

[20] This museum number is either erroneously recorded or shared with UET 3, 1498, an Ur III balanced account.

ET X/E_1, E_2	Ugarit, Middle Babylonian		x

Table 1: Overview of available metadata of the manuscripts. The asterisk indicates if a colophon belongs to the Library of Ashurbanipal.

1.2.1. Neo-Assyrian Private Archives and Libraries

The archaeology of the city of Ashur is generally well documented and the work of Pedersén is invaluable in the reconstruction of the archives and libraries excavated there. However, the records pertaining to the manuscripts of the Exam Texts are erratic. Only one known findspot and context is known, while the excavation details of the five others have been lost. **ET A/L** was part of archive N28, which was found in a private house in the inner city.[21] This archive consists of about 40 tablets and predominantly features one Nabû-šuma-iddina. Most of the texts are documentary in nature: there are records of purchases of slaves and real estate, loan documents about quantities of silver, and at least one juridical settlement that forced Nabû-šuma-iddina to pay a settlement. These sources have dates between 698 and 613 BCE.[22] In this archive, ET A/L is the only literary text, which is unusual. It is well written with few mistakes. No photo is available to compare the handwriting, so the writer of this tablet cannot be ascertained. If it was the owner of the archive, he might have kept the tablet as an heirloom of his schooldays.

The archaeological context of **ET A/J** is unknown. It is however noteworthy because of its well-preserved colophon, which has been subjected to detailed analysis by Maul, 2012. The tablet is dated to 1 Nisannu of the eponym of Ḫanana: new year's day 701 BCE.[23] Rev. 3'–10' reads:[24]

[...] libir.ra-^{d}*i-šum ša₂-a-ṭi-ir ba-ri₃* sar ^{m}⌜^{d}ag⌝-*e-ṭi₅*-[*ra*]-*ni* ^{lu2}[*ša₂*]-*ma-lu-u₂ a*-[…]
⌜*li*⌝-*gi-mu-u₂* ^{md}ba.ba₆-mu-ba-⌜*ša₂*⌝ ^{lu2}maš₂.bur₃ ^{uru}[*an*]-*ta-aṣ-ṣa-a* ⌜*te*⌝-[*er-du*]-*u₂* ^{md}gi.ḫal-saŋ-il₂ […]
ša-dup-pu-u₂ ^{md}ag-*šum₂*-si.sa₂ ^{lu2}maš₂.bur₃ ^{uru}[*an*]-*ta-aṣ-ṣa-a mar₂* [^{m}an].šar₂-pap-ba-*ša₂* ^{lu2}dub.man
bal-[til^{ki}-*u₂*$^{?}$]
peš ^{aš}*aš-šur*-zi-*še-ṣi* ^{lu2}maš₂.bur₃ ^{uru}[*an*]-*ta-aṣ*-⌜*ṣa-a*⌝ peš.gal ^{m}*da-di-ia-u₂* ^{lu2}a.ba e₂ diŋir […]
ša e-ri-šu u₂-šam-šu₂-u ^{d}ag […] en *ṭup-šar-ru-ti* bir-*šu* bir e₂-*šu li-*⌜*iq*⌝-[*bi*]
ina šu.min ^{d}*gu-la a-zu-gal-la-tu₄* gal-*tu₄* gig *la* ⌜*pa*⌝-*du-u₂ ina* ša₃-*bi-šu₂* ⌜*lib*⌝-[*ši*]
^{iti}bara₂ u₄ 1.kam *lim-mu* ^{m}*ḫa-na-na* $^{lu2!(URU)}$en nam ^{uru}du₆-*bar-si-ip₂* […]
du-lu-ḫi-iš na-as-ḫa igi.tab *ul u₂*-[*puš₄*]

[21] For the archaeological context and profile of this archive, see Pedersén, 1986: 121–123.
[22] Pedersén, 1986: 121–123, online via the ATAE project on ORACC.
[23] Millard, 1994: 94.
[24] The transliteration and translation are adapted from Maul, 2012: 204–206.

> Copied and checked [according] to its original. Writing of Nabû-ēṭiranni, the scribal apprentice […], descendant of Baba-šuma-iqīša, the scribe of Antaṣṣa, younger son of Nabû-rēšī-išši […], son of Nabû-šuma-līšer, the scribe of Antaṣṣa, son of Aššur-aḫa-iqīša, the scribe of Ashur, son of Aššur-napišta-šēṣi, the scribe of Antaṣṣa, son of Dādiyû, the scribe of the temple […].
> The one who requests it and forgets it, may Nabû, […], lord of the scribal art, command the scattering of him and of his house. By the hands of Gula, the great chief physician, may there be a merciless disease in his body!
> 1 Nisannu, eponym of Ḫanānu, lord of the province of Til-barsip.
> Hurriedly extracted and checked, not done well.

The otherwise unknown scribe of this tablet, Nabû-eṭiranni, lists his family up to six generations. He claimed the title of apprentice scribe and might have aspired to become a 'scribe of Ashur' like his ancestors. His oldest ancestor, Dādiyû, is also said to have started the lineages of two other Assyrian scribes: Šumma-balāṭ and Nabû-zēru-lēšir.[25] The former is known to have written lexical lists, and the latter is the scribe of KAR 23 and 25, both šu'ila-prayers. Šumma-balāṭ's work was discovered in library N2 in Ashur,[26] while the findspot of Nabû-zēru-lēšir's prayers has been lost. There is also an individual named Nabû-eṭiranni who wrote a Šurpu tablet: LKA 91 (VAT 13613), found in library N4.[27] This large library, which was in use at the same time ET A/J was written, belonged to a family of *āšipu*s. It contained some witnesses of the Exorcists' Manual, and hundreds of incantation rituals, and diagnostic and prescriptive texts. There is a chance that the Nabû-eṭiranni of this archive, whose tablet did not include a genealogy, also wrote ET A/J. He did, however, not belong to the close family of *āšipu*s. Therefore, the relationship between the Exam Text and the corpus of *āšipu* literature cannot be established based on this manuscript alone.

According to Maul, one of the most striking aspects of the colophon is the fact that it contains a date – which is atypical for this period.[28] The presence of a date might relate to the fact that it was written on 1 Nisannu, or new year's day. Additionally, the majority of his article focuses on the archaising features that are visible in both the palaeography of individual signs and in the spelling of words.[29] However, the scribe Nabû-ēṭiranni was inconsistent in his use of

[25] The three family trees are presented by Fadhil, 2012: 30 and Radner, 1999: 364. Note that the other members of the family do not have entries in the PNA.
[26] Fadhil, 2012: 29–30; Pedersén, 1986: 29–34.
[27] Pedersén, 1986: 41–76, no. 405; Fadhil, 2012: 36–43.
[28] For an overview of literary tablets with dates from this period, see Maul, 2012: 202 with footnote 2..
[29] Maul, 2012: 203 with footnotes 7–9.

archaic sign forms and interchanged them with shapes contemporary to his own time.[30] Notably, as Maul indicates, his mimicking of ancient sign forms is only present in the colophon and not in the main text on the obverse of the tablet.[31] It must be added that this is also true for the many synonyms of 'scribe' that Nabû-ēṭiranni uses (^{lu2}maš$_2$.bur$_3$, ^{lu2}dub.man, ^{lu2}a.ba).[32]

The developing proficiency of Nabû-ēṭiranni as a scribe is evident from his use of archaic sign forms and knowledge of obscure logographic spellings. According to Maul, this may be interpreted as attempts to demonstrate the alleged ancient age of the text itself.[33] Even though an exact relationship between this manuscript and other texts from the house of the *āšipu*s cannot be ascertained, ET A/J indicates that the Exam Text was used as a vehicle to display intellectual and technical prowess in the scholarly circles of Neo-Assyrian Ashur.

1.2.2. Neo-Assyrian Nineveh: The Library of Ashurbanipal

Most of the surviving colophons in the Exam Text corpus indicate that the tablets belonged to the 'Library of Ashurbanipal.' This was most likely not a single library, but consisted of multiple scholarly tablet collections housed on the main citadel of Nineveh, Kuyunjik. The main collection belonged to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (r.668–ca. 631 BC). Because of poor 19th century archaeological practices and record keeping, the findspots and contexts of the tablets are not known. Ongoing efforts are being made to sort catalogue, study, and publish the 30.000 tablets and fragments that were taken from this site, mostly to the British Museum.[34]

The library tablets were regularly supplied with colophons. There are multiple types, the most basic of which can be seen in mss. **ET A/A** and **ET D/a** (rev. 19'–20'):

> kur ^{m}*an-šar$_2$*-du$_3$-a man šu$_2$ man kur *an-šar$_2$*^{ki}
> Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of the land of Ashur.

This type of colophon (*type a*) was usually written well after the drafting of the tablet, and was set in an archaising font. It shows where the tablet belonged and who the owner was. A more elaborate version is now designated as *type d*:

[30] Maul, 2012: 203–204 with footnote 13.
[31] Maul, 2012: 202.
[32] The Exam Texts exclusively contain $^{(lu2)}$dub.sar. Its omission in the colophon is striking, just as the lack of synonyms in the main text of this manuscript.
[33] Maul, 2012: 207–208.
[34] Taylor, 2022.

[e$_2$].ᵍgalᵍ ^{m}*an-šar$_2$*-du$_3$-ibila lugal šu$_2$ lugal kur *an-šar$_2$*^{ki} *ša* ^{d}ag *u$_3$* ^{d}*taš-me-tú* ŋeštu.min daŋal-*tú iš*-[…]

[…]-ᵍ*zu*ᵍ igi.min zalag$_2$-*tu$_4$ ni-siq ṭup-šar-ru-ti ša ina* lugal^{meš}-*ni a-lik* […]

[…] *la i-ḫu-zu ne$_2$-me-eq* ^{d}ag *ti-kip sa-an-tak-ki ma-la ba-aš$_2$*-[*mu*]

[…]-ᵍ*re*ᵍ-*e-ma a-na ta-mar-ti ši-ta-as-si-ia qe$_2$-reb* […]

Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of the land of Ashur, whom Nabû and Tašmetu [bestowed] with broad wisdom, [who learned] with bright eyes the highest level of the scribal art, [which work] had not been learned by the kings, [my predecessors]. [I wrote on tablets] the wisdom of Nabû, as many signs as there are, [I checked and collated them] and for my consulting and reading out [I established them] inside [my palace].

This is the best surviving *type d* colophon as seen in ms. **ET D/A** (rev. 13'–16').[35] It is also present in mss. **ET A/G** and **ET B/A**, though in poorer state of preservation. Next to the information about the owner, this colophon includes a prayer to Nabû, the god of writing, and his consort Tašmetu. It ends with a small mission statement that explains the tablet's presence in the library. Because both types of colophons are found on manuscripts of ET A, their use is probably dictated by the availability of space.

The 'I' in the colophon is Ashurbanipal, whose literacy is well known, but he was not the only one who used the texts. According to Wisnom, "the library was ultimately a resource to support the workings of government, to be used by both Ashurbanipal and his advisers."[36] These advisers were specialists in the main scholarly disciplines of astrology, exorcism, medicine, haruspicy, and lamentation.[37] This is reflected in the composition of the library: the majority of the texts were lists, manuals, and compendia used in these branches of scholarship.

Furthermore, the king collected literature of any other kind. This could explain the presence of the Exam Texts in his library. However, ET A is attested seven times; ET D occurs twice, and all five of ET B's manuscripts are from the library. Only ET X is not present, or has not yet been identified. With regard to ET A, the best contender for a manuscript to have been used as a general reference work is **ET A/A**. It includes a special statement in the colophon (rev. 12'–13'):

dub-sar dumu-a-ne$_2$ […] zag til-la-be$_2$-še$_3$

kur ^{m}an-[…] kur *an-šar$_2$*^{ki}

[35] The transliteration is adapted from the eBL Project: https://www.ebl.lmu.de/library/AO.9073.
[36] Wisnom, 2025: xli.
[37] Wisnom, 2025: xlii.

The scribe [interrogates] his student. Finished completely.
Palace of Ash[urbanipal, king of the world, king of] the land of Ashur.

It is the only surviving colophon that states the incipit of the composition and the fact that the tablet contains it completely.

Because the Exam Texts – except ET X – occur multiple times in the Library of Ashurbanipal, the scholars working there would have been aware of their contents. The texts might even have entered into the royal tablet collection through their own private libraries. The Exam Texts do not support the government of the king, but rather support the scholarship that makes it possible.

1.2.3. Neo-Babylonian Tablet Collections

Ms. **ET A/M** was discovered by German archaeologists in the city of Babylon. They documented its findspot as square 28n1 of the Merkes neighbourhood. It was located in the middle of the city and contained temples and large private residences. Though a number of archives was discovered here, ET A/M was a loose find without an archival context.[38] Other tablets found scattered in this square are a fragment of physiognomic omens, and a lexical list.[39]

The NB manuscripts from Sippar (ET A/M_2, ET A/M_3, ET A/M_4 and ET D/E) entered into the British Museum collection in three shipments between 1880 and 1882. One fragment in shipment 1882-5-22, joined with one of the 14000 fragments from shipment 1882-9-18, thus linking the shipments together.[40] Because the tablets were delivered in crates and their archaeological context was not documented, its provenance cannot be accurately studied.[41] It may be impossible to present an overview of these deliveries, but general observations may be made. The shipments consist of all aspects of the written record, from field sales, to royal cylinders, to astronomical texts. The tablet numbers surrounding the Exam Text manuscripts are, however, mostly given to school exercises, (bilingual) literary texts, omens, and lexical lists.[42] These tablets might have shared their archival contexts with documentary texts, which was usually the case. Unfortunately, the one Sippar manuscript with a colophon cannot offer any further information. **ET A/M_2** rev. 14' only preserves one and a half personal name:

[38] Pedersén, 2005: 218, 224 (no. 189).
[39] Pedersén, 2005: 224 (nos. 193, 194).
[40] This is ms. ET A/M_3. BM 54981 is from the former shipment and BM 69265 from the latter.
[41] Leighty, Finkel and Walker, 1988: xii.
[42] Leighty, Finkel and Walker, 1986: 152, 161, 170; Leighty and Grayson, 1987: 234, 333.

[…] ^{m}ad-nu-zu ⌜x-x$^{?}$⌝ ^{md}EN-[…]

[…] Abī-ul-īde … EN-[…][43]

Ms. **ET D/D** was excavated in Nippur between 1889 and 1900 on a site designated 'Tablet Hill'.[44] The archaeological context of this site is notoriously hard to ascertain. Whereas many OB school texts were uncovered at this site, tablets dating to the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods also found their way into the CBS catalogue. As a result, it cannot be reliably used to gain information on the archaeological contexts of individual tablets.[45]

The only manuscript from the city of Kish, **ET D/C** has a similarly short colophon to ET A/M$_2$. However, it contains a rare phrase that is not seen anywhere else. Rev. 13–14 read:

[…]⌜sar⌝-*ma up-pu-uš*
[… ^{md}]en-uru$_3^{ir}$ dumu ^{lu2}umbisaŋ-*ti*

[…] written and done well.
[…] Bēl-nāṣir, son of the scribal art.

Bēl-nāṣir calls himself a 'son of the scribal art' (dumu ^{lu2}umbisaŋ-*ti*). The term dumu can also be translated figuratively as "member of a professional or social group."[46] The postposition -*ti* shows that Bēl-nāṣir is not simply the son of a particular scribe, or scribes, but of the abstract *ṭupšarrūti*, 'scribal art'. With this title, which seems to be a hapax, Bēl-nāṣir assigns himself to the wider community of scribes, participating in its traditions and showing his professional qualities. The subordinate 'son of the scribal art' may be contrasted to the title 'lord of the scribal art,' which is an epithet of Nabû.[47] Furthermore, 'scribe' in the colophon of ET D/C is written ^{lu2}umbisag. This word is used nowhere else in the Exam Texts corpus. Similarly, the compound ^{lu2}a.ba, which was especially popular in the Neo-Assyrian period, is not present in

[43] The interpretation of the name Abī-ul-īde was suggested by C. Waerzeggers. Not enough survives in order to establish Abī-ul-īde's relation to the tablet; if he was the owner or related to the owner. The relationship between the two names is unclear as well. The broken section in between is transliterated by the BLMS project members as PA UD. However, more small wedges (not present in the hand copy) can be seen between these signs and the vertical wedge of UD is probably the *Personenkeil* of ^{md}Bēl-[…]. Alternatively, the ligature ^{d}EN could be the start of the name Enlil.
[44] Clayden, 2016: 45 (no. 135).
[45] Clayden, 2016: 28, citing a personal communication with Westenholz of 2013.
[46] CAD M/2: 314–315, 4.b.
[47] This is for example attested in ET A/J: rev. 6': "en *ṭup-šar-ru-ti*".

the Exam Texts proper (where the term dub.sar is consistently used). It only occurs here and in the colophon of ET A/J.

Bēl-nāṣir thus seems to have designed a new title for him to use at the bottom of his manuscript of ET D. It shows that he reflected on the contents of the text and chose to engage with it. Calling himself 'son of the scribal art', he opens himself up to the instructions of proper scribal conduct that ET D consists of – though using a different terminology that perhaps was more applicable to Bēl-nāṣir himself. This may indicate that he was a student at the time of writing this tablet, but this can only be suggested.

1.2.4. Hellenistic Uruk: Private Collections

Both ET A manuscripts from Hellenistic Uruk can be discussed here. **ET A/N** preserves a colophon (rev. 16'–19'):

> nam-dub-sar-ra ama gu$_3$ de$_2$-ke$_4$-˹e-ne˺ […]
> *ṭup-šar-ru-u$_2$-tu$_2$ um-mi la-'i-ṭa-˹at˺* […]
> im ^{md}60-še$š^{meš}$-mu dumu ^{md}60-en-*šu$_2$-mu* ^{lu}ša$_3$.bal.[bal …]
> ^{d}60 *u an-tum* unug^{ki}-*u$_2$* šu$^{!(Ⅎ EŠ)}$ ^{m}*ib$_2$-luṭ*-^{d}60 […] unug^{ki}-*u$_2$*
> unug^{ki} ^{iti}bar u$_4$ 19.kam […]
>
> The scribal art is the mother of orators, [the father of experts]
> *The scribal art is an embracing mother, [the father of experts]*
> Tablet of Anu-aḫḫē-iddin, son of Anu-bēlšunu, descendant of […]
> of Anu and Antu, the Urukean. Hand of Ibluṭ-Anu, […] the Urukean.
> Uruk, 19 Nisannu, […].

First, the catchline of ET D in this colophon must be pointed out. It is the only direct evidence that ET D followed on ET A. This is also demonstrated by thematic patterns, as studied in Section 3.2.

ET A/N was owned by Anu-aḫḫē-iddin, but written by "the hand of" Ibluṭ-Anu. This is a common occurrence and the relationship between these individuals may be understood as that of supervisor and student.[48] It is surprising that an apparently well educated individual, who had his own students, was either not previously known for

[48] Ossendrijver, 2011a: 214–215; 2011b.

producing literary texts, or eluded reconstructions of the small scholarly network of Hellenistic Uruk all together.[49]

The names Anu-aḫḫē-iddin and Anu-bēlšunu are common in this community, but as a father-son pair they are rare. The family name is unfortunately broken. None of the well-known Anu-bēlšunus from the Sîn-lēqi-unninī family have a son with this name.[50] There are two individuals that currently fit this combination of names. The first one belongs to the Ekur-zākir family. This Anu-aḫḫē-iddin/Anu-bēlšunu authored various divisions of property and sale transactions, often relating to prebends. The documents range between SE 88–111 (223–199 BCE).[51] ET A/N would be the first literary text known to have been written by him. Another Anu-aḫḫē-iddin features in SpTU 4, 150[52] as the father of the scribe, meaning his own patronym is not given. This man belongs to the Gimil-Anu family. Contrary to our manuscript, the archaeological context of this tablet is known: the archive of Iqīšāya//Ekur-zākir.[53]

This archive was found in the same excavation square in Uruk (Ue XVIII) as ms. **ET A/O**. This square contains at least two occupation levels with private houses. The top layer yielded the above mentioned archive of Iqīšāya//Ekur-zākir, and the bottom layer held an archive of descendants of the Šangu-Ninurta family.[54] However, ET A/O was discovered in an ambiguous layer in between these two levels.[55] Since it cannot be proven to which family this layer belonged, it is designated as the 'house of the *āšipu*s' (not to be confused with the similarly named house in Ashur). This is because members of both families are known to have practiced in this discipline, as the contents of their archives indicate. Thus, even though it is uncertain to which archive ET A/O belonged, it must have been related to *āšipu*s nonetheless. This is likely also true for ET A/N. Despite the difficulties in identifying its owner, it must have circulated in a small community of scholars working at Uruk's Anu temple.

[49] There is no fitting Anu-aḫḫē-iddin attested in Robson, 2020.
[50] This family tree is illustrated in Pearce and Doty, 2000: 334–335. The combination Anu-aḫḫē-iddin and Anu-bēlšunu occurs twice, but as brothers.
[51] For this individual, see Wallenfels, 1998: 27–32, Hackl and Oelsner, 2021: 50, fn. 62. His family tree is presented in Hunger, 1968: 18.
[52] Tablet 4 of Alandimmû.
[53] Clancier, 2009: 50–51; 2024. This archive contained a large number of tablets written by other individuals.
[54] Clancier, 2009: 450.
[55] Frahm, 2011: 247, fn. 1156.

1.2.5. Ugarit: The House of the Scholar

The manuscripts **ET X/E$_1$** and **ET X/E$_2$** belong together, as E$_1$ is the Akkadian version and E$_2$ is the Sumerian version. Both tablets were found in the 'house of the scholar,' located in the residential quarter of Ugarit (ca. 1400–1200 BCE). Marguerite characterises the archive found in this house as follows: "The excavations yielded tablets that vary greatly in nature and contents, which led to the conclusion that their owner was a scholar. They include magical and medical formulas, encyclopaedias, a treatise on the "art of writing," lexicographic texts in Akkadian (i.e., vocabularies, one of which has comments added in the margins)." [56] About half of the texts is written in alphabetic Ugaritic and there is a single administrative text. The "treatise on the "art of writing"" must be the two versions of ET X.

1.2.6. Conclusions

The colophons on the manuscripts and the contexts where they were found allow for various observations on the functionality of the Exam Texts. The colophons contain many traces of scribal students engaging with the texts. Nabû-eṭiranni (ET A/J) describes himself as a scribal apprentice and perhaps specifically wrote his copy of ET A on New Year's day. Bēl-nāṣir (ET D/C), using the title of 'son of the scribal art,' interpreted the instructions of ET D as applicable to his own situation. The tablet of Anu-aḫḫē-iddin was written by Ibluṭ-Anu, a scribe more junior than him, most likely a student. Most colophons originate from the Library of Ashurbanipal. It functioned as a scholarly library, but also facilitated the education of its employees. These specialists share their profession with owners of private archives in all periods where Exam Texts were written. Manuscripts have been recovered from a 'house of the *āšipu*s' in both Ashur and Uruk. Even if the exact archaeological context of a manuscript is unclear, a significant number of them circulated in the small scholarly communities working in the palace and the temples.

1.3. Extracts and Incipits

In three instances, extracts and incipits of Exam Texts are attested in other tablets. This section studies the other literary compositions in these contexts in an attempt to identify possible associations between them and the specific Exam Text reference. Apart from being included in ET A/N's colophon, ET D's incipit is present as a catchline on a tablet from NA Nineveh

[56] Marguerite, 2006: 71–72.

containing a bilingual proverb collection, while its first three lines are attested on a Neo-Babylonian school tablet. ET A is quoted in a commentary text on a lexical list.

1.3.1. ET D/a (Sm. 61)

One attestation of ET D's incipit is located in a Neo-Assyrian collection of bilingual proverbs (ms. ET D/a). This tablet with the siglum Sm. 61 has seen extensive study in the past,[57] because late copies of Sumerian proverbs with an added Akkadian translation are relatively rare. The tablet presents the proverbs in two columns: a Sumerian version in the left column and the Akkadian translation in the right, separated by a double vertical ruling. According to Lambert (1960: 222), writing before the identification and publication of the Exam Texts, two proverbs are written in Sumerian only and a catchline is lacking. This view should be amended, since one of these two 'proverbs' is the catchline of ET D. It is not translated. Moreover, its presentation stands out among the others because it is not written in a single column. Instead, it extends over the full length of the line, even covering the lower parts of the vertical rulings. One reason for this may be the lack of space on the tablet, as the scribe may have reserved some space for the Libraries of Ashurbanipal colophon written below.

The proverbs on the tablet are not connected to the theme of writing or the 'scribal art.' They are, in order, Sumerian Proverb Collection (SPC) 1.104: "oil poured inside a sceptre – nobody knows it;" SPC 3.86: "to give is of the king, to make good is of the cupbearer;"[58] a proverb unknown from the collection: "to give is of the king, to improve is of the steward;"[59] SPC 3.17: "friendship is for one day, collegiality is forever;" SPC 3.18: "in a place of collegiality there is slander, it is (even) there in a place of purification;" ending in two proverbs unknown from the collection: "a foreigner in another city is a slave;" "I/you don't protect a millstone;" and finally the incipit of ET D.[60] Two of the proverbs (3.17 and 3.18) are known to have existed together in the OB period[61] and the others are included and presented without any logic that is at the moment discernible.

The relation between the incipit of ET D and the other proverbs contained in Sm. 61 thus remains contentious. The possibility must be entertained that the catchline existed as a

[57] Lambert, 1960: ; Alster, 1997; 2004: 50–51. See also the references on the manuscript's eBL page https://www.ebl.lmu.de/library/Sm.61.
[58] Slightly modified from the OB original, where the second character is the cupbearer's son.
[59] Of this proverb, the first phrase is not translated into Akkadian; likely because it is identical to the preceding proverb.
[60] Lambert, 1960: 258–259.
[61] Alster (1997:379) argues that the second proverb is a comment on the first one, "expressing the paradoxical notion that bad qualities exist even among those who should be most able to avoid them."

standalone proverb, of which no OB attestation survives. However, because of the location on the tablet this theory seems doubtful. Alternatively, a the proverbs themselves may have been considered ancient knowledge. This might have triggered an association between them and the interpretation of difficult Sumerian that is mentioned in ET D. Ultimately, Sm. 61 shows that ET D held a significant position in relation to texts related to wisdom literature which certainly had direct OB predecessors.

1.3.2. ET D/D (PBS 5, 132)

Ms. ET D/D is the only explicit school tablet included in the corpus. It is a large Neo-Babylonian tablet that contains a variety of extracts of lexical lists and literary texts, including the first three lines of ET D. The third line is repeated. The tablet is a Type 1b school tablet according to the typology of Gesche and is the only clearly identifiable school tablet in the corpus of the current study. It was presented by Jiménez (2017: 390–391), who, based on Gesche's work, argued that it "was produced by a student at the elementary stage of his education."[62] The obverse contains an extract of ur_5-ra = *ḫubullu* II 306–376 – written twice, a section of the lexical list concerning weather phenomena, types of animal dung, types of agricultural labourers, and yields of various products to be given as *biltu*-payment.[63]

The reverse has a more diverse content. School tablets of the type 1b are characterised by standardised compositions (mostly a small selection of lexical lists) on the obverse and non-standardised lexical lists and literary texts on the reverse.[64] This is also the case for ET D/D: there are a lu_2 list, a list with verbal paradigms, and multiple extracts of literary texts. Aside from ET D, there are parts of an unknown Akkadian literary text, a physiognomic omen that is repeated three times, part of the Akkadian *Series of the Fox*, and two bilingual lines (one repeated three times) from unknown origin.[65] The columns are very narrow: every line of the text takes up about three lines on the tablet.

The *Series of the Fox* is a long Akkadian disputation poem between a fox and a wolf. It was a popular text and stands out among other Akkadian literature for being copied on elementary school tablets.[66] It is a first millennium rendition of a genre that is first attested in the OB period, where literary debates formed an integral part of the scribal curricula.[67] Its

[62] Jiménez, 2017: 390. This view was earlier also expressed by Lenzi, 2013: 24.
[63] Landsberger, 1957: 74–80.
[64] Gesche, 2001: 62ff; Veldhuis, 2003: 627–628.
[65] See Jiménez, 2017: 390 for the contents of these extracts.
[66] Jiménez, 2017: 39.
[67] Vanstiphout, 2003: 153ff; Jiménez, 2017: 121–124.

redactional history shows a number of parallels with the Exam Texts: the first manuscripts appeared late in the second millennium BCE, it was a narrative not earlier attested in its older genre, and occurs in both Library of Ashurbanipal contexts as well as Neo- and Late Babylonian school tablets.[68] These similarities suggest that for the scribe of this tablet, ET D was not primarily an esoteric guideline to being initiated in the 'scribal art,' but instead served a purpose that the *Series of the Fox* extract also had. Since the manuscript is an elementary school tablet, this was most likely pedagogical.

1.3.3. SpTU 2, 54

This text is a commentary to the sign list Aa 5/4. In lines 22–25, the second sentence of ET A is quoted to explain the reading of the Sumerogram murub_2 as *puḫru*. Frahm (2011: 106–107) points out that the reference to ET A fits quite well, considering both ET A and the lexical list Aa are both attested in Uruk and circulated in the same scholarly milieu. SpTU 2, 54 itself was discovered in Uruk as part of the library of the *āšipu* Iqīšāya of the Ekur-zākir family. It was written by Enlil-bēlšunu, son of Enlil-napišti-uṣur, the brewer of Enlil, from the Gimil-Sîn family, whose origins imply a relation to the city of Nippur. He was an *āšipu ṣeḫru* or 'junior exorcist' who wrote it as "lemmata, oral explanations, and (materials for) a 'questioning,' following the sayings of a (master-)scholar."[69] This shows that at least part of ET A was known among junior scholars, perhaps even students, who were busy improving their craft.[70]

1.3.4. Conclusions

These three references to Exam Texts come from very different contexts. They show that scholars in the Nineveh libraries, Nippurean scribal students, and Hellenistic apprentices all knew their contents and deemed it relevant to cite them in other literary contexts. In the first case, the ET D was associated with ancient wisdom. In the second, with pedagogical literary texts. In the latter, the reference may have been an intellectual exploit or mnemonic device. Even though the corpus of Exam Texts and the number of surviving tablets are relatively small, the texts still contained knowledge that many types of students, scribes, and scholars were familiar with. They also engaged with them in different ways, which is the topic of the next section.

[68] Jiménez, 2017: 39–57.
[69] Translation by Frahm, 2011: 54, 106–107, 292–296. See also Veldhuis, 2014: 401–403.
[70] For further comments on this text, see Section 3.1.2.

1.4. Variation between Manuscripts

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the Exam Texts have survived from a multitude of historical and geographical contexts. Additionally, the colophons indicate that the texts were used by both students and scholars. For these reasons, the corpus should not be handled as a homogeneous and unchanging entity, but as a malleable construct that manifests itself in different ways depending on the context. Therefore, this section employs an alternative method to study the functionality of the Exam Texts. It analyses the variation that occurs in strategies of orthography and the avoiding of repetition, as well as in the formatting of the tablets.

1.4.1. Orthography

Whereas the vocabulary of the Exam Texts corresponds well throughout the manuscripts, the most significant variation occurs in the bilingual aspect of the texts. The sign MIN ('ditto') is often used to avoid repetition of Sumerian words into the Akkadian version of the same line. For example, ET A/M_1 preserves line 17, which in Sumerian reads eme-gal eme-x eme-sukud-da [eme-te-nu_2-a eme-si-sa_2 eme-x],[71] and is rendered as MIN MIN MIN MIN MIN MIN in Akkadian. This is a shortcut on behalf of the scribe, who saved time and effort by not repeating the Sumerian words as sumerograms. They would have been identical signs, which he deemed redundant. In other cases where MIN is used, it replaces only the element eme or *lišānu* ('language, speech') in a longer compound. Notably, this only happens if this 'language' refers to professional jargon, such as eme unud / MIN *u_2-tul-lu* ('language of the herdsman') in ET A/M: 3'.[72] It never replaces eme in eme gi_7 or eme uri^{ki} (*lišān šumēri*, 'Sumerian', or *lišān akkadi*, 'Akkadian').

Another repetitive element that features especially in ET A is the verb from its questionnaire: *tīde* ('do you know it?'). Whereas its Sumerian counterpart i_3-zu-u is always written in the preserved parts of the manuscripts, *tīde* is generally found at the right edge of the tablet where space may be limited. In ms. ET A/B, the verb of the last line of the obverse is replaced with KI.MIN. On the reverse, *tīde* is fully written out again, probably as a reference for the following questions. The scribe of this manuscript differentiated between MIN and KI.MIN: the former is used in lieu of repeated logographic spellings between the Sumerian and

[71] The transcription is after eBL. This spelling is also present in the same line on manuscript ET A/B.
[72] This is also true for mss. ET A/L: 2; ET A/M_3: 12'. Ms. ET A/B: 39' reads: '[…]-ᵍ*ni*¹-*ta* MIN *kut-tim* MIN bur.gul.' Note that bur.gul maintains its logographic spelling rather than a syllabically rendered *parkullu* ('seal cutter'). Even though these manuscripts form a minority in the corpus, they are the only ones to preserve the lines that contain the repeating sequence of emes that is suitable for replacement.

Akkadian, and the latter replaces recurring words throughout the Akkadian version of the narrative.

The main recurring element in ET D is nam-dub-sar-ra or *ṭupšarrūtu* ('scribal art'), which is present at the start of the first seven lines. In ms ET D/B: 1'–4', MIN replaces the *ṭupšarrūtu*s, but still maintains the prepositions:

nam-dub-sar-ra […]
MIN *ṣa*-[…]
nam-dub-sar-[ra …]
MIN *la* […]
nam-dub-sar-ra […]
ana MIN […]
nam-dub-[sar-ra …]
ana MIN […]

In ms. ET X/C: 1–4, MIN replaces both the sender and the addressee of the letter in the Akkadian version:[73]

˹lugal-nesaŋ˺ ki ˹dur˺-an-ki-a ˹u$_3$˺-[…]
a-na MIN *ni-ip-pu-ri-i* […]
lugal-ibila urim$_2^{ki}$-ke$_4$ […]
um-ma MIN *u$_2$-ru*-[…]

Say to Lugal-nesaŋ of Nippur,
Lugal-ibila of Ur says to him:

To the scribe of this tablet, repetition of the personal names was redundant. The spelling would not change between the Sumerian and Akkadian version and the names are not integral to the understanding of the story. What may be important, is the fact that they are both Sumerian names that had become uncommon, if not fallen into disuse when the manuscripts were written.[74] The occurrence of MIN is enough to point the reader to the line above where these arguably old fashioned names are written out.

Next to the abbreviations of words by using (KI.)MIN, two manuscripts of Exam Texts exhibit a rare phenomenon: phonetic writing of Sumerian. Ms. ET D/B$_1$, which was edited by

[73] The transcription is after eBL.
[74] The names are not attested in Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian prosopographies (Baker, 2011; Gabbay, 2024).

Maul, 2010a, is a small fragment that contains the start of the first seven lines. Where we would expect nam-dub-sar-ra, it reads nam-tu-uš-ru. Moreover, in the Sumerian manuscript of ET X from Ugarit (ms. ET X/E_1), the entire text is spelled phonetically. For example, line 18 reads nam-dub-sar-re-eš-še. This means that some of the texts' users required the ability to read the Sumerian parts. According to Maul (2010a: 208), the recording of the phonemes is seen from the Old Babylonian period onwards. It was, however, especially important to the *kalû*s and *āšipu*s from late periods, who employed this knowledge in their professions.

1.4.2. Tablet Formatting

The division of the Exam Texts' manuscripts into lines and paragraphs is overall very consistent and follows the same order.[75] The sections of ET A's manuscripts that contain the examination use horizontal rulings to separate the questions, rather than the individual lines. As a result, a single passage can be as long as eight lines. Most manuscripts of the Exam Texts use the whole width of the tablet to write the text, placing the Akkadian versions of each line below the Sumerian. A total of five manuscripts use columns to demarcate the two languages, including a prism from Hattusha.[76] According to Cooper, columns are reminiscent of lexical lists and were maintained to write copies of scribal literature.[77] This theory may be based on the layouts of the Exam Text manuscripts being studied here.

The tablets that deviate from the standard formatting are most relevant to the study of their functionality. In this regard, ms. ET A/M (Figure 1) is noteworthy. In the first section of the obverse, the Akkadian precedes the Sumerian version of the line. The second half switches to a columnar format, where the Sumerian translations are added in superscript, giving the appearance of an extended gloss to accompany the entire line.[78] As the spacing on the reverse demonstrates, this is not done because of lack of space. These ostensible explanatory annotations in Sumerian may indicate that the Akkadian version took precedence and was used as a model for the Sumerian translation. The glosses would then serve to show what the latter could look like.

[75] Exceptions are ms. ET A/M_1, which places lines 14–15 between lines 17–18, and ms. ET A/M_4, which combines lines 18 and 19 into one section.
[76] According to Viano (2016: 345), "a pedagogical function can be supposed for those texts, both incantations and literary compositions, written on prisms (…), a format unknown to the Hittites but often used for school texts in Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian period."
[77] Cooper, 1993: 81.
[78] A gloss can be defined as an explanatory annotation to obscure readings of signs or words. Worthington,2012: 138.

Another manuscript, ET A/M_2, may rightfully be called messy. It is written in poor handwriting and with uneven spacing between signs and lines. Moreover, some lines are written fully in Sumerian and translated below in Akkadian, some are half Sumerian, half Akkadian, and some insert the Akkadian sentence in the middle of the Sumerian. The use of *Glossenkeile* (partition signs) is irregular as well – they only occur three times on the preserved part of the obverse. It may well be the product of an inexperienced scribe.

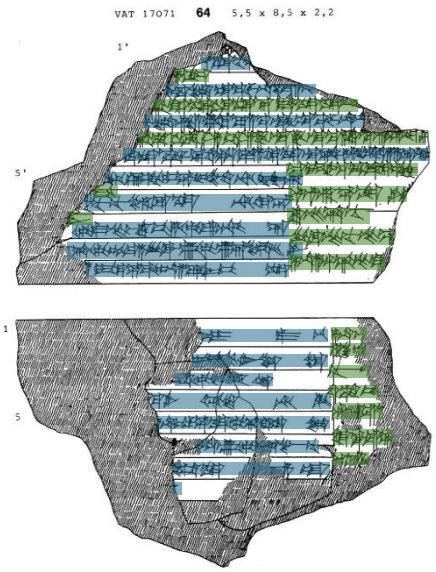

Figure 1: Ms. ET A/M. Copy: Van Dijk, VS 24, 64. Akkadian lines are highlighted in blue and Sumerian lines in green.

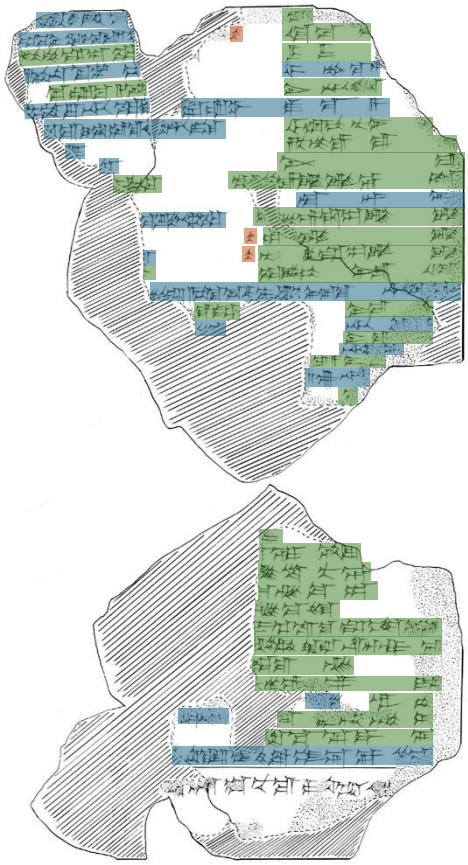

Figure 2: Ms. ET A/M2. Copy: Alster and Geller, CT 58, 63. Akkadian lines are highlighted in blue and Sumerian lines in green.

1.4.3. Conclusions

The variation exhibited between the manuscripts underscores the obvious fact that they are the products of individual endeavours. This is visible in the few aberrant tablet layouts, where scribes decided for themselves what information was most important, and how this should be presented. These deviations from the norm show that the same texts were written by both experienced scholars and much less advanced scribes. Every scribe wrote it with a specific purpose in mind. As the copious use of the sign MIN demonstrates, this was not always to create a perfect bilingual text, or to display their prowess in translation between Sumerian and

Akkadian. Instead, when copying the Exam Texts the message and implications of the stories might have been more important than language acquisition.

1.5. Conclusions

The colophons, archaeological and archival contexts, occurrences of extracts, and variation together display a rich tradition of copying the Exam Texts. Over more than 500 years this was done by various types of individuals for various types of purposes. Thus, the image that arises is diffuse. In many cases, they functioned as school texts. This is perhaps best demonstrated by ms. ET D/D, which is the only tablet type known to have been explicitly used for educational purposes. Additionally, many manuscripts are from the Library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh and the private archives and libraries of scholars, which is true for every period in which the Exam Texts are attested. It is not immediately evident what their benefit is in the performing of their daily duties. Rather, the functionality might be to support these scholarly communities. They were stored in the libraries of *āšipu*s and *kalû*s perhaps as heirlooms of their education, where they were employed to train new generations of professionals. Thus we can conclude that the Exam Texts were generally created and used in scholarly contexts that also hosted the scribal training of students.

2. Exam Texts and their Second-Millennium Predecessors

Early in their publication record, the Exam Texts were seen as products of OB scribal literature. The similarities mentioned in secondary literature remain generally superficial, focusing on style and structural elements. Because of the popularity of research into the OB eduba, this bias has significantly influenced later scholarship into the Exam Texts. This chapter critically compares the Exam Texts with OB scribal literature in order to evaluate these assumptions about their relationship. After an introduction on these older school texts, full translations of each Exam Texts will be presented to show diachronic intertextual comparison and contrast. Additionally, this chapter assesses are two small texts from the late second millennium that seem to reference passages from ET A.

2.1. Exam Texts and OB Scribal Literature

The curriculum of the eduba was divided into different stages. In the elementary stage, students familiarised themselves with the writing system through copying sign lists and thematic lexical lists, and learned mathematics and accounting. The Sumerian language – which was not native to the Akkadian students – was introduced using model contracts and proverbs. Only if the student chose to pursue a higher education, Sumerian literature became part of the curriculum. Some of these stories reflected on the lives of students. These narratives include dialogues between them and their parents, teachers, or fellow students. A total of six witnesses of this 'eduba-literature' are known, with a further three being classified as 'dialogues.'[79] These categories are however modern constructs; there is no evidence that they were conceived of as a coherent corpus by their scribes and users in the OB period.[80]

2.1.1. Exam Text A: 'Exam at the Scribal School'

1 A scribe tests his student
in the presence of the teachers, in the courtyard of the school.
'Come, my student, and sit near to me. I will speak to you and you will be listening.
From your childhood to your youth, you have dwelled at school.

[79] They are Eduba A, B, C, D, E, and R, and the Dialogue between Two Scribes, between Enki-hengal and Enkita-lu, and between Enki-manšum and Girine-isag. An overview can be found at https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/catalogue/catalogue5.htm.
[80] Kleinerman and Gadotti, 2017: 90, fn. 5.

Learning the scribal art, but not knowing its character.'

'What is it, that he doesn't know?'

'What do you know?

I will ask you questions. Speak! I will speak to you and you will reply to me.'

'Ask me a question! I will speak to you and I will reply to you.'

'You cannot reply to me!'

'Why can I not reply to you?'

'The beginning of the scribal art, the single wedge, that it has six voices, that it stands for "sixty", the raising of its voice, do you know it?

What Sumerian do you know? Its secret, do you know it?

Translating and interpreting from Akkadian above in Sumerian below, and from Sumerian above into Akkadian below, do you know it?

The 'subsitute', the 'transversal thing', the 'knotted', Sumerian that is two or threefold (in meaning?), that is not suitable for putting into Akkadian, do you know it?

… 'Finished', 'that which goes around', 'middle', … Sumerian tenses, that which is not tripled, … do you know it?

I, you, …, for him, 'uš', 'aš', 'eš', … which cannot be put in order in Sumerian and Akkadian, do you know it?

The writing board of the scribal art, 'eme-gal', 'eme-sukud', 'eme-tina', … covering up Akkadian and seeing it at the beginning and the end, do you know it?

The … normal, … oblique, changed, flat, the full sign, the unfinished sign, the inscribed sign … do you know it?

… Sumerian as the equal of Akkadian, do you know it?

The language of the 'nu-eš', of the 'išib', of the 'gudub', whose lines are split at the beginning … do you know it?

… The skillfully composed songs …, do you know it?

To properly set in order … its melody faithfully, do you know it?

… The song of the 'gala', of the 'en', of 'that which is related to urun', the song of truth, … to divide them into sections, the response, to change and to stop, do you know it?

Changed Akkadian, the language of the silversmith, of the seal cutter, to understand their conversation, do you know it?

To understand the language of talkers, to mix (words), the language of the ox-driver, of the cowherder, of the sailor, do you know it?

Multiplication, reciprocals, coefficients, balancing accounts, … making all kinds of assignments, dividing property shares, delimiting a field, do you know it?

To twist, … to run, … the lyre, the 'balaŋ', the 'harhar', their sounds, as many as there are, do you know it?'

'I did not listen to the words of my master. It did not pass into my heart.

You did not speak to me, my elder brother did not show it to me.

What do I know? What can I say to you?'

‘What have you done? Why are you sitting here?
You have finished your youth, you have reached old age.
Like an old ox, you are not suitable for learning.
Like shriveled grain, you have let the right time pass.
You do not tremble because of your companion, of the one who hits the head!
You do not consult with a clever one, you do not talk with someone who is wise!
Is my speech displeasing to you?
… bulging eyes …
… a boy …
How long will you be sated?
How long will you be confused / *will you play*?[81]
How long will you approach / *place* …?
How long will you be pale?
How long will you be deaf?
How long will you … of raising the head / *be heated up*?
You have no fear / *dried out one, of ... you are not afra*id!
You, with a head of uncultivated land, do not listen / *You are obstinate, you do not listen*!
Do not let your strength slacken / *you are strong, you are not weak!*
This is only a test, do not lament!
Do not be afraid, do not tighten your throat / *do not constantly worry and seek*!
Do not fill your mouth with complaints!
You are not one who turns your … to the door / *do not turn your ear to the door*!
Because of the scribal art, sit down, so that you are bowed.
May your heart think about this night and day.
The scribal art is a good lot, possessing a protective lama-spirit, is bright-eyed, and is ‘the need of the palace’.

ET A is the longest text of the corpus and contains the most elements that can be compared with OB compositions. Sjöberg (1974: 138–139) immediately referred to Eduba B, also known as ‘a scribe and his perverse son,’ which he published a year prior. According to him, both texts are dialogues between a scribe and his student, which can be extrapolated to a father and his son. The final section of both texts consists of insults and other offensive statements aimed at either the student or the son. This is the extent of Sjöberg’s initial comparison, which undoubtedly was meant to lay the groundwork for further research.

While the structures of ET A and Eduba B indeed look broadly similar, the same cannot be said for the characters featuring in them. In ET A, the scribe might be the student’s father.

[81] Italics following a / indicate a significant diversion in the Akkadian translation.

This is not true in Eduba B, where the father mentions a different individual as his son's teacher. Moreover, the setting is different. Whereas in ET A, both the scribe and his son are already present at the scribal school, the father in Eduba B urges his son to travel there. Lines 5–8 read:

tukum-bi ki-na-me-še$_3$ nu-du-de$_3$-en a-na-aš-am$_3$ u$_4$ mu-e-zal
e$_2$-dub-ba-a-zu-še$_3$ gen-[na] e$_2$-dub-ba-a-zu-še$_3$ gub-ba
eš$_2$-ŋar$_2$-zu šed-[da]-ab […] ŋal$_2$-tag$_4$-a-ab-en
dub-zu [sar]-ra-ab

Indeed, are you not going anywhere? Why are you wasting time?
Go get yourself to school, get yourself ready for school.
Read your task, open your […],
write your tablet![82]

Inquiring about his sons activities and giving him commands, the father's tone in this composition is much more strict than in ET A, where the questions remain neutral up to the point of the insults.

Another OB composition that lends itself for comparison with ET A is Eduba A, or 'father and son.'[83] Contrary to Eduba B, it offers a more positive perspective on the daily activities of a student at eduba, both at school and at home. This story is primarily told from the perspective of the son to his father, who is situated at home. In the narrative, the son claims he is being treated unfairly by his teacher, prompting the father to invite him to their house. Together, father and son convince the teacher that the son is indeed a good student. The teacher starts praising the student, wishing for him all the fortunes that the scribal art can provide under the auspices of Nisaba, goddess of writing and grain.

Two observations can be made about the relationship between these two Eduba Texts and ET A on a stylistic level. First, both Eduba A and B reflect on the activities, relationships, and organisation surrounding scribal education in the OB period. They reference daily schedules, teacher-student-parent relationships, and correct behaviour that is associated with mastering the scribal art. This stands in stark contrast with ET A, which does not contain any of these elements. Instead, it focuses on the contents of the curriculum and the evaluation of a student's education. Rather than narrating a story from within the time of his education, ET A

[82] Transliteration: Sjöberg, 1973. Translation modified from Sjöberg, 1973 and Vanstiphout, 2004.
[83] This is the earliest published Eduba Text. Kramer, 1949; Vanstiphout, 2004: 206–211; Attinger, 2019.

is placed at the end, looking back on the knowledge and skills the student is supposed to have acquired. Second, the dialogic style of ET A includes an unconventional feature. There is a third party, the assembly of scholars who are witnessing the exam, who are a third voice in the text (ET A: 6):

> a-na-am$_3$ niŋ$_2$ nu-mu-un-zu-am$_3$
> *mi$_3$-nu-u$_2$ ša la i-du-u*
>
> What is it, that he doesn't know?

Although it is only a single line, this is an aspect of ET A that is not present in any of the OB scribal literature. An OB school dialogue is always between two parties. These two observations show that even though ET A deals with the same topics as Eduba A and B, it is definitely not a direct copy or even directly inspired by them. The characters and the setting is entirely different. If Sjöberg's assertion that the composer of ET A knew Eduba B was true, these incongruencies would not have been present and ET A would imitate the OB texts much more closely.

A third example of OB scribal literature is much closer to ET A in terms of content. Eduba D, or the 'Dialogue between Examiner and Student,' narrates the proceedings of an examination of a student in a scribal school. In addition to the introduction of Eduba D, which is almost identical to the opening lines of ET B and will be discussed below, the exam questions also reference specific aspects of the education that the student received:

ET A: 9–12	**Eduba D: 6–20**[84]
'Ask me a question! I will speak to you and I will reply to you.'	'I have always listened to the explanations of my master. I will answer you'.
'You cannot reply to me!'	'You can answer me, but what do you write?'
'Why can I not reply to you?'	'If you examine what I write, (you will see that) I have three months left in school.'
	'I can read and write Sumerian and Akkadian words from *a-a me-me* until […]. I have written all the lines of *Inana-teš* from 'animals of the field' to the end/beginning of lu$_2$ = *šū.*[85] I will show you the signs, their writing and solutions, and how they sound.'

[84] Translation based on the editions from Civil, 1985a and Vanstiphout, 1997.
[85] This list is conventionally called lu$_2$ = *ša.*

'The beginning of the scribal art, the single wedge, that it has six voices, that it stands for "sixty", the raising of its voice, do you know it?'	'Show me! I will not present anything too difficult for you.'
	'Even if I am assigned lu_2 = *šū* on my exercise tablet,[86] I can give you the 600 meanings of lu_2 in order.'[87]

Table 2: Comparison between ET A and Eduba D.

ET A and Eduba D share their setting and contain a student-examiner interaction. Still, a close inspection of the examination yields important differences in the characters between the two texts. One aspect of Eduba D's exam is that the student offers a written text to the examiner, to have the examiner check his work rather than listening to his claims. Doing this would show that the student has almost reached the end of his education. This can be contrasted with the examination in ET A, which is oral. Second, the procedure of the exam is different between the texts. Whereas in ET A the student's own teacher asks the questions, in Eduba D there is an official examinator scrutinising him. For this reason, the student keeps referring back to what his teacher has taught him, and boasts about his performance at school where the examiner was not present (Eduba D: 21–25):

niŋ$_2$-kas$_7$ u$_4$ e$_2$-dub-ba-a i$_3$-tuš-u$_3$-na mu-ŋar-ra
u$_4$ du$_8$-a-ŋu$_{10}$ iti-da u$_4$ 3-am$_3$
ezen dil-dil-be$_2$ iti-da u$_4$ 3-am$_3$
ša$_3$-ba iti-da u$_4$ 24-am$_3$
e$_2$-dub-ba-a i-in-ti-i-na-ŋu$_{10}$ u$_4$-da gid$_2$-da nam-me

The daily schedule of the school was established (thus):
My days off were three per month
Various festivals were three per month
In there, a month was 24 days
which I spent at school. The days were not long.[88]

Similar to Eduba A and B, this passage shows that presenting the daily organisation of the schools is one of the focal points of the OB scribal literature. In Eduba D, the student boasts

[86] The term used is im-šu. These are Type IV lentil-shaped exercise tablets. Veldhuis, 1997: 38–40.
[87] lu$_2$ = *ša* does not have 600 lemmata. Vanstiphout, 2004: 236, fn. 140.
[88] Transliteration modified from Civil, 1985a: 70.

that he has no problems maintaining this schedule. It fits in the broader atmosphere of this examination, where the student is eager to present his knowledge and skills to the examiner before the questions are even asked. This is already seen in lines 6–20 cited above, and continues after the explanation of the school's schedule in lines 27–38. The behaviour of Eduba D's student stands in sharp contrast to the student of ET A, who does not interrupt the barrage of questions that his teacher is asking him. His only response is the rhetorical question "what can I tell you?" He is unable to answer the questions that the teacher is asking him.

At this point in both stories, the narratives of Eduba D and ET A take the same direction. The formal examination of the student in Eduba D ends in a fragmentary state. In the next preserved section, following line 70, two characters start exchanging insults with each other. It is unclear whether these are the student and the examiner, or if another party has been introduced. Since this section remains unpublished, it can currently not be studied and compared to ET A.[89]

We may conclude that out of the OB scribal literature, ET A bears most resemblances with Eduba D. Both texts contain the same characters, share the topic of an examination at school, and the dialogical buildup to the start of the questionnaire is almost identical. The main difference is the agency of the student, who is almost silent in ET A and is boastful in Eduba D. Between ET A and Eduba B, the topic of scribal education is perhaps the only real commonality.

2.1.2. Exam Text D: 'In Praise of the Scribal Art'

1. The scribal art is the mother of orators, the father of experts
   The scribal art gives a good fate, its joy never goes away
   The scribal art is joyful, its abundance is not satisfied
   The scribal art knows the rites, who knows it is not stressed
   The scribal art cannot be understood, who knows it is not stressed
   If you plan to use the scribal art, it will add power for you
   Plan to use the scribal art, it will add profits for you
5. If you plan to follow the scribal art, it will get you goods and possessions
   Devote yourself to the scribal art, it will supply you with riches
   Do not elevate[?] the scribal art, do not neglect it
   Do not neglect the scribal art, do not be idle
   The scribal art is a house of richness, the place of the secret of Amanki
   The scribal art is a house of goodness, the secret of Amanki

[89] Civil, 1985a: 78 states that they are of great lexicographical and sociological interest, but allegedly do not relate to scholarly activities and therefore fall outside the scope of his edition.

…, it will show you the secret

If you work hard for it, it will show you its secrets

Do not neglect it, it will disperse you

Do not be idle for it, badness will be said about you

10. The scribal art is a good lot of richness and plenty

Since your youth you were not filled up, since your adolescence you …

During your youth, you were annoyed, during your growing up …

The scribal art is the bond of everything …

The scribal art is the bond of everything, the nature of the father of the experts

Do not place … on it, … you find

If you abandon it, its goodness […] *you see*

To learn unparallelled knowledge and Sumerian, to learn eme[…] …

To learn great knowledge and Sumerian, to learn …

15 To write on a stela, to measure out a field, to regulate an account

To learn to write on a stela, to measure out a field, complete an account

… palace …

… that palace …

The scribe is truly its descendant, is imposed on him, he will … the *dupsik*-basket

The scribe is truly a servant, he will call the tupšikku-*basket*

Hurowitz (2000) has analysed ET D from a literary perspective, uncovering sophisticated structures in the seventeen lines of the composition. The term nam-dub-sar-ra / *ṭupšarrūtu* ("scribal art") occurs in ten lines, while the last line starts with dub-sar / *ṭupšarru* ("scribe"). Furthermore, lines 3, 5, 6 and 7 form a chiastic structure with lines 8, 9, 10 and 14 whereby certain key words are repeated.[90] Between the keywords of lines 7 and 8 in the middle of the chiasm we find the name Amanki. According to Hurowitz, the combination of this location with this divine name cannot be a coincidence, as it falls directly in the centre of the four chiasms. Additionally, the first seven lines all start with 'the scribal art' and this sequence is broken in line 8.[91] ^{d}am-an-ki is an emesal spelling of the name Enki.[92] This line features a word play on his Akkadian name Ea in the phrase e$_2$-a niŋ-tuku ki uri$_3$.[93] The occurrence of Ea is at first glance surprising, because he is not the patron god of scribes. Instead, one would expect Nabû or even Nisaba to be present, who have a closer relation to writing – arguably the essence of

[90] Hurowitz, 2000: 52.
[91] Hurowitz, 2000: 52–53.
[92] The Akkadian version of this line uses the same spelling, but has the suffix *-ma* rather than -ke$_4$. For the name Amanki, sometimes spelled ^{d}am-ma-an-ki, see Ebeling, 1938: 376. The reference to emesal in line 14 may be a clue to help decipher the name Amanki for those that did not understand its eme-gi$_7$ reading.
[93] The Akkadian version of this line is e$_2$ *bu-ni* ('a house of goodness'). Hurowitz, 2000: 53, fn. 15.

the scribal art itself. In this case, Ea is referenced as the god of secrecy, a topic which will be discussed in Section 3.2. The wordplay and complex chiasmic structures contained within the text have been interpreted as an example of the broader but still rather vaguely delineated category of wisdom literature.[94] Arguably, no OB bilingual literary text demonstrates such innovative use of both languages woven into the fabric of the text.

ET D:15 shows similarities with ET A: 27, which concerns mathematics and administration, with the exception of the writing on stone (stelae). These practical aspects of the scribal art stand in contrast to those mentioned in the previous line, which mentions "unparallelled knowledge and Sumerian."[95] A reminiscent list of skills that are acquired by a student after having completed school is found in the OB composition Eduba D (34–39):

> eme-gi$_7$ nam-dub-sar ša$_3$-dub-ba šid niŋ$_2$-kas$_7$-še$_3$ mu-da-a-b-sa$_2$-sa$_2$-e-en
> eme-gi$_7$-ta inim mu-da-ab-bal-e-en
>
> "I have completed Sumerian, the scribal art, and accounting. I can translate from Sumerian."[96]

The values ascribed to each skill may be hard to ascertain, but their juxtaposition shows that they were all equally important results of attending the scribal school. The fact that according to Eduba C Sumerian bookends the scribal art and accounting is different from the comparable passage in ET D: 14–15, where there is a clear order from the sophisticated and esoteric to the practical.

ET D is difficult to compare to OB scribal literature because there is no direct equivalent. It is styled as a hymn; a genre which is not attested within the corpus of Eduba literature. This is a major reason why it cannot have been directly based on any such predecessor. Typically, OB hymns to Nisaba focus on her divine status and relations with the other gods.[97] Alternatively, the famous hymn to the Sumerian king Šulgi mentions the same broad tenets of the scribal art: mathematics and accounting, and playing music. However, its style is very different: it is written in the first person and contains many other topics that are unrelated to scribal education.[98]

[94] Hurowitz, 2000: 49–50.
[95] Previous editions of ET D combine lines 14 and 15 into one, assuming a single enumeration despite the fact that none of the manuscripts preserve the end of line 14.
[96] Transliteration modified from Civil, 1985a: 70.
[97] Nisaba A: ETCSL 4.16.1.
[98] Šulgi B: ETCSL 2.4.2.02.

A last topic that is addressed by both ET A and D is the role of the scribal art in relation to the palace:

ET A: 56
nam-dub-sar-ra (…) niŋ$_2$-ša$_3$-ḫab e$_2$-gal-la-ke$_4$
ṭupšarrūtu (…) *ḫišiḫti* e$_2$.gal

The scribal art (…) is the need of the palace.

ET D: 17
dub-sar a ri-a-be$_2$ ḫe-a ^{gi}dupsik ab-[x-x]
ṭupšarru lū arad išassi ina tupšikku

The scribe is truly a descendant, it is imposed on him, he will … the *dupsik*-basket
the scribe is truly a servant, he will call the tupšikku-*basket*.

Sjöberg (1972: 127) assumed that the scribe of ET D:17 was a descendant of the scribal art, whereas Peterson interprets the scribe as a descendant of the palace mentioned one line earlier.[99] Because of the association with accounting and the role of the scribe in administration shown above, the latter interpretation seems more likely. Consequently, this allows for a significant observation in relation to the OB scribal literature. Despite the OB student's proclamations to be proficient in matters like accounting and mathematics, it is never explicitly stated that the scribal art is meant to be used at a palace. In fact, according to OB scribal literature , a scribe – or by extension, the scribal art – should never be at the service of another institution. In ideological terms the ability to read and write is always portrayed as the highest goal one can achieve.

2.1.3. Exam Text B

Section 1

1 … say …
'Boy, are you a student?'
'I am a student.'
'If you really are a student,
5 Come on, I will say this to you,
Let me say this to you:

[99] Peterson supplied the BLMS project with his translations, so this version is present there.

Do you know Sumerian?'

'I know Sumerian.'

'Do you know how to translate[?] from Sumerian?'

10 'I know how to translate[?] from Sumerian.'

(unknown number of lines missing, including ms. E obv., which is too fragmentary for translation)

Section 2

1 …

Your hand…

Your hand must make it very big!

Your hand must make it very small!

5 Your hand must erect it!

Your hand must not make it thick!

Your hand must not make it thin!

Your hand must set it down!

Your hand must make it full!

10 Your hand must check it!

You must put them there, you must tell them to stand!

There is no (…)

What does he say about me?

You are at the scribal school, sit down!

15 …at the 'greatest scribal school' in the land…

If really … at the 'greatest scribal school in the land'…

…for the third time – Akkadian…

…

(small number of lines missing)

1' … Get out of…

… with your mouth, you must not cross it!

… I will write you a second [imgidda[?]]/*liginnu*-tablet!

… you must write…, you must have your name written by a seal-cutter!

5' … may you write it!

… if you are able, you will write it yourself!

… you are a scribe, sit down!

… my brother, you do not choose it yourself.

… he knows the scribal art.

10' … your constantly listening to the [master scribes?].

… you return to [your side?], you will choose it yourself.

… your master scribes.

… big brothers[?].

… my master scribes.

(small number of lines missing)

1'' From Sumerian…

That … not Sumerian…

The result (of a calculation) twice and thrice…

From your side…

5'' To the knowledgeable man, you are not equal.

Do you, or don't you know Sumerian?

Sumerian…

Section 3

1 … (of) Eridu, *emegalamma* that we understand…

… impressions[?] of my deep heart…

Look at the …, their darkness must be made light. / *Look at the secret of ..., you must make their darkness light.*

… from Sumerian … to translate. / *... from Sumerian* (…) *to give their gift.*

5 … of Ur, that Nisaba placed down.

… may the wisdom be placed near your heart, their eyes are truly bright for you.

… move with you, may you appear to constantly care about the scribal school! / *be happy, may you be a regular in the scribal school!*

… the big tablets, when you were born. / *... of the big tablets, you are their child.*

… you must make your master scribes heavy (important), the scribal art…

10 May you learn …[100]

Due to the large number of lacunae and missing lines, a discussion on the general structure of the text cannot be extensive compared to ET A and D. Nevertheless, the introduction survives well enough to compare it to several OB school texts.[101]

ET B: 1–9	**Eduba D: 1–7**	**Eduba R: 1–7**
[…] says […]		
'Boy, are you a student?'	'Boy, are you a student?'	'Boy, are you a student?'
'I am a student.'	'I am a student'	'I am a student.'
'If you really are a student, come on, I will (say) this to you, let me say this to you:	'If you really are a student,	'If you really are a student,

[100] A first attempt at restoring the text was made in a term paper for the course 'Advanced Sumerian' at Leiden University, submitted in January 2024. This is an improved version that allows for interpretations not present in that paper.

[101] The extent to which both OB compositions share similarities among themselves warrants a separate study. Eduba D and R share their opening lines: for this reason they have their third lines as incipits: eme gi$_7$ e-zu-u$_3$ for Eduba D (Civil, 1985a: 67) and a-na-am$_3$ a$_2$-aŋ$_2$-ŋa$_2$ e$_2$-dub-ba-kam for Eduba R (Gadotti and Kleinerman, 2017: 95, 112).

do you know Sumerian?'	do you know Sumerian?'	do you know the rules of the school?'
'I know Sumerian.'	'I know how to speak Sumerian.'	'If you ask me about the rules of the school, let me place it for you: from sunrise to sunset I would be answering, there would be no end to my words.[102] I know the rules of the school, which are endless.'
'Do you know how to translate from Sumerian [into Akkadian?]?'	'You are young, how can you speak it?'	
[…]	'I have always listened to the explanations of my master. I will answer you'.	

Table 3: Comparison between the introductions of ET B, Eduba D, and Eduba R.

In these three texts, instead of a student being directly addressed, the teacher first asks if the young person (lu₂ tur / *ṣeḫru*) is indeed a student. The student's affirmative reply functions as a narrative device, as it is immediately challenged by the teacher and provokes the start of the examination. At this point, the narratives deviate.

Eduba D contains a student's claims to have mastered the 'scribal art'.[103] Despite the fact that ET B does include some verbs in the first person singular, they are not boastful like in Eduba D. Moreover, the student of Eduba D expresses his wish to put his scribal skills into practice as an accountant. While mathematics and some administrative operations are mentioned in ET A, such explicit ambitions for accounting is not included in the surviving parts of ET B, nor anywhere else in the exam texts.[104]

Eduba R, also known as 'the rules of the school,'[105] discusses the daily activities of a student from his own perspective, including lengthy exhibits of the roles of various officials working in the institution and how the student interacts with them.[106] The instructions of the school are framed in terms of directives – 'this is how a student behaves according to the rules' – rather than ET B's optatives – 'may you behave like this in order to achieve wisdom.' ET B thus takes the notion of the 'scribal art' in a different direction. Its instructions deal with

[102] inim-inim-da nu-mu-da-til-le: contra Gadotti and Kleinerman, 2017: 109 who translate 'and I wouldn't be able to finish my assignments!'
[103] Vanstiphout, 1997.
[104] The ultimate goal of the 'scribal art' as stated by the Exam Texts will be discussed in section 2.2.
[105] Gadotti and Kleinerman, 2017.
[106] There are various men in charge of minute details such as the courtyard (Eduba R, section 1: 17) water jugs (section 2: 1, 3), lentil-shaped tablets (section 2: 2). There is a correlation between these officials and the lexical list OB lu₂; for a discussion see Gadotti and Kleinerman, 2017: 115.

techniques on how to make clay tablets as indicated by the repeating phrase 'your hand must…' (section 2: 2–10), with directives on how to behave according to the social hierarchy of the school (section 2: 1'–14'), and – like ET A – with translation skills of Sumerian (section 2: 1''–7'').[107] While Eduba R mentions many types of officials working at the scribal school, the number of characters in ET B is much smaller. The scribe is addressed as 'my brother' (šeš-ŋu$_{10}$ / *aḫī*),[108] and at least one teacher (*ummānu*) is mentioned.[109] This implies that the person giving the instructions may be a more experienced student rather than a teacher, for which there is precedent: Eduba C presents the same relationship between instructor and addressee.[110]

The instructions for 'your hand' are not explicitly connected to fashioning clay tablets – or this information has not survived – but especially the instructions to not 'pile it up' or 'make it soft' point in this direction. These instructions appeal to a process or method as opposed to a result. Alternatively, the menial activities may be related to calligraphy similar to the ET A passage about sign shapes (l. 19), but the terminology is too dissimilar to support this theory and the verb sar ('to write') is absent. The fashioning of clay tablets was part of the scribe's profession as is mentioned in the OB scribal literature.[111] These lines are, however, the only references in all four Exam Texts dealing with this particular task. In fact, the materials needed for writing are mentioned in only two other places: ET A: 18 mentions a 'writing board' (*lē'u*).[112] Writing boards are not attested in OB scribal literature, with the exception of the $^{(ŋeš)}$dub-dim$_2$.[113](lit. 'tablet creator', mentioned as the responsibility of one of the officials in Eduba R).[114] Additionally, ET X mentions stripped leather in the context of writing implements.

Another OB school text that lends itself for comparison with ET B is Eduba C, otherwise known as the 'Dialogue between a Supervisor and a Scribe'.[115] This text narrates how an experienced scribe gives some life lessons to a younger scribe that are not only limited to the 'scribal art', but seem to extend to human qualities in general. He attempts to teach him humility, restraint, modesty, and gratitude. In return, the younger scribe answers that he is already a professional and lists his responsibilities in the house of his teacher. For this, the older

[107] Note that in all cases, any references to Akkadian that could have existed have broken off.
[108] ET B, section 2: 8'. Only the Akkadian survives.
[109] ET B, section 2: 12', 14'.
[110] Vanstiphout, 1997: 590-592.
[111] The most striking example is found in Eduba A: 5: 'I prepared my tablet'. This observation argues against Young's assertion (2024:341) that such descriptions have not been found.
[112] This line survives in only one manuscript (ET A/D: 2') and only in Akkadian. It is therefore uncertain if other manuscripts included this line as well.
[113] Eduba R, section 2: 4ff. The word literally means 'tablet creator' It was an implement used to shape tablets, and there are no indications that it had a surface that was meant to be inscribed. See Attinger, 2021: 304; ePSD.
[114]
[115] Vanstiphout, 1997: 590–592.

scribe praises the other, wishing for him all the benefits that the 'scribal art' can provide. One of these praises is 'Nisaba has placed the responsibility of the teacher in your hand. She will change the fate that was decided for you, may she place your hand on you!'[116] Nisaba, the patron goddess of writing until the OB period, commonly features in scribal literature. Many texts are dedicated to her as is evidenced by the phrase 'praise Nisaba! (^{d}nisaba za$_3$-mi$_2$).[117]

[… ur]im$_2^{ki}$ ^{d}nisaba du$_3$-du$_3$ gar-ra-ke
[… *š*]*a*$_2$ *u*$_2$*-ri ši-ik-na-ti ša*$_2$ ^{d}*nisaba*

… of Ur, that Nisaba placed down.

This attestation of Nisaba's name in ET B, section 3: 5 is the only one in the Exam Text corpus: The connection with the city of Ur made here is noteworthy. No OB or later text associates Nisaba with this city. Instead, she is said to reside in the city of Ereš. Where does the association of Ur and Nisaba come from? The answer may be hidden in the broken first part of the line. Perhaps the memory of the aforementioned king Shulgi of Ur, who in an OB hymn is portrayed as a 'smart scribe of Nisaba'[118] is the missing link.[119] The further absence of the titulary goddess of writing in the Exam Texts demonstrates her loss of popularity after the OB period.[120] However, the Babylonian god of writing Nabû, is not mentioned in the Exam Texts either (excluding the colophons).

2.1.4. Exam Text X: Letter from Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaŋ

1 Say to Lugal-nesaŋ of Nippur
Lugal-ibila of Uruk, says to him:
Do not so greatly neglect the message that I sent to you!
And do not neglect the child that sits in front of you!
5 You must explain him every skill of the 'scribal art'
You must show him the solutions of the tablets with calculations and accounting
You must explain to him the secrets of the old cuneiform signs

[116] Eduba C: 62–63: ^{d}nisaba dugud-da um-mi-a šu-za i-ni-in-ŋar-ra nam i-ri-tar-ra mu-na-ra-kur$_2$-ru šu zi ḫa-ra-an-ŋar (transliteration: modified from ETCSL 5.1.3)
[117] Among the texts included in the current discussion, it is attested in manuscripts of Eduba A, Eduba C, Eduba R and Dialogue 1. In general, it was a frequent inclusion in many products of OB scribal schools.
[118] A Praise Poem of Shulgi (Shulgi A), ETCSL 2.4.2.1: 19: dub-sar gal-zu ^{d}nisaba-kam-me-en.
[119] On the reception of king Shulgi in first millennium literature, see Sallaberger, RlA 13: 278–279 and Lenzi, 2013: 183–184.
[120] Michalowski, 1998–2001: 578–579.

The cut reed, the stripped leather and clay, you will give to him
The field that was harrowed three times …
And don't you know that … write a message … like a child?
When spreading …, do not neglect the clay of the scribal art!
The head of the man who … the food …
The feet of the man who lies down …
… to gather …
… on a single string, may he wish for a god and a protective Lamma-spirit
… a garment and a headdress …
… to the place of his father
Until I write you a message, in the school …
Until the signal that you and I have talked about …
You must not let the child go!
His father … the wellbeing of this child …[121]

The final text to be discussed is not part of the original Exam Text corpus that Sjöberg published on behalf of Landsberger, but fits the definition and should therefore be included. It is the only text that has a direct precursor in the OB scribal curricula: the letter from Inim-Inana to Lugal-ibila.[122] It is one of the epistolary texts that were studied by students early in the second phase of their education (OB period), but their placement in the scribal curricula of the first millennium is unclear.[123] In fact, its similarities to the OB literary letter are so evident, that Kleinerman (2011) includes ET X in her publication about this epistolary material. Civil (2000) also publishes both letters in the same article, stating how the later version "illustrates the way scribes, no longer capable of originality, put together "new" texts and tried, often ineffectually, to preserve a literary tradition."[124] While he is right about the fact that the ET X can be considered "new", the creative adaption of the source material shows anything but unoriginality and ineffectuality. ET X's relationship with its previous version is vital to understanding the process through which traditions were preserved, or at least reflected upon.

Say to Lugal-ibila,
Thus says Inim-Inana:
Do not neglect your Sumerian!

[121] Kleinerman bases some aspects of her reconstruction on the later ET X, while in its edition Civil (2000: 113) says that his is a "relatively free" attempt to get close to the late OB original. In order to avoid circular reasoning, my translations stick as much to the available manuscripts as possible.
[122] Kleinerman, 2011: SEpM 22; ETCSL 3.3.12.
[123] The text is not known from a type I or II school tablet according to the typology of Gesche, 2001.
[124] Civil, 2000: 105.

For the second time, I am writing you a message in the correct language.
The children, who are sitting before you,
you must not let them leave the school!
Moreover, if someone wants to trump you,
saying to you 'I will go' because of his father's authority:
Until the signal that you and I talked about,
or until I send you a message,
you must not let the children go!
You are responsible for […]. It is urgent![125]

ET X adds eight more lines to the original composition and modifies the others. Even the address of the letter has been changed: while the OB letter did not state where the two persons lived, ET X does. Lugal-ibila is from Uruk and writes to Lugal-nesaŋ from Nippur. The toponym is written *ni-ip-pu-ri-i* (ms. ET X/C: 1) and *ni-pu-ri-ia* (ms. ET X/E_2: 1). It is uncertain whether the addressee is located in Nippur, or if he originates from Nippur and carries the epithet for this reason. Nevertheless, there is a clear association between Lugal-nesaŋ the teacher and Nippur as an ancient religious and scholarly centre.

In the first line of the message (ET X: 3), the object of the statement 'do not neglect your Sumerian' is replaced with 'the message that I sent to you.' Kleinerman (2011: 181) points out that the notion of neglect appears in ET D as well. In ET X it is however said to the teacher rather than to the student, with ironic effect. The omission of Sumerian is striking, as understanding the language is crucial to the other Exam Texts. The second part of this line, 'I am sending you a message in the correct language' refers to Sumerian being the only 'proper' language in educational circumstances. The fact that it is not retained in ET X, may indicate that this was no longer the case in the contexts where it is attested. Alternatively, Civil (2000: 108–109) argued that eme si-sa_2 could designate a grammatical term, meaning that Inim-Inana shows his ability to write 'correct' Sumerian.

Another innovative feature of ET X that is not present in the OB letter is found in lines 5–8. Here we find a quote of Eduba A: 60–62, which originally read:

I explained him many times every skill of the scribal art
To show him the solutions of he tablets with calculations and accounting,
I explained to him all the secrets of the cuneiform signs.[126]

[125] Own translation based on Kleinerman, 2011.
[126] Own translation after Viano, 2016: 269.

The indicative mode of this OB narrative text has been replaced by commands in ET X, but the contents remain the same. The reference is notable because these lines are not part of the source's introduction. This is usually the case, as previous examples in this chapters have shown. It means that when ET X was composed, large portions of Eduba A were still accessible.

The inclusion of writing materials is also new, but is reminiscent of many OB texts in which the preparation of writing implements is essential to the scribe's profession (see the discussion in the previous section). ET X: 8 is, however, the only place in the corpus of scribal literature where stripped leather is used as a writing surface.[127] Following several fragmentary lines, line 15 expresses the father's wish that his son receive a god and a protective Lamma-spirit, which is also encountered in ET A: 55 as a property of the scribal art. Both versions of the letter conclude in the same way by warning the teacher to closely monitor the time when the children can go home.

The genre of literary letters was popular in OB school contexts. About the purpose of copying these Sumerian letters, Kleinerman notes that there was little practical use outside of the classroom. The Sumerian language was hardly used as a spoken language in the second millennium, and its role in the curricula served to "promote and promulgate a sense of Babylonian cultural identity."[128] This sense of unity was legitimised by some letters being ascribed to ancient kings.[129] The format of the letter gives the message of the text an additional dimension that it otherwise would not have had: the text becomes relatable and engaging as educational material.[130]

Letters continued to be used in pedagogical contexts into the first millennium.[131] ET X does not preserve any aspect of royal rhetoric. Its legitimising force is not aimed at the state, but at the heritage of scribal institutions.[132] This purpose became ever more persuasive by adding aspects of contemporary scribal education – understanding 'secrets' and perhaps writing on stripped leather. In OB scribal texts, the word ul-la ('old') is never used to qualify teaching material – not even in Eduba A: 62 which is quoted in ET X. The addition of this adjective legitimises the seniority of the 'scribal art'.

[127] ET X : 8: kuš al-ḫi-a / *mašku letû*. Civil (2000: 113) translates 'leather strips'. The attribute ḫi-a is also used for im 'clay' immediately afterward (an Akkadian translation is not preserved).
[128] Kleinerman, 2011: 96.
[129] For this subgenre, see Michalowski, 2011. With respect to their literary setting, see pp. 35–63.
[130] Kleinerman, 2011: 98.
[131] Four other OB literary letters are known from manuscripts from the first millennium, see Kleinerman, 2011: 99 fn. 19.
[132] Kleinerman, 2011: 99.

2.2. Kassite Predecessors of Exam Texts

There are two tablets that can be named forerunners to the Exam Texts. Bartelmus names the first a 'kind of Exam Text,' as it contains seven Akkadian lines that closely resemble ET A: 13, 18: "[…] cuneiform sign […] to interpret the secret of Sumerian, can you do it? Eme-gal, eme-suḫ, reading their artistry, can you do it?"[133] According to Bartelmus, explicit mimation (in e.g. eme-gal-*am*) might be an attempt at archaising spelling. The short text consists of two questions. Unlike in ET A, where the verb is *tīde* 'do you know it?', here the verb is *tele"i* 'can you do it?' It seems appealing to interpret this difference as a development from practical to theoretical knowledge, but this is impossible to conclude without further evidence.

The second text that Bartelmus relates to ET A is shorter, but bilingual. It is however slightly broken and difficult to interpret: "How long must you […]? How long must you […]?"[134] These lines show similarities with ET A: 41–46, where they form part of the teacher's insulting rhetorical questions.

Both tablets originate from the same context. Archive M6 from Merkes, Babylon contains a large amount of school tablets from the Kassite or Middle Babylonian period (ca. 1400–1100 BCE).[135] They are small exercise tablets and the lines are therefore likely excerpts from literary texts.[136] Without the availability of a complete composition from this time, it cannot be established if the excerpts reference an original OB school text or if ET A was already in existence in the same form that passed into the first millennium.

2.3. Conclusions

The Exam Texts show many similarities to compositions that originate from the realm of OB scribal literature. In some cases, like the opening lines of ET B, it is hard to imagine a lack of direct descendance between them. It is, however, telling that most of these correspondences occur only in the introduction of the texts before they deviate. Afterwards, they are different texts entirely. Compared to the OB texts, the Exam Texts are vague retellings of school life without the specifics about curriculum and school personnel. Indeed, superficial similarities can be found on the level of genre (dialogue, hymn, instructional text, letter), on structural levels

[133] Bab 36669, 14 = VAT 21956. It was found in the Merkes neighbourhood. Translation after Bartelmus, 2016: 163–164, 357.
[134] Bab 36669, 19 = ROM 910x209.184. Bartelmus, 2016: 160, 360–361. For the difficulties in the verbs, see the discussion there.
[135] Bartelmus, 2016: 77ff.
[136] Bartelmus, 2016: 86.

(introduction, main address, flamboyant closing line), and on the level of the characters that operate in the stories. Still, these elements are too general to argue for an OB date for the Exam Texts. Their authors' familiarity with the OB textual tradition stands without question. However, whether the level of distortion is due to a broken chain of transmission or conscious creative choice, is more difficult to determine. To do this, a different approach is needed. The next chapter analyses the Exam Texts from the perspective of post-OB linguistic and literary innovations.

3. Exam Texts as Post-OB Products

This chapter shifts the focus from the OB period to the first millennium, when almost every known manuscript of the Exam Texts was written.[137] It aims to study whether the Exam Texts can be characterised as products of post-OB literary traditions. There are two ways to approach this question. First, the Sumerian grammar and vocabulary of the Exam Texts will be analysed and compared with other bilingual texts from the first millennium. These other texts especially include lexical lists, which Veldhuis (2018) has shown to provide a proper basis for intertextual analysis. An exhaustive study of the Sumerian language in its first millennium form, also called 'late Sumerian' or 'post-Sumerian,' is still lacking.[138] While this falls outside of the scope of this thesis, it will attempt to make the Exam Texts accessible for this purpose. Second, this chapter employs a thematic approach to demonstrate the Exam Texts' affiliation with first millennium scholarly practices: the notions of secrecy and secret knowledge.

3.1. Late Sumerian Grammar and Vocabulary

Veldhuis (2018) lists four types of bilingual literary texts in the first millennium. There are 1) Sumerian literary texts of the OB period that were supplied with Akkadian translations, and sometimes had interpretations. There are also 2) emesal liturgies of which the Akkadian translations vary from literal to exegetical and 3) incantations in which the Sumerian significantly deviates from the OB 'classical' Sumerian. A fourth group is designated by Veldhuis as "a mixed bag of prayers and hymns, royal inscriptions, and Eduba texts."[139] With Eduba texts, he means ET A, D, and X. This last group is generally characterised by deviations from classical Sumerian morphology and syntax and the use of rare or invented words not found in OB Sumerian literature.

These markers had previously been studied by Jacobsen (1991) in regard to a bilingual royal inscription of Šamaš-šuma-ukīn (r. 668–648 BCE). He focused on the "many and so puzzling grammatical irregularities" in the Sumerian version of the text. 'Akkadianisms,' or traces of Akkadian influence on Sumerian, include orthography (e.g. nominalised renderings of finite verbs as part of personal names), inconsistent substitution of standard Sumerian by emesal

[137] The exceptions are the manuscripts of ET X from Ugarit and Hattusha.
[138] See e.g. Hallo, 2010: 79.
[139] Veldhuis, 2018: 186.

equivalents, the confusion of the nonhuman and human noun classes in Sumerian with male and female in Akkadian, and many smaller grammatical anomalies that are not part of 'classical Sumerian' of OB period literature.[140] According to Jacobsen, these phenomena can be largely explained as conscious efforts by the text's scribes to create a "highly artificial and abstruse style" of Sumerian.[141] George (2009: 108–109) argues that this is a symptom of the fact that Sumerian by this time had become an academic language, known to its users mostly from lexical lists and grammatical tables. While refraining from adding to the interpretation of the Sumerian of the royal inscriptions, he thus frames it in a more positive light. The designation 'academic Sumerian' demonstrates the creativity and ingenuity that the scribes were able to pour into their texts. This creative employment of the Sumerian language is parallelled in ET D. As discussed in the previous chapter, it contains examples of word play, vocabulary from lexical lists and sophisticated stylistic devices that structure the text.

A well known first-millennium composition where these features are present is known as the Elevation of Ishtar, included by Veldhuis in the same group of bilingual miscellanea as the Exam Texts. Only two of its five known tablets are relatively well preserved, and the provenance of most manuscripts is similar to that of the Exam Texts.[142] The sections below present the presence of emesal, grammar, and vocabulary similar to Veldhuis's methodology, in order to demonstrate the wide applicability of his observations and conclusions.

Since ET A:14 attests not only to "translating and interpreting from Sumerian above into Akkadian below," but also to translating the languages the other way around, the notion of translation should also be entertained. In exceedingly rare cases, Akkadian literature was translated into Sumerian. This may have happened in educational contexts, as ET A: 14 attests to: "translating and interpreting from Akkadian above in Sumerian below, and from Sumerian above into Akkadian below, do you know it?" One example of the Dialogue between the Tamarisk and the Palm from OB Susa shows a very literal translation of Akkadian speech formulae into Sumerian:

> ^{ŋeš}sinig ka$^{!}$-ba mu-ni-in-ak bi$_2$-in-du$_{11}$.g
> gu$_3$ bi$_2$-in-du$_{11}$.g ^{ŋeš}ŋešnimmar-ra-še$_3$
> Tamarisk opened its mouth and spoke

[140] Jacobsen, 1991: 283–287.
[141] Jacobsen, 1991: 291.
[142] The majority of the tablets come from Neo-Assyrian Nineveh and Hellenistic Uruk, with one coming from Neo-Babylonian Babylon as well. See Veldhuis, 2018: 184 for an index.

He spoke to Palm.[143]

According to George (2003: 107), this sentence reflects standard formulae that present direct speech in Akkadian literature.[144] It is a unique example of Sumerian replicating Akkadian language patterns in the OB period. Additionally, a fragmentary tablet containing a bilingual version of the Weidner Chronicle provides support for this direction of translation from the Neo-Babylonian period. Finkel (1980: 72–74) notes two negated verbal forms where the phoneme -šu- betrays its back-translation. Since none of the Exam Texts contain Akkadianisms this explicit, they were likely not translated composed in Akkadian and translated back into Sumerian, but designed as bilinguals sometime after the OB period.

3.1.1. Grammar of Late Sumerian

One type of reference work that might have functioned as a model of Sumerian in the late period are the so-called grammatical texts. These lists contain columns of verbal paradigms in Sumerian and Akkadian, sometimes with additional grammatical terms. They are practical texts that were probably used in the education of students from the OB period onward.[145] Most manuscripts with standardised arrangements of the paradigms originate from the first millennium and are now designated Neo-Babylonian Grammatical Texts (NBGT).[146] In some cases, the entries of the texts are supplemented by grammatical terminology that is also found in the questionnaire of ET A. Despite Black's hesitations about the relevance of ET A to this subject because of the late dating of the manuscripts, he cautiously sides with Sjöberg that the composition may come from the OB period, because the grammatical theory arguably finds its origins there as well.[147]

Jacobsen (1991) demonstrated how 'abstruse' features of late Sumerian are sourced from such grammatical texts. For example, the suffix -be$_2$, which in the OB period designated a non-human possessive pronominal suffix, is translated as a first person singular. This is explained by NBGT 2: 256–257: -be$_2$ = *a-na-*<*ku*>.[148] While this particular form is not attested

[143] Cavigneaux, 2003: 54.
[144] He reconstructs this formula as *bīnum pâšu īpušamma iqabbi izzakkaram ana gišimmarim*. It is not preserved in any of the Akkadian versions of the dialogue.
[145] Black, 1984: 3–5.
[146] Black, 1984: 4–5 argues against the distinction between OBGT and NBGT, as early texts probably already abstracted analytical forms of verbs and nouns.
[147] Black, 3–5.
[148] Landsberger *et al*, 1956: 156.

in the Exam Texts, the following grammatical idiosyncrasies place the composition of the texts firmly in the post-OB period.

In the Exam Texts, we see inconsistent use of non-human agent markers in verbs. In ET A, about half of the second person markers are written -b- instead of -e-, which is reminiscent of the usage of -be$_2$ in the NBGT. Additionally, the locative marker -a in classical Sumerian is replaced with -ta, used to denote the ablative case. The main examples are already seen in the text's introduction: e$_2$-dub-ba-a-ta i$_3$-til$_3$-le-en "you have spent at school" (ET A:4). In ET B, the phrase e$_2$-dub-ba-ta saŋ-us$_2$ pad$_3$-da-me-en "may you appear to constantly care about the scribal school" is even more obscure. Even though the Akkadian verb differs slightly from the Sumerian, *ina* e$_2$ *ṭup-pi* shows that a locative is intended.

A final grammatical anomaly must be mentioned. ET B: 7–8[149] form a question and answer:

[e]me-[g]i$_7$ i$_3$-zu : [...]
[e]me-[g]i$_7$ a-zu : [...]
"Do you know Sumerian?"
"I know Sumerian!"

The prefix a- is an unconventional feature of this line. It existed as a vocalic prefix in the Sumerian of the third millennium, having a similar function to i-.[150] In ET B, it serves to distinguish between the second person (line 7) and first person (line 8) conjugation of the verb zu. The Akkadian version is broken, but we would expect *īde*. This form of the verb *edû* is irregular and signifies both the first and third person singular. Here, the Akkadian first person singular preposition *a-* was added to the Sumerian root, which helps to understand who is uttering this line in the dialogue.

The Sumerian grammar of the Exam Texts shows features that originate from a time after the OB period. Despite the examples listed above, the overall diversion from OB syntax is quite limited. This may relate to the sentence structures which are generally not very complex.

[149] These lines are preserved on only one manuscript: ET B/B.
[150] Jagersma, 2010: 548–549.

3.1.2. Rare Vocabulary

Another way of distinguishing the Exam Texts from OB scribal literature is through the vocabulary. When comparing the two corpora, some Sumerian words used in the Exam Texts are highly unconventional and rarely seen in texts from the OB period. Rare vocabulary in both Sumerian and Akkadian is sourced from lexical lists, or is sometimes invented for these texts. This section presents a selection of unusual vocabulary that demonstrates how the Exam Texts employ lexical knowledge of Sumerian.

murub$_2$ or unken = *puḫru* (ET A: 2)

A commentary text to the lexical list Aa 5/4 includes a rare reference to an Exam Text. In SpTU 2, 54: 22–25, the Sumerian word murub$_2$, written SAL.LAGAR, is equated with *pingu* ('knob'), *pilšu* ('hole'), *biṣṣuru* ('female genitalia'), and alternatively *pingūtu*.[151] In order to provide further context, the commentary quotes line 2 of ET A: murub$_2$ um-me-a-ke$_4$-e-ne kisal e$_2$-dub-ba-a / *ina pu-ḫur-ru$_3$ um-man-nu ki-sal* e$_2$ *ṭup-pi* ('in the middle of the scholars, in the courtyard of the scribal school'). This adds the additional meaning *puḫru* to murub$_2$. It should be noted, however, that only a single (NA) manuscript of ET A preserves the beginning of the Sumerian line. There, the line starts with unken, which just like *puḫru* has the base meaning of 'assembly'. If murub$_2$ had replaced unken in later versions of ET A, the reference in SpTU 2, 54 might not only be considered a commentary on Aa 5/4, but also on ET A: 2 in order to explain an obscure Sumerian translation of *puḫru*. We might interpret it as a gap in a circle of scholars where the teacher and student could take position for the exam.

niŋ-ša$_3$-ḫab / *ḫišiḫtu* (ET A: 56)

This combination is only attested in the lexical lists erim-ḫuš = *anantu*[152] and an-ta-gal$_2$ = *šaqû*.[153] Apart of these contexts, the term niŋ-ša$_3$-ḫab is not found in literary texts outside of the Exam Texts. In the OB period, the regular equivalent of *ḫišiḫtu* ("need" or "necessity", CAD Ḫ: 204) is a$_2$-aš$_2$,[154] which appears in literary texts like the Farmer's Instructions.[155] By contrast, niŋ-ša$_3$-ḫab seems to be a back-translation from Akkadian, as the meaning of the

[151] For a full edition of this tablet, see its entry in DCCLT.
[152] Tablet I: 195. Cavigneaux *et al*, 1985: 9.
[153] Tablet 8: 119'. There is only a single manuscript from NA Nineveh where the Akkadian translation is broken. Cavigneaux *et al*, 1985: 169.
[154] For more references, see Attinger, 2021: 122.
[155] Civil, 1985b: 28, 74.

sign combination is obscure. The base meaning of ŋab is "to stink," so "that which makes the heart reek" is a creative way of describing something that is a requirement.

ir-pag ak / *kapādu* (ET D: 4)

The Akkadian term *kapādu* means "to plan, to plot, to devise" (CAD K: 172–174). As Lambert (1960: 231) pointed out, it is close in meaning to *ṣamāru* and *ṣarāmu*, both "to strive, to pursue, to plot." While the latter terms are common in OB texts, *kapādu* is significantly rarer in this period, but is frequently found in first-millennium royal inscriptions and literary texts. Lambert makes this comment in a discussion of the Assyrian Proverb Collection, where tablet 2: 23–26 include the proverb "when you (plan), your god is yours, when you don't (plan), your god is not yours."[156]

In the vocabulary list sig$_7$-alan = *nabnītu*, *kapādu* is equated to ir-pag ak (tablet 4, 112–113[157]). This list may have existed in the OB period, but starts appearing more frequently in MA and MB contexts and is most commonly attested in NA Nineveh.[158] It is also found in tablet 16 of the canonical bilingual *utukkū lemnūtu* series, which contains incantations, hymns and dialogues that express Marduk's domination over evil demons. This final tablet narrates how Marduk prevents a lunar eclipse commanded by Ishtar, who was "plotting against the rule of heaven."[159]

bar-dag ak / *tâpu* (ET D: 5; ET B, section 3: 7)

This term is defined by the CAD (T: 197) as "to be attentive, to pursue something." A more literal translation of the Sumerian might be "to dedicate."[160] It is found in erim-ŋuš = *anantu*, tablet 2: 234–235 (MSL 17: 39): bar-dag = *tu-u$_2$*-[*pu*], bar-dag-dag = *ta-a*-[*pa*].[161] Additionally, tablet 'A' of an-ta-gal$_2$ = *šaqû* includes the entry bar-dag = *ta*-[*a-pu*].[162] Outside of lexical contexts, this term seems to be a hapax: it only occurs in ET D and B. This

[156] In his translation, Lambert (1960: 231) translated "exert yourself" for *kapādu* instead of staying close to the literal meaning. For this reason, I replaced this in hyphens. His transcription reads (1960: 227): "ud-da ir-pag an-ak-en diŋir-zu niŋ$_2$-zu ud-da ir-pag nu-an-ak-en diŋir-zu niŋ$_2$-nu-zu / *u$_4$-ma ta-kap-pu-ud il$_3$-ka ku-u u$_4$-ma ul ta-kap-pu-ud il$_3$-ka la-a ku-u*".
[157] Finkel and Civil, 1982: 81.
[158] Finkel and Civil, 1982: 5–8.
[159] Geller, 2018: 508 translates "plotting," based on his transcription "^{d}inanna-ke$_4$ an-da ki-tuš ku$_3$ mu-un-ri nam-lugal-la an-na-še$_3$ ir-pag mu-un-ak / ^{d}*iš-tar it-ti* ^{d}*a-nim šar-ri šub-tu$_2$* KU$_3$-*ti$_3$ ir-mi$_3$-ma ana* LUGAL-*ut* AN-*e i-kap-pu-ud*."
[160] Attinger, 2021: 231.
[161] Cavigneaux *et al*, 1985: 39.
[162] Cavigneaux *et al*, 1985: 188. The DCCLT version corrects *šit*-[*pu-u$_2$*] with *ta*-[*a-pu*]: https://oracc.org/dcclt/P394160.

is significant, as it is one of the few ways in which these two texts are linked – apart from thematic similarities. In ms. ET B/C: 12, the only place where this line is preserved, the Sumerian idiom is abbreviated to simply dag.

ki-uri$_3$ / *nișirtu* (ET D: 7–8)

The Akkadian *nișirtu* is conventionally translated as "secret, treasure" or by extension "secret knowledge" (CAD N/2: 276–279, mngs 2', 3'). Normally, it has the Sumerian equivalent ab-ḫal. The only lexical attestation of ki-uri$_3$ = *nișirtu* comes from a Kassite manuscript of the acrographic ka$_2$-gal = *abullu* series. There is however a slight modification, as the Sumerian is translated more literally into the Akkadian as *ašar nișirti* which we do not see in ET D.[163] This translation fits better with the word's use in royal inscriptions, where it usually refers to secret places.[164] It is not part of the OB version of Kagal, which only had three sections that did not include words starting with the sign ki.[165] For a further discussion on the term *nișirtu,* see section 2.2 below.

zil$_2$ / *damqu* (ET D: 10)

While *damqu* is an adjective that is regularly used to classify something as "good, fine, pleasant,"[166] the Sumerian zil$_2$ has a more narrow meaning that specifically relates to pleasantness. It features in the OB lexical list Ea a = *nâqu* on tablet 5: 59: [zi]-i□ / tag / MIN / *da-ma-qu*.[167] In the derived list Aa a = *nâqu*, which succeeded Ea in the first millennium, zil$_2$ is attributed more meanings in Akkadian: *da-ma-qu, dam-qu, ba-nu-u$_2$* and *ku-un-nu-u$_2$*.[168] zil$_2$ is commonly attested in OB literary texts,[169] but its popularity declines from the late second millennium onward when sig$_5$ becomes the regular Sumerian translation of *dam(ā)qu.*

3.1.3. Emesal

According to Veldhuis, the Elevation of Ishtar contains unusual passages in emesal. Normally, this dialect would be reserved for specific types of incantations or direct speech attributed to

[163] Civil, 1971: 239: II 2.
[164] See references in CAD N/2: 276: 1.b.
[165] Veldhuis, 2014: 171–173.
[166] CAD D: 68–73.
[167] Civil, Green and Lambert, 1979: 398.
[168] Civil, Green and Lambert, 1979: 414: tablet V/1: 239–242.
[169] See Attinger, 2021: 1168 for references.

women in narrative texts. This is however not the case here, as these words occur in an almost random pattern all throughout the text, regardless of "gender or performance".[170] In the Exam Text corpus, only one emesal word can be found: the name Amanki in ET D: 7.[171] It is the emesal version of the god Enki/Ea and is used in both the Sumerian and Akkadian version of this line. There is no explanation why especially the emesal version of his name is used here: since ET D is essentially a monologue, there are no indications as to the gender of the one providing the instructions. With a single attestation of emesal, no pattern can be established. Its random occurrence seems to indicate that its use is similarly inconsistent to the Elevation of Ishtar. Additionally, the Exam Texts themselves make no mention of the study of emesal as part of the school curricula, unless it was mentioned in now broken passages.[172]

3.1.4. Conclusions

The grammar and vocabulary of the Exam Texts as laid out above show many characteristics of compositions that were created after the OB period as bilinguals. The use of suffixes whose meanings differ from classical Sumerian is complemented by heavy use of bilingual lexical lists in shaping the contents of the texts. It is especially pertinent that lists such as Kagal, Antagal, Nabnītu, and Ea, and not to mention the grammatical texts, are referenced in their standardised forms in which they arose at the end of the second millennium.

However, we have been focusing on idiosyncrasies of the late period. Overall, the Exam Texts show much less deviation from classical Sumerian than other bilinguals in Veldhuis' classification. Based on these linguistic details alone, it is hard to conclusively date the texts. This is only possible after more research has been conducted. For this reason, a more thematic approach will now be applied to provide further credence to a late dating of the Exam Texts.

3.2. The Secret of the Scribal Art

The notion of a 'secret' is a shared motif in all four Exam Texts. This thematic connection is most apparent between ET A and D, which we know to have been associated with one another in at least one manuscript (ET A/N[173]). This section presents the argument that the relationship

[170] Veldhuis, 2018: 188–191.
[171] For further references to this name, see Hurowitz, 2000: 53, fn.14.
[172] ET D: 14 could have included it: e.g. in ms. ET D/A: rev. 3: "[x x]- ga eme-gi$_7$ zu-zu-de$_3$ eme-[x] zu- zu-de$_3$" (ed. BLMS: https://oracc.org/blms/P345440). See also ET A: 18, e.g. ET A/M$_3$: 6': "[…x]-sukud eme-te-nu$_2$-a […] eme-gi$_7$ eme-uri^{ki} nu-si-sa$_2$-e-de$_2$ […]" (ed. BLMS: https://oracc.org/blms/P274260).
[173] It includes the catchline of ET D.

between the 'scribal art' and 'secret knowledge' is one of the strongest indicators that we are dealing with a coherent group of texts that is strongly influenced, if not shaped by the ideology of scholarly communities of the first millennium.

3.2.1. Unlocking the Secret with the Exam Texts

The contents of the examination of ET A represents a scribal student´s primary education. This is because references to literature and specialist knowledge are lacking. To a lesser extent, lines 14–15 of ET D reflect on the skills that the scribe has already acquired, but the purpose of this text is presenting the student with what will happen if he chooses to continue studying. The two texts, one looking back and one looking ahead, thus present a single continuing narrative.

Once his primary education is completed, a student knows how to write, translate Sumerian and Akkadian and can understand various technical jargons. Most importantly, he is able to work as an accountant in the palace administration – a career path stressed in both ET A: 56 and D: 16: the scribal art is the niŋ$_2$-ša$_3$-ḫab e$_2$-gal / *ḫišiḫti ekalli*: the 'need of the palace'. A fully completed primary education provides a degree of literacy that is ostensibly sufficient for this purpose. The profession of (palace) administrator, however, is regarded with contempt by ET D as line 17 demonstrates:

> [dub]-sar a ri-a-be$_2$ ḫe$_2$-a ^{gi}dupsik ab-[x-x]
> [*ṭup-šar-ru*] *lu-u$_2$ a-rad i-šas-si ina tup-šik-ku*
>
> The scribe, is truly its descendant, is imposed on it, he will … the basket.
> *The scribe is truly a servant, he will call for the basket.*

Since the previous line is fragmentary, it is unclear whose descendant the scribe is, or what he is imposed on. What is clear is that in this context, the duties of a scribe are connected to the ^{gi}dupsik / *tupšikku* basket, which was used for carrying earth and functions as a metaphor for corvée service. While the Sumerian is broken, the Akkadian verb "to call" is ambiguous: the scribe either calls others for duty, or is assigned to do it himself. Whichever case it may be, both stand in sharp contrast to the promises that are found earlier in the text: pursuing the scribal art leads to power (line 4) and wealth (line 5). Because these promises can only materialise when the student "plans to use the scribal art," an uncertain future is implied where the he has to choose between higher education and starting a career. The purpose of ET D is to entice and persuade its user to continue in academia.

There is a clear relationship between scribal education and learning the scribal art, which is not immediately in reach of the student. In ET A: 5 the student is said to "learn the scribal art, but not know its character."[174] Showing the various skills afforded by the scribal art to young students is one of the tasks of the teacher in ET X: 5. ET B, section 2: 9' shows that someone else knows the scribal art, contrary to the addressee of the text. In these contexts, it is clear that the students have not yet acquired it, as they are still in the early stages of their education. Only if they continue, they have a chance of unlocking all the opportunities offered by the scribal art.

The key to the scribal art is implied in all Exam Texts. In ET D: 7, the scribal art is said to be the ki-uri$_3$ / *nişirtu* ('secret') of Amanki / Ea, the god of – among other things – secrecy and wisdom. Nabû or even Nisaba would be contenders to the realm of knowledge as well, but they are more closely connected to literacy rather than wisdom in the broadest sense of the concept. To know the scribal art is to have secret knowledge, while simultaneously the scribal art is inherently bound to secrecy.[175] This comes to the fore in secrecy formulae that serve to protect the contents of scholarly tablets from unwanted eyes. So-called *Geheimwissen* colophons included phrases like "one who knows may show one who knows, one who does not know may not see it."[176] Secrecy thus serves as a way of community-making among initiated scholars, who perform acts of gatekeeping through writing such colophons. This is a phenomenon that did not exist in the OB period.

3.2.2. Terminology of Secret Knowledge

In the Exam Text corpus, the key concept of secrecy and secret knowledge is signified in a number of ways. The following table lists its different manifestations in the Exam Texts:

Reference	Term used	Literal translation
ET A: 5	ŋeškim / *ittu*	'character' (of the scribal art)
ET A: 13	dul / *katimtu*	'cover' (of Sumerian)
ET B, section 3: 3	[…] / *katimtu*	'cover' (of [Sumerian?])
ET D: 7	ki-uri$_3$ / *nişirtu*	'secret' (of Amanki / Ea)
ET D: 8	ki-uri$_3$ / *nişirtu*	'secret' (of Amanki / Ea)

[174] nam-dub-sar i$_3$-zu-a ŋeškim-be$_2$ nu-zu-a / *ṭupšarrūta taḫuzu idassa ūl tīde.* The Akkadian version of this line uses two different verbs: *aḫāzu* and *edû*. The verb *aḫāzu* is ambiguous and can mean 'to understand,' but also 'to learn'. Because the following phrase negates it, the latter interpretation is more likely. See CAD A/1: 177–178.
[175] Lenzi, 2013: 24.
[176] Stevens, 2013: 211.

ET X: 7	(ki-)dul-dul / *katimtu*	'cover' (old signs)

Table 4: terminology of secrets in the Exam Text corpus.

Table 4 shows a wide variety of terms that are used in the Exam Texts to designate 'secret' or 'hidden' things. While belonging to the same semantic field, *niširtu* and *katimtu* have their own nuanced meaning. In the Exam Texts, *niširtu* is the only one that is found in ET D which reflects a higher educational level. More significant, however, is its association with the god Ea. Conversely, (ki-)dul(-dul) *katimtu* is present in Exam Texts A, B and X. Lenzi points out that most of the contexts of *katimtu* concern acquisition of language and writing skills. It thus reflects uncovering meanings of obscure words and difficult texts that are not yet understood. The process of uncovering the hidden meaning of a language may in this context be an idiom for knowledge acquisition.[177] George argues that this is not simply a given for inexperienced students, but that obscurity is deliberately placed in bilingual texts in order to provide a more esoteric experience.[178] A third term, ad-ḫal / *pirištum* – which is used in the *Geheimwissen* colophons – does not feature in the Exam Texts. Only in the colophon of ET A/J, the name Nabû is written as ^{d}gi.ḫal. Maul, 2012: 206–207 references a list of Names of Nabû where this name is translated into Akkadian as *Nabû bānû pirišti*, or 'Nabû who creates the secret'.

These terms are found in many other contexts. Famously, the opening lines of the Gilgamesh epic contain an explicit reference to understanding secrets. In line 7 of the first tablet, we read *niširta īmurma katimti iptu*, "he saw the secret and uncovered the hidden."[179] The association between *niširtu* and *katimtu* is further strengthened in contexts where the latter functions as an adjective. Two of Ashurbanipal's annals contain the combination *niširtu katimtu*, "hidden secret".[180] As these two examples stem from contexts that also yielded Exam Texts manuscripts, and because especially the first one was a popular composition,[181] we may assume that some scribes working at the Assyrian court were aware of the overlapping connotations of these two secretive terms.

The "hidden secret" of Ashurbanipal refers to his knowledge of a wide variety of scholarly practices such as astrology and extispicy, medicine, and reading obscure (*ṣullulu*) Sumerian and Akkadian.[182] Another source that focuses more on the process towards unlocking the secrets and obtaining this knowledge is the lexical list Aa a = *nâqu*: 2/4. A large section

[177] Lenzi, 2008: 142. This idea is already present in Sjöberg's edition of ET A (1974: 152).
[178] George, 2009: 107.
[179] George, 2003: 538–539.
[180] Ashurbanipal 15: i 9'; 220: i 13'. Accessed via RINAP5 on ORACC. Note that *katimtu* may also be substantivised here. The juxtaposition is the most significant.
[181] As evidenced by the long list of manuscripts used by George to reconstruct the epic. George, 2003: 531–534.
[182] Ashurbanipal 220: i 13–18.

from line 45 onwards contains, among other terms, *katāmu* (the base verb of *katimtu*), *niṣirtum*, *pirištum, ṭupšarrūtum,* MIN (*ṭupšarrūtam*) *aḫāzu*, *iḫzu, aḫāzu, kapādu, ṣarāmu*: all these terms relate to learning, explicitly mentioning the scribal art.[183] For a scribe faced with many of these terms at once, parallels between uncovering secrets and learning hidden things would be evident.

For students of the texts, these deeper layers would only become apparent at a slow rate. Starting with learning hidden meanings of Sumerian and other aspects of the scribal art in ET A, the association would only come after a student had advanced to ET D. The introduction of the new term *niṣirtu* provides the references to *katimtu* with a previously unknown nuance. Sumerian, difficult as it is, is only the first step towards the greater scribal art. This is another way in which ET D functions as a teaser to continue one's education.

3.2.3. Implications for the Dating of the Exam Texts

When stating the relationship between the scribal art and the notion of secret knowledge, Lenzi (2008: 140ff) argues that chronology is an important factor. According to him, this idea is only present from the late second millennium onwards. This conclusion is probably correct, but his methodology is based on the following: Exam Texts A, B and X are assumed to date to the OB period, as they do not contain the term *niṣirtu*. Their attestations of *katimtu*, which allegedly means nothing more than "hidden from view/understanding," led to his argument that the notion of secrecy did not exist in the OB period.[184] Almost immediately after arriving at this conclusion, Lenzi cites ET D: 7–8 to support his claim that since this text does contain *niṣirtu*, secrecy did exist in the first millennium.[185] Contrasting the origins of ET D with those of the other Exam Texts is a mistake that leads to circular reasoning: secrecy existed because the term is encountered in ET D, and ET D stems from the first millennium because it includes *niṣirtu*. In similar fashion, George starts with the assumption that ET A is OB and was translated from Akkadian into Sumerian.[186] This explains the argument that 'hidden meanings' were put there deliberately. Considering *katimtu* and *niṣirtu* as being on the same gradient solves the subsequent paradox of the late date of the manuscripts.

We should return to the observation that Exam Texts A and D are known to have belonged together at one moment in time, and that common themes provide them with an

[183] Civil, Green and Lambert, 1979: 281. Note that mimation is present in some, but not all entries.
[184] Lenzi, 2008: 143.
[185] Lenzi, 2008: 143.
[186] George, 2009: 107.

intricate connection. Moreover, other literary contexts create firm associations between the terms related to secrecy found in them. This means that Lenzi's conclusion is correct: the bond between secrecy and the scribal art did originate after the OB period, however *all* of the Exam Texts are proof of this development.

3.3. Conclusions

Because of the lack of comparative scribal literature from the first millennium, this chapter studied the minutia of vocabulary and syntax. The analysis shows that the origins of the Exam Texts must be placed at the end of the second millennium at the earliest. When cross-referenced with the most important theme running through the texts, this dating becomes ever firmer. The notion of secret knowledge, which is present in all Exam Texts, was not present in the OB period and points to a later date of composition. More importantly, this reveals the texts' purpose as wisdom texts that reflect not only on scribal education, but on epistemology – the process of knowledge acquisition. This will be elaborated and connected with the other findings in the final conclusions.

4. Conclusions

This thesis has studied the small corpus of four Exam Texts and analysed how they engage with the intellectual heritage of OB scribal education in their first-millennium literary and integrate it historical contexts.

The time of composition and the course of the subsequent transmission of the Exam Texts is unknown. The first unambiguous attestations of ET X originate from MB Ugarit and Hattusha. Even though the age of these manuscripts comes close to the OB period, the text had already changed. Already it was no longer the Sumerian letter from the eduba curricula, but the bilingual letter that was present in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian libraries. This may indicate that a large degree of innovation took place immediately after the OB institution of the eduba disappeared. In this period, surviving tablets with eduba literature were probably more common than in the first millennium and formed the inspiration for new compositions. However, these new Exam Texts were creative innovations. Their first authors imitated the style and contents of OB literature, sometimes directly quoting the old sources, but manipulated them to reflect the system of scribal education of their own time. Akkadian was now a literary language like Sumerian and both language were experimented with, scholarship was being canonised, and the role of the palace was becoming more established.

Even though the exact trajectories of the transmission the Exam Texts remains unknown, the late date of their composition is evident from the vocabulary and grammatical features in the Sumerian versions of the texts. They both resemble contemporary narratives such as the Elevation of Isthar and are heavily based on standardised lexical lists from the first millennium. Furthermore, the fact that they are bilingual as opposed to unilingually Sumerian is an even more obvious clue. For this reason, this thesis argues that the Exam Texts cannot be used in discussions on the OB eduba or OB scribal literature.

The manuscripts' colophons and archaeological and archival contexts indicate that the Exam Texts were generally created and used in scholarly contexts that also hosted the scribal training of students in the first millennium. The prominence of their relations to families of *āšipu*s is noteworthy, but may be due to archaeological chance. As scholarly texts, the Exam Texts perhaps functioned as treatises on the ancient status of the scribal art. They reminisce of the OB period, whose memory was still held in high esteem by late scribes. The pretence of copying a text with supposed ancient knowledge likely provided credibility and legitimacy to their work. Their sophistication is perhaps best demonstrated by the intricate literary patterns

underlying ET D's narrative. Additionally, the motif of unlocking secret knowledge that runs through the corpus is a clear indicator that they functioned as a gatekeeping tool for the scholarly communities that claimed this accomplishment. Though ms. ET A/J points to this, the claim that ET A and D functioned as initiation texts cannot be supported with the available evidence. After all, the Exam Texts are in absolute numbers very rare in the overall textual record. As educational tools, the Exam Texts functioned in a similar way to their OB counterparts. They represented different literary genres that were copied in the higher levels of elementary education, in preparation for the advanced levels. This contrast is woven into ET A (to which may probably be added ET B and X) and D, which enticed students to pursue an academic career.

These two functionalities coalesce around the concept of epistemology. Firstly, with regard to their contents, the Exam Texts show the process of knowledge acquisition at its most basic level: education. Together, they narrate the way in which to gain practical and theoretical skills in order to become a professional scribe. Secondly, as didactic tools they could have helped students in their own educational careers. Thirdly, for those scholars who had arguably already achieved illumination, the texts guarded the path towards it and provided legitimacy to their craft. It is hoped that the results of this thesis allow the Exam Texts to perform the same roles for us.

Avenues for further research abound. The Exam Texts' contextualisation allows them to be better incorporated in the ongoing study into Late Sumerian, especially when the eBL finished their efforts to transcribe and annotate every manuscript. On a technical level, the contents of ET A can now be fully synthesised in a wide variety of studies: from Sumero-Akkadian bilingualism, to translation theory, to grammatical terminology. The Exam Texts provide glimpses into the ideology of scholarship and supplement our knowledge of the curricula of first millennium scribal students and apprentices. To what extent they reflect any historical educational setting, still has to be studied. The texts are full of humour, word play, and figures of speech, and vastly expand the repertoire of offensive language known from the first millennium. All of these topics now have four additional relevant sources with detailed historical, literary, and cultural contexts. Hypotheses that were made in previous research and were nuanced because of the Exam Texts' paradoxical old style and late date, can now be turned into conclusions.

5. Bibliography

Abbreviations follow the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) and the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI).

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