

10 Conclusions

Toward a History of Sumerian Literature in the Late Bronze Age

When William Hallo approached the history of Sumerian literature in the 1976 volume dedicated to Thorkild Jacobsen, our knowledge of the mechanisms of textual production, selection and standardization over time was less thorough than it is today. The present work allows us to attempt a reconstruction of the history of Sumerian literature in the transitional moment between textual production during the Old Babylonian period and canonization in the first millennium.

Sumerian literature is mainly known from the Old Babylonian documentation of Nippur. In the latter part of Samsu-iluna's reign (1749-1712), wars and failure of the water supply caused the depopulation of southern Babylonia. The city of Nippur was occupied for a short period by the first king of the Sealand dynasty, Ilīma-ilum, who was a contemporary of Samsu-iluna and his son Abiešuḫ.²¹³⁵ Nevertheless Nippur remained under the control of the kings of Babylon until the latter part of Ammišaduqa's reign.²¹³⁶ In the Late Old Babylonian period Southern Babylonian priests, scribes and scholars were exiled to the North where they disseminated their repertoire of texts. However, scholarly activities did not completely fall off in southern Babylonia as demonstrated by the recovery of literary texts dated to the Sealand dynasty.²¹³⁷ A renewal of scholarship in Nippur occurred after the demise of the Sealand dynasty at the hands of the Kassite rulers and especially from the mid-13th century as a result of the Nippur renaissance. The corpus of Middle Babylonian Sumerian literary texts can be dated approximately to the 13th century. In the late 13th century the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I defeated the Kassite ruler Kaštiliaš IV and conquered Babylon, importing scholarly texts to Assur as part of the booty. These tablets, representing part of the body of texts in the Middle Assyrian libraries of Assur, date to the 12th – early 11th century. In the Middle Babylonian period, the OB material was reorganized through the selection and adaptation of Sumerian texts. Many compositions were provided with Akkadian translations, but unilingual texts were still copied. The process of canonization was still in an embryonic phase in the Kassite period;²¹³⁸ that further modifications occurred later during the Second Dynasty of Isin is evident from the MA texts, which reflect a more advanced stage of standardization than the MB corpus. The majority of the MB and MA texts rely on the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition even though compositions belonging to the Northern Babylonian tradition such as *Incantation to Utu* are documented in the Kassite period.

At the end of the Old Babylonian period (1595), after the fall of the first dynasty of Babylon to the Hittite king Muršili I, scholarly material started to be transmitted to Syria and Anatolia. In general terms, Sumerian literary texts recovered at Ḫattuša, Emar and Ugarit reflect the post-Old Babylonian stage of the history of Sumerian literature. Nevertheless, the Western periphery corpus does not represent a single and homogeneous phase in the selection, standardization and transmission of the Old Babylonian material. Comparison with the approximately contemporaneous Mesopotamian sources has shown that, with the exclusion of a variant recension of *Incantation to Utu* (KUB 4 11) and an Akkado-Hurrian version of *The Instructions of Šuruppak*, none of the compositions known to date from the MB and MA tablets are attested in the Western periphery corpus. To the texts attested

2135 See Cole 1996, 12 n. 42.

2136 George 2009, 136-142.

2137 George 2007a, George 2013, 129-131.

2138 Western periphery recensions of *BeR*, *EaN* and *Nergal D* show that this process had already started in the MB period, see below.

both in Mesopotamia and in the Western periphery we may add *BeR* because one of the Ugarit manuscripts is a Middle Babylonian script tablet, either imported or written *in loco* by a foreign scribe. While for some compositions the lack of duplicates is due to the chance of archaeological discovery, other texts were clearly not transmitted to the Western periphery. Notably, the long mythological texts *Lugal-e* and *Angim*, which were among the most popular compositions from the Old Babylonian period up to the first millennium, are unknown in the Western periphery documentation. Also, Eme-sal liturgies never crossed the border of Mesopotamia. Texts and knowledge reached the Western periphery in the wake of foreign (i.e. Mesopotamian) specialists – e.g. scribes and exorcists – and/or by means of military campaigns.

Sumerian texts from the Western periphery do not reflect a homogenous tradition. The Northern Babylonian tradition is clearly identifiable in texts written in phonetic orthography. However, one must distinguish between unorthographic texts transmitted to the Western periphery – mostly the monolingual incantations written on Babylonian script tablets CTH 800 – and phonetic versions added to compositions transmitted in standard orthography. The latter are the product of local scribes who learned phonetic orthography by means of lexical lists derived from a Northern Babylonian tradition.

Transmission of the Sumerian material occurred in several waves that may reflect different traditions. The unorthographic monolingual incantations CTH 800, which show similarities with the texts from Meturan, represent the earliest wave and the oldest tradition (LOB). A second wave spreading toward Ḫattuša comprises the Assyro-Mitannian incantations that are the product of local scribal tradition(s) from Northern Mesopotamia/Babylonia. These texts are later than the monolingual incantations in phonetic orthography, as their bilingual format indicates. In roughly the same period occurred the transmission of *The Hymn to Iškur-Adad* to the Hittite capital as well as *PfK*, attested in a Syrian school tablet from Emar and in two manuscripts from Ugarit. It is not precluded that these two compositions were composed in the Kassite period on the basis of Old Babylonian themes and texts. During the 13th-12th century the dissemination of these texts (e.g. *MLM*, *LI-LN* and the vanity theme compositions) was boosted by the second flourishing of the Nippur school and the conquest of Babylon by Tukulti-Ninurta. Another possible source of the material found in the Western periphery is perhaps the Sealand scribal schools. Some orthographic features of a tablet of Gilgameš from the Sealand²¹³⁹ recall habits attested in Syria and Anatolia, but the material from Southern Babylonia from this period is too scanty to be used in the present study.²¹⁴⁰ Dissemination of the Sumerian material to the Western periphery can be tentatively summarized as follows:

Century	City	Composition
16 th – 15 th	Ḫattuša	Monolingual Incantations in Phonetic Writing (CTH 800)
15 th – mid-14 th	Ḫattuša	Sumerian Forerunner to the Hittite Prayers to the Sun-god Prisms KBo 19 98
14 th – 13 th	Ḫattuša	Assyro-Mitannian Incantations Fragment KUB 4 23 (?) The Hymn to Iškur-Adad (Model of KUB 4 4?) Saġ-geg VI (KBo 14 51)
	Emar Ugarit	A Prayer for a King Incantations (?)

2139 George 2007a, 63.

2140 The only published Sumerian text from the Sealand dynasty is a *Balaġ* to Enlil, see § 1.1.9.2.

Century	City	Composition
13 th	Ḫattuša	Eduḫba E Nergal D Dumuzi Text (D-I R?) The Message of Lu-diġira to his Mother The Letter of Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaġ New Script Incantations including Incantation to Utu
	Ugarit	The Message of Lu-diġira to his mother The Letter of Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaġ Incantations (?)
	Emar	Tsukimoto Incantation (?) Incantations (?)
late 13 th – early 12 th	Emar	The Ballad of Early Rulers Enlil and Namzitarra The Fowler
	Ugarit	The Letter of Sîn-iddinam to Utu Proverbs from Ugarit The Fox and the Hyena Hymn to Enki (?) Incantations

According to the reconstruction proposed in the table, the earliest texts transmitted to the Western periphery rely on the Northern Babylonian tradition. This is due to the geographical proximity of Northern Babylonian centers as well as the decline of scribal activities in Nippur and Southern Babylonia in the early Kassite period. Transfer of knowledge between Northern Babylonia, specifically Ešnunna, and Syria (Mari) is already attested in the Old Babylonian period.²¹⁴¹ It is likely that in this phase the transmission of this material followed the same routes. It is worth noting that the only Sumerian text from Alalaḫ whose documentation dates to the 15th – 14th century is an unorthographic incantation,²¹⁴² reflecting a scribal convention common in Northern Babylonia. After the revival of the Nippur scribal schools the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition spread in Mesopotamia and beyond, as witnessed in the 13th century documents from the Western periphery.

Not all the texts from the Western periphery are documented in either earlier or later periods. For instance, Syro-Anatolian manuscripts of *The Hymn to Iškur-Adad* and *PfK* are the only sources known to date. Comparison with first-millennium duplicates, when available, yields very different scenarios. Some texts are far removed from late duplicates, notably incantations, while others such as *LI-LN* are very close to the preserved first-millennium sources. Distinctions should also be made on the basis of text typology, as incantations are further removed from the extant OB and first-millennium sources than literary texts are. This can be understood in light of the lesser degree of textual stability across space and time that non-curricular texts such as incantations usually show.²¹⁴³ Sumerian incantations attested in copies from the Western periphery that entered first-millennium series are *Udug-ḫul* Tablets I to VII, *Muššu'u* Tablets VI, VIII, IX,²¹⁴⁴ *Saġ-geg* I (= *Muššu'u* Tablet I) and VI, and a forerunner to *Bīt rimki* House II. It is worth noting that tablets from Syria and Anatolia represent the oldest sources of *Saġ-geg* and *Bīt rimki*. Western periphery manuscripts containing these incantations do not reflect the serialization that can be seen in the later MA sources, but frequently include miscellaneous incantations.

2141 Charpin 2012.

2142 AT 453.

2143 See Tinney 2011, 591-593.

2144 Other Akkadian incantations belonging to the series *Muššu'u* are attested at Emar and Ugarit, see Böck 2007, 42-43.

Canonical Series	Source	Format	Script
Udug-ḥul I / Muššu'u IX/b	Tsukimoto Incantation(b) E 730	Monolingual	SH SH(?)
Udug-ḥul II	KUB 4 24	Monolingual	NS
Udug-ḥul III	E 729	Monolingual	SH
Udug-ḥul III/VI(?)	KUB 37 102	Bilingual – Interlinear	Ass-Mit
Udug-ḥul IV	E 790	Monolingual	SH(?)
Udug-ḥul V	KBo 36 11+(d)	Bilingual – Columns	Ass-Mit
Udug-ḥul VI	KUB 4 16	Bilingual – Columns	Ass-Mit
Udug-ḥul VII	KUB 37 143	Bilingual – Columns	Ass-Mit
Muššu'u VI	KBo 36 11+(a)	Bilingual – Columns	Ass-Mit
Muššu'u VIII/q	Tsukimoto Incantation(a)	Monolingual	SH
Saġ-geg I / Muššu'u I (?)	E 732	Monolingual	SH(?)
Saġ-geg VI	KBo 14 51 AuOrS 23 21(b-§8)	Monolingual(?) Monolingual	MB Ug
Bit rimki House II	CTH 794(b)	Bilingual – Interlinear	Ass-Mit

To sum up, the Western periphery corpus reflects a very fluid moment in the history of Sumerian literature, when some innovations and tendencies mostly known from the first-millennium sources first appeared on the scene, while others were still unknown. Serialization and the consistent use of the interlinear format typical of first-millennium documentation, which occur in MA texts,²¹⁴⁵ are unattested in both Western periphery and Middle Babylonian documentation. Nevertheless, Western periphery recensions of *BeR*, *EaN* and *Nergal D* derive from the adaptation and modification of OB texts that occurred in the process of standardization during the Middle Babylonian period. Indeed, the Ḫattuša recension of *Nergal D* is much closer to the first-millennium duplicates than to the single OB manuscript.²¹⁴⁶ These three texts – but probably this consideration is applicable to other compositions that do not have first-millennium duplicates or that are poorly preserved in fragmentary manuscripts – show that the process of standardization consisted in rephrasing and adding lines to the OB texts as well as modifying their line order. The compositions *The Fowler* and *The Fox and the Hyena* may also be added here. If they result from modification of the OB *The Fowler and his Wife* and *The Fox and Enlil as Merchant* and do not represent independent compositions, they provide further examples of adaptation. The absence from the LBA Mesopotamian documentation of texts known from the Western periphery that exist in first-millennium copies such as *BeR*, *LI-LN* and *SI-Utu* clearly evidences that what has come down to us from the Middle Babylonian period is only a small part of the actual textual production. We also need to recall that much material from Babylon is still unpublished. The Western periphery texts help to fill this gap, providing insights into the lost Middle Babylonian repertoire. The best example is provided by *BeR*, which is attested at Ugarit on a tablet written by a Babylonian scribe but unknown in Mesopotamian LBA sources. The Sumerian literary texts from the Western periphery are to be understood as internal to the Mesopotamian stream of tradition. As demonstrated in detail, the alleged adaptation of Mesopotamian literary texts to the local cultural milieu must be rejected. The modification of OB Sumerian compositions occurred in the Middle Babylonian scribal schools and not in the Western periphery. Nevertheless, the creation of compositions upon Mesopotamian themes occurs in Syria and Anatolia, but never in the original language. Examples are the Hurrian and Hittite versions of Gilgameš and the Hittite versions of the Sargonic tales. It is not by coincidence that these texts, which can be called free adaptations, never appear on the same tablet as the original Mesopotamian composition. The creation of compositions based on themes derived from a different language is not a phenomenon that first arises in the Western periphery. It is common to the Mesopotamian literature itself and generally

²¹⁴⁵ See for instance *Lugal-e* and *Udug-ḥul*.

²¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, no first-millennium manuscripts of *EaN* are preserved and the only one of *BeR* is too fragmentary to be of use.

to all ancient Near Eastern cultures, as attested in the Akkadian versions of the Gilgameš epic, *The dispute between the Date Palm and the Tamarisk*, and to a certain extent the biblical text. Similarly, some masterpieces of Western literature are examples of cross-linguistic adaptation, such as the *Aeneid* and *Orlando Furioso*.

The corpora of Sumerian literary and magical texts from Ḫattuša, on the one hand, and from Emar and Ugarit, on the other hand, are very different. With the exception of the compositions transmitted from Ḫattuša to Ugarit, *MLM*, *LI-LN* and perhaps *Saġ-geġ VI*, the repertoire of texts recovered at Ḫattuša is completely different from the Emar-Ugarit corpus.²¹⁴⁷ Outside of those texts, the only connections between the Hittite and Syrian spheres are provided by the NA 'Catalogue of Texts and Authors' which quotes *Nergal D* and the series of Sidu which includes *BeR* and *The Fowler*. Among the texts from the Hittite capital only *MLM*, *LI-LN* and *Edubba E* can be traced back to the mainstream of the Sumerian literary tradition. The remainder of the Sumerian corpus from the Hittite capital relies on different traditions that in some cases were centered in Northern Babylonia. Moreover, the Mesopotamian material from Ḫattuša reflects an older stage in the standardization process compared to the Emar-Ugarit texts. The documentation from the Hittite capital covers a longer time frame than the Emar and Ugarit archives, and some texts directly reflect the OB (or LOB) stage, for example CTH 800. The older stage of the material from Ḫattuša is evident in the few pieces of literature preserved in all three centers – for example, the wisdom text *Šimâ Milka*, which incorporates both the classical, positive father-to-son instructions, as known from *The Instructions of Šuruppak*, and the more pessimistic vanity theme.²¹⁴⁸ The Emar (Syro-Hittite) and Ugarit sources of *Šimâ Milka* parallel each other whereas the Ḫattuša manuscript reveals an older textual tradition.²¹⁴⁹ The same holds true for the Gilgameš epic.²¹⁵⁰ The earlier stage of the Ḫattuša material, compared to the Syro-Hittite documentation from Emar, is also recognizable in the aforementioned ġeš section of the list *Urra*.²¹⁵¹ The Ḫattuša recension preserved in the MS prism KBo 26 5B diverges from the Nippur and Syro-Hittite tablet from Emar which, conversely, displays a level of standardization closer to the first-millennium recension. Nevertheless, Sumerian literary texts from Ḫattuša, Emar and Ugarit were all used in the same stage in the scribal curriculum, the Intermediary Phase. Tablets from the Western periphery as well as the Middle Babylonian documentation witness that compositions such as *The Hymn to Iškur-Adad*, *PfK* and perhaps the Dumuzi composition KUB 37 41, which originally were likely non-curricular texts, found their way into the curriculum in the post-Old Babylonian period. All the Sumerian literary texts from the Western libraries are indeed short compositions whereas the long epics and myths that in the OB curriculum formed the Advanced Phase, including the Decad and the House F Fourteen, are totally unknown. In my opinion these compositions, at least in the Syrian and Anatolian curriculum, were substituted by Akkadian texts such as *Šimâ Milka* which, given its relationship to the vanity theme compositions of the Intermediary Phase, was probably the first text learned in the Advanced Phase.²¹⁵² The scribal curriculum in the Western periphery focused on Akkadian, the international diplomatic language, and studying long Akkadian compositions likely appeared to Western scribes to be much more useful than mastering Sumerian epic and myths.

2147 I presented some thoughts on why different material is attested at Ḫattuša, Emar and Ugarit in the paper 'The Fortune of Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East: the Case of the Vanity Theme', given at the 60th Rencontre d'Assyriologique Internationale in Warsaw.

2148 For a discussion of key themes of this composition see Cohen 2013, 118-123.

2149 Dietrich 1991, 65-67; the variants in Cohen 2013, 84-101, refer to the Ḫattuša manuscript.

2150 The Ḫattuša sources represent an older recension (OB) than the Emar-Ugarit recension, which is closer to the standard Babylonian text, George 2003, 24-26.

2151 See § 9.4.

2152 It is understood that the Intermediary Phase also comprises short Akkadian compositions.

Curriculum ¹	
Elementary Phase	Lexical Lists ²
Intermediary Phase	A Prayer for a King Dumuzi Text (D-I R?) Edubba E Enlil and Namzitarra Proverbs from Ugarit The Ballad of Early Rulers The Fowler The Fox and the Hyena The Hymn to Iškur-Adad The Letter of Lugal-ibila to Lugal-nesaĝ The Letter of Sîn-iddinam to Utu The Message of Lu-diĝira to his Mother
Advanced Phase	Atraĥasis The Epic of Gilgameš Šimâ Milka

¹ Texts in the table are listed in alphabetic order.

² Lexical lists from the Western periphery are extensively treated in Scheucher 2012; for a survey of this material see Viano *forthcoming*.

Because long Sumerian compositions are attested in Mesopotamia in the Late Bronze Age, it is clear that the material found in the Western periphery was carefully selected and not haphazardly transmitted. It is not a coincidence that the Emesal liturgies, which are known from MA and MB sources and would become very popular in the first millennium, are unknown in the Western libraries. These compositions used in liturgical contexts were entirely unfamiliar in Syria and Anatolia and had no practical function in the education of a Western Semitic or Hittite scribe. Each of the three centers had its own religious and cultic practices in which Emesal texts would have found no place. On the contrary, the large amount of incantations – another non-curricular text type – discovered at Hattuša was a consequence of the importation of Mesopotamian specialists who used these texts in magic rituals.

A question that is left open for further research, hopefully to be facilitated by new textual discoveries, is to understand whether the third and early second millennium Syrian scribal schools, notably Ebla and Mari, played any role in the formation of a scribal tradition in the Western periphery during the Late Bronze Age.²¹⁵³

2153 Civil 1995, 2306, see also Civil 1984a.