

The Reception of Sumerian Literature in the Western Periphery

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Introduction

The subject of the present study is the Sumerian tradition in the Syro-Anatolian region during the Late Bronze Age (LBA) - 16th - 12th century B.C. The Late Bronze Age in the ancient Near East is usually termed the International Period¹ by scholars because of the relationships that were cultivated among the so-called great powers (i.e. Babylonia, Assyria, Mitanni, the Hittite kingdom and Egypt) and between the great powers and their vassals (local domains) in those centuries. This period is characterized by intense political, economic and cultural exchanges. Movements of traders, merchants, diplomats, scribes and scholars across the ancient Near East can be traced in the textual and archeological documentation. In this context Akkadian, the language of Babylonians and Assyrians, became the international language of diplomacy, correspondence and trade. Letters sent by private citizens and royal courts alike were written in Akkadian not only in Mesopotamia but also in Syria, Anatolia, and even Egypt.

Paralleling the widespread distribution of diplomatic and economic texts, literary, religious and lexical texts can be found in just about every region of the ancient Near East, written in Akkadian, Sumerian or local languages. In the Western periphery, as the area outside Mesopotamia comprising Syria and Anatolia is usually called, Sumerian literary texts were recovered in three centers only: Ḫattuša, the capital of the Hittite Empire, Emar, a city on the Middle Euphrates first under Mitannian rule and later part of the Hittite Empire, and Ugarit, the major Syrian harbor on the Mediterranean Sea.² Lexical texts were found not only at these sites but in several other places too, e.g., Nuzi, Megiddo and Alalāḫ.³

Sumerian is the most ancient language so far documented, but it is an isolated language with no known relatives in the world. Its earliest written attestations, dated to the late fourth millennium B.C., were found in the city of Uruk, in southern Mesopotamia, where Sumerian was used for economic accounts and lexical texts. The first half of the third millennium B.C., the Early Dynastic period, saw the political fragmentation of southern Mesopotamia into small city-based states. Sumerian was the current language of administrative and economic texts, lexical lists and royal inscriptions. To this period (ca. 2600 B.C.) date the earliest examples of literary texts, discovered in the cities of Fāra (ancient Šuruppak) and Abū Šalābīḫ. Some of these literary works, such as the wisdom composition *The Instruction of Šuruppak*, survived in modified and adapted forms until the late second millennium. After the Sargonic period (ca. 2350-2200 B.C.), when the use of Sumerian was reduced in favor of Akkadian, Sumerian flourished anew during Gudea's dynasty and the Ur III period. Under the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112-2004), Mesopotamia was unified as a political and administrative entity. The vast collection of tablets (over 60000 published texts)⁴ yielded by the Ur III chancellery comprises mostly administrative texts and royal inscriptions but a small number of literary texts are also preserved. These are the remains of a larger corpus that with further modification and adaptation was (partially) adopted in scribal schools of the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods (2004-1600). After the fall of the Ur III dynasty and the collapse of its centralized administrative system, Sumerian went out of use as a spoken language by the 19th century,⁵ even though a certain level of proficiency was probably retained in scribal schools.⁶

1 Liverani 1994.

2 A single Sumerian incantation was found at Alalāḫ, AT 453.

3 Hallo 1992, 80, with bibliography; see also van der Toorn 2000; for literacy in Late Bronze Age Syria see van Soldt 2013.

4 Jagersma 2010, 5.

5 On the death of Sumerian see Edzard 2000, Michalowski 2000, Jagersma 2010, 9-10.

6 Sjöberg 1975b, 161-162.

The bulk of Sumerian literature is known from the Old Babylonian scribal schools and particularly from those of the city of Nippur, the major cultural and religious center of southern Mesopotamia due to its status as the seat of the god Enlil, the principal deity of the pantheon. These texts are the products of scribal education, resulting from the effort of non-native speakers to learn to read and write Sumerian. The Old Babylonian Nippur tablets date to the second half of the 18th century. The Old Babylonian literary corpus resulted from the expansion and adaptation of selected texts of the Ur III repertoire, while at the same time new compositions were created.⁷

In the second half of the second millennium B.C., Sumerian had been a dead language for over half a millennium, but it continued to function as a written language of scholarship and education in scribal circles, very much like Latin in the Middle Ages. In an environment in which only a small percentage of the population was educated to read and write, scribal schools remained for over three thousand years centers for the transmission of literacy and culture. Scribes were trained in the cuneiform script. Sumerian was the principal part of this training, because the study of cuneiform was always associated with Sumerian, even when it had gone out of use as a spoken language. The cuneiform system, invented to write Sumerian, was adopted by many different languages, but always preserved its logographic character. A knowledge of Sumerian was indispensable for every scribe, in Mesopotamia as well as in the whole cuneiform world, because Sumerograms were used as logograms to write texts in all languages and in all text genres, from economic accounts to the most advanced literary works. Sumerian was learnt not only in its homeland, the south of Mesopotamia, but all over the ancient Near East when the cuneiform script was adopted in regions such as Syria and Anatolia. In addition to the practical use of Sumerian, a cultural interest in Sumerian literature ensured its preservation in scribal circles. In the Old Babylonian schools, however, Akkadian was also taught; in particular, Akkadian wisdom texts were commonly used in schooling during the Late Old Babylonian period, as the surviving literary catalogues indicate.⁸ In the post-Old Babylonian period Akkadian became more relevant in scribal education.⁹ Sumerian texts were copied and transmitted in the scribal schools for centuries, probably until the first centuries of the Christian era.¹⁰

Our comprehension of the educational system during the Old Babylonian period has been considerably improved since the pioneering studies of Sjöberg (1975b) and Vanstiphout (1979). In recent years interest in the function of the scribal school, or *e₂-dub-ba*, and its curriculum has grown, as reflected in several studies devoted to the topic.¹¹ Education in the Old Babylonian period took place in private houses,¹² often but not exclusively within family circles.¹³ Sumerian was the main focus of this training and Sumerian literary texts were primarily pedagogic tools. Physical examination of epigraphic material has led to major insights into Old Babylonian schooling, particularly with respect to the relationship between the texts learned in school and the tablets on which they were written. Literary texts, as well as lexical lists, were inscribed on several tablet types that served various uses. Civil's classification of tablets includes the following types:¹⁴

7 For a history of Sumerian literature see Hallo 1976.

8 Sallaberger 2010, 307-309.

9 Cohen 1988, 12, Groneberg 2003.

10 For the last cuneiform texts see Geller 1997.

11 Vanstiphout 1995, Veldhuis 1996, Veldhuis 1997, Tinney 1998, Tinney 1999, Vanstiphout 1999, Veldhuis 2000a, Veldhuis 2000b, Robson 2001, Robson 2002, Delnero 2006, Veldhuis 2006, Delnero 2010, Tinney 2011, Delnero 2012.

12 Veldhuis 1997, 23-28. On the relation between private and public spheres in the OB educational system see Veldhuis 1996, 13-14.

13 Tinney 1998, 49.

14 Civil 1995. For lexical lists see Veldhuis 1997, 28-40; for literary texts see Tinney 1999, 160, Delnero 2006, 82-84.

Type I: Large multicolumn tablets containing one long composition or several shorter texts (*Sammel tafeln*).

Type II: Tablets inscribed with different material on each side: the obverse contains a two-column exercise with the teacher's model on the left and the student's copy on the right; the reverse contains an extract from a different text. Literary texts are rarely attested on Type II tablets.

Type III: The so-called *imgidda* is a single-column tablet containing an excerpt of a longer composition (ca. 40-60 lines) or a complete shorter text.

Type IV: Lentil-shaped tablets containing an excerpt of few lines.

Type P: Prisms inscribed with either a long composition or a collection of several texts.

This classification is primarily based on Nippur tablets but comparable types were found in all the Old Babylonian sites where school material was discovered, such as Ur, Uruk, Sippar and Kiš. The continuation of this system can be traced in later periods and in the Syro-Anatolian documentation as well, even though major differences can be detected. Multicolumn tablets are indeed attested in the Sumerian textual production of Ḫattuša and Emar but they serve a purpose different from the OB type. Multicolumn tablets (more than two columns) from the Western periphery are inscribed with a single composition written in different versions, i.e. Sumerian, phonetic Sumerian, Akkadian and occasionally Hittite (see below). The best examples of these multicolumn tablets are the manuscripts containing the *Ballad of Early Rulers* from Emar and *The Message of Lu-diġira to his Mother* discovered at Ugarit, but stemming from Ḫattuša. Prisms are only known from the Hittite capital. A new type of tablet, Type V, developed in the LBA, but it is restricted to the Kassite documentation. This is a pillow-shaped tablet with text lines written in different orientations on the two sides: the obverse contains an extract (few lines) of a literary text with lines written along the long side, the reverse has an excerpt of a lexical list with lines written along the short side. Extract tablets are known from Emar and Ugarit where they were used for lexical lists, but no lentil-shaped or Type V tablets are attested. Also the social setting of the OB *Edubba* is reflected in the LBA scribal schools. The family-based schooling system clearly stands out at Ḫattuša,¹⁵ Emar¹⁶ and Ugarit.¹⁷

On the basis of tablet types, the sequence in which texts appear on specific tablet types and the occurrence of texts on the so-called literary catalogues (lists of literary compositions probably used for archival purposes but containing compositions learned in school),¹⁸ modern scholars were able to reconstruct the scribal curriculum during the Old Babylonian period. Three progressive pedagogic phases can be distinguished according to level of difficulty.¹⁹ The first or Elementary Phase, as reconstructed by Veldhuis,²⁰ includes lexical lists, model contracts and proverbs. After preparatory exercises in impressing combinations of wedges on clay, pupils proceeded from elementary lists up to very complex lexical texts. Mathematical texts²¹ were learned along with the most advanced lexical lists, followed by model contracts. At the end of the first phase samples of literary compositions were introduced in the form of proverbs. Vanstiphout²² identified the royal praise poem *Lipit-Ištar B* as an

¹⁵ Beckman 1983.

¹⁶ Cohen 2012a.

¹⁷ van Soldt 1995.

¹⁸ According to Delnero 2010, literary catalogues do not list compositions in the sequence in which they were learned in school but are simply inventories. Nevertheless, as he admits (Delnero 2010, 53), they list texts copied as scribal exercises.

¹⁹ On the literary genres taught in the curriculum and on schooling in general see Waetzoldt 1989, Vanstiphout 1995, Vanstiphout 1999.

²⁰ Veldhuis 1997, 41-64.

²¹ For mathematical tablets see Robson 2002.

²² Vanstiphout 1979.

elementary literary text that was presumably learned in school after the Elementary Phase, on the basis of its occurrences on Type IV tablets. Three other literary texts, namely *Iddin-Dagan B*, *Enlil-bani A* and *Nisaba A*, were later identified by Tinney²³ as copied at the same stage as *Lipit-Ištar B*. This group of four compositions, called the Tetrad by modern scholars, belongs to the Intermediary Phase together with other short compositions such as didactic pieces, Edubba texts,²⁴ literary letters etc. Tinney also identified a group of ten compositions that occur as the first entries in literary catalogues, dubbed the Decad, as part of the Advanced Phase. Even though the sequence in which texts from the Advanced Phase were learned cannot be assumed on the basis of the catalogues,²⁵ it is clear that the Decad includes some of the compositions most commonly studied in Old Babylonian Nippur. Further popular literary texts, which Robson²⁶ called the House F Fourteen, form a group of fourteen compositions found in more than ten exemplars in the scribal school House F in Old Babylonian Nippur. Unsurprisingly, the Advanced Phase is associated with a fluid group of texts, and the teacher had some latitude in choosing which texts to use.

Elementary Phase	Writing Exercises Elementary Lists Ur-ra Advanced Lists Mathematical Tablets Model Contracts Proverbs
Intermediary Phase	Tetrad Short Literary Compositions
Advanced Phase	Decad House F Fourteen Further Long Compositions

Reconstruction of the scribal curriculum is based on sources from Nippur, but the same texts were found in other southern Babylonian cities. Šulgi's claim to have founded scribal schools at both Ur and Nippur underlines the similarity between the corpora in the two cities.²⁷ The repertoire of Northern Babylonian²⁸ schools was comparable to what we find in the south although with important recensional and orthographic variants, as we will see. From a comparative perspective the study of the OB curriculum allows us to place material from later times, in our case the LBA, within the schooling process. This is also relevant to understanding the function of Sumerian texts in the Western periphery and the level of proficiency reached by scribes. As will be demonstrated in detail, the Sumerian literary texts transmitted to Western regions belong to the Intermediary Phase: this was the highest level of Sumerian education required by Syrian or Hittite scribe. The compositions of the Advanced level were replaced by Akkadian literary pieces as a consequence of the acquired prominence of Akkadian in schooling.

The LBA represents, in terms of Sumerian literature, the Middle Babylonian period and is generally considered to be the moment when the canonization of the Ur III/OB Sumerian literary corpus

23 Tinney 1999.

24 Edubba texts are literary compositions regarding the scribal school.

25 See remarks in Delnero 2010.

26 Robson 2001.

27 Hallo 1976, 198.

28 Note that 'Babylonia' here refers to central-southern Mesopotamia and 'Babylon' to the city; Northern Babylonia indicates the upper part of southern Mesopotamia, namely the Sippar area and the Diyala region.

which was transmitted to the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian libraries started.²⁹ Canonization³⁰ is the outcome of a long process of textual transmission resulting in a final version which is no longer modified.³¹ During the Middle Babylonian period, OB Sumerian texts went through a process of selection by scribes and only some compositions were transmitted, whereas others were no longer copied. Some texts were passed on as they had been received, but in most cases they were modified and adapted according to cultural tendencies, and usually an Akkadian translation was added to the monolingual Sumerian version. At the same time, new bilingual texts were created, notably liturgical texts in the Emesal dialect,³² but also compositions in the main dialect. For religious and magical texts, canonization ended in the compilation of series comprising a fixed number of tablets with a stable sequence.³³ Long compositions that survived into the post-Old Babylonian period are almost exclusively limited to the myths related to the god Ninurta, *Lugal-e* and *Angim*, which however are never found outside Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, shorter divine narratives are quite well attested until the first millennium. Divine hymns survived to a very limited extent. Royal hymnology, which represented the core of scribal education in the Old Babylonian period, lost its role in the cult setting with the collapse of the system of UR III-OB courts. Only a limited number of royal praise poems survived after the Old Babylonian period. Wisdom literature is a genre well represented in the post-Old Babylonian period: proverbs and short reflective compositions were very popular especially in the Western periphery.³⁴ Wisdom bears the legacy of a traditional knowledge that always represented a paradigmatic reference for ancient Near Eastern populations. Emesal liturgies continued to be tradited, blossoming in the first millennium because they were associated with religious institutions which survived and developed after the Old Babylonian period.³⁵ As will be demonstrated in detail, Sumerian literary texts from the LBA had not yet reached the standardized form they display in the first millennium. Thus canonization was not yet accomplished in the Kassite period,³⁶ but occurred later.³⁷ Likewise the texts from the Second Dynasty of Isin that are probably reflected in Middle Assyrian documentation do not represent the final 'canonical' version, but were further modified in the first millennium. However, some Sumerian literary texts from Ḫattuša and Ugarit such as the *Letter of Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaĝ* show a high degree of stability between LBA and first-millennium sources. This indicates that some compositions had reached their 'canonical' form already in the LBA. Therefore the Middle Babylonian period was a fluid moment in which diverse stages – i.e. *seniores* and *recentiores* – of the canonization process coexisted. Even a single composition could be available in different versions as exemplified by the *Ballad of Early Rulers*.

The raid on Babylonia led by the Hittite king Muršili I (1595 B.C.) brought the Old Babylonian period to an end with the fall of the first dynasty of Babylon. From this moment on, Sumerian and Akkadian texts spread to regions outside Mesopotamia, reaching Syria and Anatolia in the west and Susa in the east. As outlined above, dissemination of Mesopotamian scholarly material is related to the transfer of knowledge of the cuneiform script, and Sumerian texts were used in the Western periphery scribal schools as learning tools. Sumerian texts transmitted to Syria and Anatolia may be grouped in three main categories: lexical lists, which represented the core of the scribal training, medical magical texts, used in rituals and to repel diseases, and literary texts. Notwithstanding its importance, the Middle Babylonian Sumerian literary tradition is poorly known because of the scarcity of sources. Archeological excavations on Kassite sites and levels were undertaken only to

29 Cooper 1971, 1-8, Hallo 1976, 198-201, MSL XIV, 168-169, see also Falkenstein 1953.

30 For canon and canonization see Hallo 1990, Hallo 1991.

31 For techniques of canonization see Hallo 1991, 12-15.

32 Falkenstein 1953, Hallo 1976, 187, Cohen 1981, 2 n. 7.

33 Falkenstein 1931, 7-15.

34 For the wisdom literature in LBA Syria see Cohen 2013.

35 Cohen 1981, 4-6.

36 The ongoing process of canonization during the Kassite period can be observed for the divinatory texts, see Heeßel 2011.

37 Standardization and compilation of series is clearly documented in the Second Dynasty of Isin for the SA.GEG omina, Finkel 1988, see also Heeßel 2011, 193-195.

a limited extent, and for many epigraphic finds discovered during old campaigns or illegal excavations, provenance and dates are uncertain. In addition, several relevant sources remain unpublished such as the school tablets from Nippur³⁸ and Babylon.³⁹ Material from the Western periphery indeed represents one of the main sources for the study of Sumerian literature in this period.

Previous research on the Middle Babylonian Sumerian texts is limited to studies which concern individual literary works⁴⁰ or are restricted to editions of compositions which include the few relevant Middle Babylonian manuscripts but pay little attention to their special importance in the context of the transmission and preservation of Sumerian literature.⁴¹ Akkadian literature received more attention from scholars, and some studies have been devoted to the diffusion of Akkadian literary compositions in Syria and Anatolia.⁴² For instance the epic of Gilgameš attested at Ḫattuša, Emar, Ugarit and Megiddo, as well as in the Middle Babylonian documentation of Nippur and Ur, has been the focus of many contributions.⁴³ Sumerian literary texts from the Western periphery have been neglected by scholars because they fall outside the specific competence of both Sumerologists, who usually deal with the much wider production of the third and early second millennium, and Hittitologists and western Semitists, who are focused on the local cultural milieu. Indeed, reading Sumerian texts from Syria and Anatolia is not an easy task, for the manuscripts present a variety of aberrant spellings, morphological anomalies, and phonetic alterations. Hence, there are no studies comprehensively dealing with the Sumerian tradition in the Late Bronze Age and the question of how and why these texts and the cultural knowledge they contain were transmitted. The study of the Sumerian texts from Syria and Anatolia is not only relevant for the Western periphery, it represents an indispensable source for the history of Sumerian literature in general. In fact, it allows us to fill the gap in our knowledge of Sumerian literature from Mesopotamia during the Late Bronze Age that, as noted above, is only partially preserved. A study on the Sumerian material from the Western periphery also needs to address the contemporaneous sources from Mesopotamia in order to identify their place in the tradition and their relation to the Syro-Anatolian texts. For this reason the present work also includes a comprehensive survey of the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian tablets published so far.

The object of this study is limited to the literary material; as a consequence lexical lists are not addressed. Here, however, the term 'literature'⁴⁴ has been used in a broad sense to include texts that stem from praxis, such as incantations and Emesal liturgies.⁴⁵ These text types were not part of the scribal curriculum but were used in magical and liturgical contexts. Incantations, denoted by the Sumerian word *en₂*, Akkadian *šiptu*, belong to the realm of magic, and were designed as tools to remove diseases. Incantations demand divine intervention, usually by the couple Enki/Ea and Asalluḫi/Marduk, in order to release the patient from demons that were believed to cause illnesses. They encode magical, religious and medical knowledge, and in order to have effect incantations were recited by an *āšipu*, the incantation priest. This material has been taken into consideration since, as in the case of Ḫattuša, most of the Sumerian texts are incantations. Moreover, incantations appear at the dawn of Sumerian literature in the same contexts where literary texts and lexical lists were found.⁴⁶ The tablet collection from Meturan bridges the literary-practical boundary, offering a mixed group of texts.⁴⁷ The specialized training of *āšipūtu*-apprentices also included literary and

38 Veldhuis 2000a.

39 Pedersén 2005.

40 Falkenstein 1939, Cooper 1971, Cooper 1972, Dietrich 1992, Dietrich 1998.

41 See for instance the editions of *The Song of the Plowing Oxen* in Civil 1976, the hymn *Inana C* in Sjöberg 1975a, and the myth *Angim* in Cooper 1978.

42 Dietrich 1988, Dietrich 1991, Dietrich 1996, Kämmerer 1998, Seminara 2000.

43 George 2003, 24-27, 287-347; see the studies of Beckman 2003, Klinger 2005, Archi 2007.

44 On the term 'literature' in Sumerian see Veldhuis 2003.

45 For the definition of incantations and Emesal liturgies as non-curricular texts see Tinney 2011, 584-588.

46 Incantations also contain literary language and poetic structures, see Veldhuis 1991, 58-59, Veldhuis 1999.

47 Tinney 2011, 589-590.

curricular texts. In the third millennium, incantations represent the most popular genre of Sumerian literature and Ebla incantations are the oldest pieces of Akkadian literature.⁴⁸ Incantations were also learned in scribal schools⁴⁹ although to a limited extent.⁵⁰ Emesal liturgies were not transmitted to the Western periphery but are attested in the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian documentation; thus they represent an additional source of information on the Sumerian tradition in Mesopotamia during the Late Bronze Age. Emesal texts are cultic liturgies used in religious ceremonies officiated by the *Gala*-priest.⁵¹ Old Babylonian tablets containing Emesal texts are predominately not from Nippur, but from Northern Babylonia, likely Sippar. This material was found during the 19th century excavations that are acknowledged to have targeted the mound of Sippar, and then purchased on the market by several museums including the British Museum and the Vorderasiatische Museum. It is unclear why only a limited number of Emesal texts were recovered at Nippur, and perhaps this quantitative difference derives from archaeological accident;⁵² in any case Northern Babylonian tablets remain our primary source for this text type. These sources reveal a specific segment of the Sumerian tradition.⁵³ A further reason for including Emesal lamentation liturgies in the present study is that, like incantations, they were learned in the schools,⁵⁴ although they were not part of the regular curriculum.

Sumerian texts from the Western periphery are not (yet) known from contemporaneous Mesopotamian sources, and often not even from earlier and later periods. This holds true for some Akkadian literary compositions as well. These features led some scholars to argue that Sumerian as well as Akkadian texts underwent modification and adaptation to the local cultural milieu when they reached the Western periphery. As will be demonstrated in the present study, there are no grounds for such a claim. Sumerian texts from Western regions represent part of the lost Mesopotamian repertoire of the Late Bronze Age. Modification and adaptation, which can be detected in the Sumerian texts from Syria and Anatolia through comparison with Old Babylonian recensions, occurred within the Mesopotamian tradition as a result of the process of selection and reworking operating in the Middle Babylonian scribal schools. Over time and space, texts were subjected to modification with regard to content, grammar, phonetics and writing. The corruption and alteration of Sumerian, which had already started in the Old Babylonian period under the influence of Akkadian, became stronger in the second half of the second millennium, especially in texts from Syria and Anatolia, where the knowledge of both Akkadian and Sumerian was weaker than in Mesopotamia. Sumerian texts from the Western periphery are based on Mesopotamian models, whether they were physically transported to Syria and Anatolia in the form of tablets or whether they were transmitted by traveling Mesopotamian scholars who knew texts by heart. Generally, this analysis will show that intentional modification of Sumerian texts did not occur in the Western periphery.

The principal goal of this work is to understand the process of dissemination of Sumerian literature in the Western periphery. This is tied to the identification of the tradition of the textual material. As mentioned earlier, our knowledge of the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus is primarily based on the tablets from Nippur that account for 83% of the total number of manuscripts.⁵⁵ The central role of the city of the god Enlil is not an accident of archaeological discovery but was recognized in

48 Cunningham 1997, 5-9.

49 Veldhuis 1999, 36 n. 5 with further bibliography.

50 Michalowski 1985, 216-217.

51 Cohen 1981, 3-6.

52 Tinney 2011, 586, suggests that only contexts that provide curricular texts were the target of archaeological excavations at Nippur. According to J. Peterson (personal communication) there are ca. 100 tablets and fragments from Nippur scattered across Philadelphia, Istanbul and Jena.

53 Krecher 1966b, 14-15.

54 Löhnert 2009, 82-86.

55 Tinney 2011, 578-581.

antiquity.⁵⁶ In an Old Babylonian literary letter⁵⁷ it is explicitly stated that there is no place where one can learn the scribal art as in Nippur, and that the Isin school should be inspired by the one in Nippur. The Nippur scribal school represents our primary source for the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition that was generally adopted in Mesopotamia.⁵⁸ Other streams of tradition are known from the Sumerian literary documentation. One flourished at the court of the dynasty of Larsa and was characterized by a corpus of texts virtually absent from the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition⁵⁹ and featuring a language with a strong local coloring. A further stream of tradition has been identified in the texts found in the Northern Babylonian centers such as Sippar, Kiš, Tell Hadad-Meturan and Tell Harmal-Šaduppum. In particular, Sippar had a preeminent religious role in the whole northern Mesopotamia similar to that of Nippur in the South.⁶⁰ The Northern Babylonian repertoire did not substantially differ from the Nippur corpus, as is clear from the Meturan findings⁶¹ and from the compositions listed in a literary catalogue from Sippar.⁶² Nevertheless texts may show strong recensional variants.⁶³ Moreover texts such as *Incantation to Utu*,⁶⁴ *Kiutu*⁶⁵ incantations, and more generally texts centered on the Sun-god, seem to be peculiar to Northern Babylonia and are unattested in Nippur. Also Emesal lamentations primarily stem from Northern Babylonia. One of the main differences of the Northern Babylonian Sumerian texts concerns orthography.⁶⁶ Many texts produced in Northern Babylonian scribal schools were written according to a substantially different orthographic convention that scholars call phonetic or unorthographic writing (for this term see below); it consists in replacing logograms with syllabograms, e.g. du-mu for dumu, i-gi for igi. This orthographic convention, attested in Mesopotamia since the third millennium, was adopted to a greater extent in Northern Babylonia during the (Late) Old Babylonian period. Unorthographic texts comprise compositions already known in standard orthography as well as texts unattested in other corpora. However, it must be remembered that not all the texts from Northern Babylonia are written in phonetic orthography. The tradition of phonetically written Sumerian texts survived in Northern Mesopotamia up to the first millennium as attested in the tablets from Sultan Tepe.⁶⁷ A few unorthographic texts such as *Incantation to Utu* have also come down to us in MB copies.

Identification of the tradition(s) of the Sumerian literary and magical texts from the Western periphery is an extremely complicated and often unsolvable question. The subject of the tradition of the LBA Sumerian literary texts will be approached from different perspectives, taking into account philological, cultural and historical aspects. The identification of a single text cannot be based on a unique criterion; several aspects must be taken into account. One is orthography because several manuscripts present phonetic writings. However, one must be aware that the presence of unorthographic writings is not *per se* a clear indication of the Northern Babylonian tradition. For instance a group of monolingual incantations from Ḫattuša (CTH 800) probably rely on the Northern Babylonian

56 Sjöberg 1975b, 176.

57 Kleinerman 2011, 194-198, see also Löhnert 2009, 83.

58 The mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition is understood here as a repertoire of texts widespread in Mesopotamian scribal circles that is known to us mainly from Nippur. However, texts that are not Nippur compositions, even though mostly preserved in Nippur copies, such as *The Instructions of Šuruppak*, can be attributed to the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition. Conversely, not all the Nippur texts belong to the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition if they only reflect a local tradition. Obviously, this definition does not pretend to be a fixed classification and is subject to modification.

59 As will be seen (§ 6.2.4), only royal praise poems belong to the Larsa corpus, whereas literary letters are Nippur compositions.

60 Myers 2007.

61 Cavigneaux, Al-Rawi 1993a, 95.

62 See Tinney 1999, 168.

63 See Michalowski 2003, 111.

64 This is a composition attested in the MB documentation as well as at Ḫattuša, §§ 1.1.10.2, 5.3.8.

65 For this incantation see §§ 1.1.10.3, 5.2.4.

66 See § 4.

67 Reiner, Civil 1967, 209.

tradition because they are completely written in phonetic orthography, and their phonetic writings reveal close similarities with the Old Babylonian unorthographic texts from Northern Babylonia. On the other hand, phonetic versions added on multicolumn tablets to texts written in standard orthography are not indicative of the Northern Babylonian tradition. They may only reveal that the copyist was learned in the phonetic orthography convention that was likely drawn from Northern Babylonian scribal tradition. To give an example, it will be argued that *The Ballad of Early Rulers* that was copied on a multicolumn tablet with a phonetic version in addition to the text written in standard orthography probably belonged to the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition. A further criterion adopted is genre. As mentioned above, texts related to the Sun-god are likely to be a product of Northern Babylonian scribal circles regardless of their orthography. Two compositions, *Incantation to Utu* (KUB 4 11) and a *Kiutu* incantation (CTH 794), stem from Ḫattuša. Comparison with the earlier (Old Babylonian) and contemporaneous (Middle Babylonian) Mesopotamian Sumerian literary texts can provide considerable information on the tradition of the Syro-Anatolian texts. For other compositions the identification of the tradition remains an educated guess. The Sumerian documentation from Syria and Anatolia that spans a long period does not represent a monolithic tradition. Nevertheless it is plausible that the majority of the Sumerian literary and magical texts were transmitted by scribal schools located in regions close to Syria and Anatolia (Northern Babylonia, Babylon) regardless of their literary tradition. Differences between earlier and later corpora will allow us to understand the place of the LBA Sumerian texts in the context of the transmission and preservation of Sumerian literature. This study will show that the corpus of Sumerian literary texts from the Western periphery does not reflect a homogeneous phase. Indeed, transmission of this material occurred in several waves reflecting different stages of the process of selection and standardization of the Old Babylonian corpus.

A philological and grammatical analysis of the documentation will be the basis of this study as it provides one of the principal ways to identify the stream of tradition. Notably, text analysis will distinguish between alterations, modifications and scribal habits which can be traced back to any segment of the Mesopotamian Sumerian literary tradition – i.e. traditionally motivated changes and features – and those, if any, that were produced in Syria and Anatolia as a result of copying by local scribes. To anticipate some results of the present work, most of the anomalies can be traced back to the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary tradition. Only in a few cases can anomalies be attributed to local copyists.

The Sumerian texts discovered in the Western periphery are far removed from the cultural milieu in which they had been created. Therefore, another important objective of the present work is to identify the function and cultural value of these texts in their new scribal and social context. In southern Mesopotamia, in cities such as Nippur or Ur, Sumerian was a primary part of the people's cultural heritage, but in Syria and Anatolia it must have been perceived as something alien or at least unusual.

A terminological note is required. According to the definition provided by Cooper (2000), the terms 'phonetic'/'unorthographic' and 'writing'/'spelling' will be used interchangeably to indicate writings deviating from the standard orthography. Additionally, as far as possible, the term 'text' will be used for the reconstructed wording of a literary work or composition. The material attestation of a text inscribed on a cuneiform tablet will be referred to as a 'manuscript' or 'copy'. 'Version' in regard to bilingual and multilingual texts identifies the various realizations of a single text, namely standard Sumerian or unorthographic Sumerian and Akkadian and Hittite translations. 'Recension' defines a series of manuscripts of a composition, roughly dated to the same period, and showing only minor variants.

The material will be presented according to its provenance. To each manuscript or group of manuscripts associated with a single composition will be dedicated a section containing grammatical and philological analysis. This study begins by presenting the material from Mesopotamia: Middle Babylonian (Chapter 1) and Middle Assyrian (Chapter 2) Sumerian literary and magical texts. This choice is intended to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the tradition of Sumerian texts from Mesopotamia that will provide the standard for comparison. This material will be organized according to types of compositions; it follows, with only a few modifications, the usual classification of Sumerian literature into divine narratives, divine praise poems, royal praise poems, wisdom compositions, liturgical (Emesal) texts and incantations. Chapter 3 provides an introduction to the

Syro-Anatolian material with the list of manuscripts and a brief description of sites and find-spots. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to the analysis of the phonetic writings contained in the Sumerian texts from Syro-Anatolian archives. Orthographic and phonetic anomalies will be compared with those attested in the OB unorthographic texts. This will allow us to define the knowledge and tradition of the syllabary used by scribes who copied Sumerian literary and magical texts discovered in the Western periphery. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will be devoted to the documentation from Ḫattuša, Emar and Ugarit respectively. Within each chapter, manuscripts will be presented according to their scripts. Indeed, tablets from the Syro-Anatolian archives containing Sumerian texts show a very different range of sign shapes and ductus, i.e. manner of incision,⁶⁸ related to the origin and background of scribes. Some tablets are the work of local scribes but others are clearly the product of non-Syrian or non-Anatolian scribes. Therefore, a detailed paleographic analysis will be provided for each tablet or group of tablets. Paleographic systematization allows us to determine the provenance and date of tablets, providing further evidence for understanding the stream of tradition to which the texts inscribed on them belong. Lastly, a complete outline of the tradition and the process of dissemination of Sumerian literature in the Western periphery, placed in its historical context, will be presented in Chapters 8 - Ḫattuša - and 9 - Emar and Ugarit. The choice to organize in a single chapter the outcomes of text analysis from Emar and Ugarit depends on the presence of the same compositions in the two sites.

68 For the distinction between ductus and sign shape see van den Hout 2012b, 152-153.