New Approaches to Commentary Formation in Ancient Mesopotamia

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Assyriologists who have studied Mesopotamian commentary formation have drawn upon ideas from scholars of religion in treating the creation of a static canon at the end of the second millennium BCE as a necessary precondition for the emergence of cuneiform commentaries. The present contribution argues against the idea that Mesopotamian commentaries emerged in response to a closed canon by marshaling evidence from Mesopotamian divinatory compositions, including the celestial-divinatory series *Enūma Anu Enlil* and its associated *aḫû*, or "extraneous" tradition, as well as the extispical treatise *Bārûtu*. These compositions illustrate that commentaries could be written about texts that were still fluid and malleable in ancient Mesopotamia. Moreover, a brief look at the phenomenon of inner biblical exegesis in the Hebrew Bible supports the idea that texts need not be unchanging to be the subject of interpretation, whether in ancient Mesopotamia or elsewhere. In response to these conclusions, I outline an alternate theory for Mesopotamian commentary formation that eschews the importance of a closed canon and stresses instead ideas of scholarly bilingualism, divination, authority, and textual decorum in ancient Iraq.

The discussion of canon and canonization in Assyriology is characterized by a remarkable number of discrete positions along the canon–non-canon spectrum.[1] While some scholars, such as Hallo, have concluded that there were multiple canons spanning thousands of years, others, such as Rochberg (especially in her early works), have argued that there never was a Mesopotamian canon, and that the use of the term canon or its derivatives to describe Mesopotamian literature is thus unsuitable.[2] Recently, Frahm and Gabbay have added a new

Author's note: Thanks are due to Matthew Rutz, John Steele, Eckart Frahm, Francesca Rochberg, Saul Olyan, and Andrew Tobolowsky for reading different drafts of this article and proposing many helpful questions and suggestions that served to elucidate and bolster my arguments. Additionally, the notes of two anonymous reviewers both saved me from careless errors and helped me clarify and expand upon this article in a number of different ways. Needless to say, all errors and omissions in this article are my own. This piece began as a chapter in my dissertation, "The Series 'If the Moon at Its Appearance' and Mesopotamian Scholarship of the First Millennium BCE," and so I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge those institutions that financially supported me throughout that process, including, but not limited to, the Graduate School and Department of Egyptology and Assyriology at Brown University and The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq. I would also like to thank the Lady Davis Fellowship and the Fulbright Program for funding my postdoctoral research at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the 2017–2018 academic year. Finally, I am happy to thank my wife, Penina, and daughter, Yael, for their unending love and support.

1. As in other fields, these discussions are often muddled by different implicit or explicit assumptions about what constitutes a canon or a canonical composition in the first place. For example, scholars may disagree about whether a canon existed in ancient Mesopotamia not because they interpret the ancient evidence differently, but because they have opposing views about whether canons are necessarily religious in nature, or whether a culture must formally list which compositions are part of a canon.

2. For a good overview of the Mesopotamian canon debate, see Hurowitz 2001, who argues against the existence of a cuneiform canon. For early Assyriological use of the term canon, see Falkenstein 1931: 10–11; Matouš 1933: 1–2; von Soden 1936; and Schuster 1938. See Hallo 1962, 1968, 1970, 1975, and 1991 for this scholar's sin-

wrinkle to the canon debate by proposing that cuneiform commentaries emerged in response to the creation of a fixed Mesopotamian canon at the end of the second millennium BCE.[3] In doing so, Frahm and Gabbay have joined scholars from other fields in arguing that commentary formation is predicated upon the existence of a static canon.[4]

Despite its support from Assyriologists and others, the hypothesis that commentaries emerged as a reaction to the fixation of canonical texts is problematic when applied to ancient Near Eastern material. The very basis of this theory is precarious if one considers that it is unclear whether a Mesopotamian canon ever existed, let alone one that was regarded as immutable, and yet hundreds of cuneiform commentaries are extant from the first millennium BCE.[5] In what follows, I will argue against the view that ancient scholars wrote cuneiform commentaries in response to the existence of a static canon. In order to support this position, I will draw on evidence from the most important Mesopotamian celestial-divinatory series of the first millennium BCE, *Enūma Anu Enlil* ("When Anu, Enlil (and Ea)," abbreviated as *EAE*), as well as the final chapter of the extispical treatise *Bārûtu* ("Art of the Seer").[6] Moreover, I will examine how inner-biblical exegesis, the interpretive tradition most closely related to that of Mesopotamia both geographically and temporally, complicates the relationship between canon and interpretation in the field of biblical studies, and consider how these ideas may affect the prevailing Assyriological theories of commentary formation. Finally, I will offer a way forward in conceptualizing the creation of cuneiform commentaries by focusing on the cross-cultural idea of authority, as well as a number of culturally specific phenomena, including divination, the lexical tradition, and an implicit concept of textual decorum.

Of the few scholars who have proffered views on the advent of Mesopotamian commentaries, most have associated these texts with canonical compositions. One of the first scholars to do so was Millard, who published his ideas in a discussion of the Mesopotamian commentary tradition in light of later, largely Bible-centered, traditions. Here, Millard argues that the creation of a commentary presupposes the authority of the base text in question. After establishing that many traditional Mesopotamian texts known from the first millennium were

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gular idea that there were multiple successive canons in Mesopotamia. For recent nuanced arguments that a Mesopotamian canon took shape at the end of the second millennium, see Veldhuis 1998 and Frahm 2011: 317–28. For arguments against a Mesopotamian canon, see the already cited discussion of Hurowitz, as well as those of Lambert 1957; Rochberg-Halton 1984 and 1987; Lieberman 1990; and Röllig 2009. Additionally, see Rochberg 2016, where she moves beyond arguments for or against the existence of a canon from a textual perspective, and instead focuses on the power and relevance of canonical compositions, especially within the practice of scholarship.

3. While Alan Millard espoused a similar view in 1978 (for which, see below), Frahm 2011 and Gabbay 2012, where these authors first lay out their ideas about canon and commentary, do not draw on Millard in their discussions of this issue.

4. Frahm (2011: 318) notes that his idea of a canonical text as an immutable artifact does not perfectly reflect the realities of the cuneiform textual record in the first millennium BCE. That being said, he still makes this unchanging canon the cornerstone of his theory of commentary formation. Moreover, this article contends that there are certain cases where important, culturally normative texts that must be considered "canonical" in any modern conception of a Mesopotamian canon were commented upon and far from static in antiquity.

Throughout this article, I use the terms "canon," "canonical," "canonicity," etc. in relation to arguments of Assyriologists and other modern scholars for or against the existence of a canon and the importance of a closed canon for commentary formation. The precise meanings of these terms vary depending on the implicit or explicit idiosyncratic definitions of the individual scholars in question. For my purposes here, a specific definition of canon is not as important as the notion that a canon and the compositions thereof are immutable.

5. For the most recent catalogue, description, and discussion of Mesopotamian commentaries, see Frahm 2011, as well as the updated online Cuneiform Commentaries Project (http://ccp.yale.edu).

6. For a good, recent introduction to these two series, see Koch 2015.

canonized by the end of the second millennium, he goes on to contend that only after a text is canonized will exegesis of that text begin. Moreover, Millard stresses that commentaries themselves aid in the preservation of the base text, though he does not elaborate on this process.[7]

Although Millard's work has not been cited in current discussions of the emergence of cuneiform commentaries, the most recent views on the topic associate canonicity and exegesis. Indeed, both Frahm and Gabbay view commentaries as products of canonization, even if their ideas are further developed or more elaborate than those of Millard. Frahm's views on commentary formation play an important role in his discussion of Mesopotamian canonization. Taking a cue from Assmann, Frahm argues that an unalterable canon is a prerequisite for the emergence of commentaries. Furthermore, commentaries make unchanging texts accessible in ever-changing social, political, or linguistic environments.[8] The canonization of cuneiform texts at the end of the second millennium thus necessitated the creation of a commentary tradition that would keep these newly immutable texts current.[9]

Drawing on Frahm, Gabbay's point of departure for a discussion of commentaries is the cuneiform canon. He argues, slightly differently from Frahm, that because the closure of the canon impinged upon scholars' ability to both create new and rework older texts, scholars were left to study existing compositions; commentaries on these existing compositions became the creative outlets for first-millennium scholarship. The goal of these exegetical texts changed with the patrons, purposes, and environments of scholarship, so that Neo-Assyrian commentaries were quite different from their Late Babylonian counterparts, even if the ultimate impetus for exegesis remained constant.[10]

In claiming that exegesis is inextricably linked to canonicity, these Assyriologists are in line with a number of other scholars who have discussed the origins of commentary. Gladigow argues that an authoritative, unalterable source-text to which one can neither add nor subtract is the basis of commentary.[11] In the same volume, Assmann elucidates his views on the relationship between canon and commentary. For Assmann, canonical texts can no longer be altered or edited; as a result, these compositions become incomprehensible over time. The commentary plays an integral role in the life of the canonical text, as it interprets a text that can no longer reinterpret itself.[12] Some years earlier, the eminent scholar of religion Smith had posited a similar relationship between commentary and canon. He asserted that canonicity implies exegesis, with the interpretive entity expanding the purview of the otherwise limited and closed canon, which remains (at least nominally) unaltered.[13]

Although the argument that commentaries emerged as a reaction to the immutable fixity of canonization is supported by both Assyriologists and other scholars, there are a number of problems with this hypothesis. To begin, because this proposition is focused on the interactions between two types of texts—unchanging, canonized source-texts and their commentaries—expressions of this hypothesis often lack a clear sense of human agency.[14] In terms of Mesopotamia, this lack of agency is visible in the arguments of Millard, Frahm, and Gabbay.

7. See Millard 1978: 249.
8. See Frahm 2011: 317.
9. See Frahm 2011: 317–18.
10. See Gabbay 2012: 270–71.
11. See Gladigow 1995: 35–36.
12. See Assmann 1995: 11.
13. See Smith 1982: 48–52.
14. I am currently working on a project that highlights the importance of groups of individuals over generations within processes of textual transmission and stabilization.

In each of their articulations, the role of the individual scholar as active decision-maker is diminished. This is especially apparent in descriptions of canonicity and the closure of the canon.

For example, Gabbay describes how "once the canon was closed and there was much less freedom for the creation of new texts or the reworking of older texts, the scholarly focus shifted to … interpretation and to the creation of new genres of exegetical texts."[15] Because the closing of the canon is not portrayed as an active decision, its result is relayed in similarly passive terms. There is no discussion that the closing of a canon is an active choice made by a group of scholars that must be reified by individuals in subsequent generations.[16] Moreover, if a closed canon catalyzed the creation of cuneiform commentaries, then the individuals responsible for closing the canon must have focused at least some of their energy on writing commentaries to those canonical texts. All of the actions described by Gabbay in passive terms would have been choices made by groups of scribes and the individual members of those groups.

While Frahm underscores the role of the scholar Esagil-kīn-apli in the process of canonization and perhaps commentary formation at the end of the second millennium, other, often anonymous, scholarly actors are absent from his larger discussion of authority and canonicity. Frahm opines that "because of the authority these ancient 'authors' and editors possessed, there was no room to question that texts attributed to them were perfect and did not permit any redactional modifications."[17] In this case, the texts themselves are said to forbid any modifications due to the authority of the given author-editors of the compositions in question. If these texts were truly considered immutable, they were considered to be so by scholars. At some point, scholars associated scholarly, legendary, and divine figures with literary works, while later scholars affirmed (or disagreed with) such traditions.[18] Though texts can certainly be agents in their own right, the agency of scholars who in this case edited, authorized, and regarded as unchanging the texts in question should not be overlooked.

More problematic than the lack of scholarly agency in arguments for the association between canonicity and the creation of commentaries is cuneiform evidence that undermines one of the major tenets of the theory in question. Though a few arguments for and against a Mesopotamian canon have been alluded to and cited above, the best way to highlight the difficulties of the position that a closed, immutable Mesopotamian canon existed in the first millennium BCE is to present specific evidence from "canonical" Mesopotamian texts.[19] Some of the best evidence against this viewpoint is furnished by exemplars of the celestial-divinatory series *EAE*, which exhibits a degree of variation unmatched by most other important first-millennium compositions, such as the diagnostic-prognostic series Sa-gig ("Symptoms") or the so-called Epic of Creation *Enūma Eliš* ("When on High").[20]

15. Gabbay 2012: 270.

16. Though it is conceivable that the closure of a canon could be a decision made by a powerful individual (such as a king), there is no evidence that this was the case in Mesopotamia.

17. Frahm 2011: 319–20.

18. For this phenomenon, including a critique of the notion that connections between famous characters and texts functioned to impart authority upon those texts, see below.

19. While spatial limitations preclude me from delving into a discussion of Assyriological views of canon in this article, I will provide an expansive and nuanced study of the scholarship on this topic in a forthcoming monograph. In addition to the citations in n. 2, see Wainer 2016: 212–31 for an overview of the important actors and views in the Assyriological canon debate.

20. See the remarks in Frahm 2011: 318–19 n. 1512, who notes in his argument for cuneiform canonicity that the different recensions of *EAE* vary significantly from one another.

In discussing *EAE*, the idea that multiple recensions of the series were circulating in the first millennium has become a truism.[21] Generalities abound in the discussions of multiple recensions of *EAE* because few scholars have published in-depth analyses of the topic.[22] Recently, Fincke has discussed recensions of *EAE* in terms of tablet layout and to a lesser degree, the sequence of omens. She argues that many of the differences in tablet numbering can be attributed to differences in tablet format and size, as well as the number of entries.[23] As Fincke notes, tablets of *EAE* did not have a fixed sequence of omens: "[I]nstead it seems that scholarly centres or individual scholars had the freedom to choose omens from a given sequence and spread them over their preferred sized tablets to be numbered consecutively."[24] In certain circumstances, this freedom to choose omens from a given sequence resulted in tablets of *EAE* that have almost as many recensions as exemplars.[25] To be sure, certain tablets of *EAE*, such as Tablet 1 or the lunar-eclipse tablets, seem to have existed in a fairly limited number of recensions.[26] Other tablets paint a much more variegated picture. Among the published portions of *EAE*, a significant lack of standardization is best exemplified in some of the earliest and latest tablets of the series.[27]

EAE 3 does a good job of illustrating how problematic these tablets of the series can be for arguments of canonization and commentary formation. The third tablet of *EAE* is concerned with different anomalies connected to the *agû*, or "crown," of the Moon.[28] The sources of Tablet 3 are so irregular in terms of omens included and omen order that a conventional edition is all but impossible.[29] Keeping in mind the limited number of incomplete sources, the scenario evoked by *EAE* 3 is not one of a few standardized recensions represented by discrete groups of exemplars. Rather, almost every Tablet 3 source seems to stand on its own, with limited correspondence among exemplars in terms of omens included and the order of those omens. To be sure, it can often be difficult to determine which fragments brought together by Verderame in his edition of *EAE* 3 were once part of complete *iškāru*, or "standard,"

21. See already the well-known remarks in Weidner 1941–1944: 181, where he argues for recensions that derive from different cities in Babylonia and Assyria; though his association of location and recension has not withstood scrutiny, his basic argument for multiple recensions certainly has.

22. For an exception to this statement, see Al-Rawi and George 2006, who examine *EAE* Tablet 20 and conclude that although there are two main recensions of the text, there are numerous other minor recensions from the first millennium.

23. See Fincke 2013b: 583–91.

24. Fincke 2013b: 585.

25. As opposed to sentences in a literary text, which need to be arranged in a very specific order for the text in question to convey the desired message, individual omens, through certainly affected by their contexts, can theoretically be arranged in many different ways without fully sacrificing the meaning of a composition. While this example highlights an important basic difference between literary and omen texts, modern scholars have written relatively little about effects of genre on modern conceptions of canonicity and ancient practices of textual stability. I believe this may be a fruitful avenue of future research.

26. For the former, see Verderame 2002; for the latter, see Rochberg-Halton 1988; Al-Rawi and George 2006; and Fincke 2016.

27. For *EAE* Tablets 1–6, see Verderame 2002; for the stellar and planetary omens that make up the latter part of the series, see Reiner and Pingree 1975, 1981, 1998, and 2005; Fincke 2013a and 2015.

28. As Verderame (2002: 60–62) notes, the exact meaning of the "crown" of the Moon is unclear, though it has traditionally been interpreted in one of three ways: as a designation for the shape of the moon, as some sort of luminous lunar phenomenon, such as earthshine, or as a lunar-atmospheric phenomenon, such as clouds accumulated around the moon. Instead of trying to define what the *agû* was in celestial-divinatory texts, Verderame stresses the different analytical groupings associated with this phenomenon in the tablet of *EAE* in question, including the shape, color, and number of *agû*, and how this phenomenon is compared to and interacts with atmospheric events, celestial bodies, and other objects and ideas.

29. See the sentiments in Verderame 2002: 59.

exemplars of this tablet, and which represent *aḫû*, or "extraneous," traditions, excerpt texts, commentaries, or something else all together without preserved subscripts.[30] That being said, of the fifteen different sources for Tablet 3 regarded by Verderame as neither excerpts nor commentaries, there are only two examples where sources correspond in both omen and omen order for more than three omens.[31]

For an example of the heterogeneity of *EAE* 3, consider the eight omens concerned with the Moon wearing various types of metal and stone "crowns." Each of these omens is found in multiple sources of *EAE* 3, though no one exemplar includes all of these entries. Moreover, while clusters of two or three of these omens are arranged in the same order in multiple sources, there is no set absolute or relative order for these entries on the whole. For example, an omen concerned with a silver "crown" immediately precedes an omen focused on a gold "crown" in each of the four exemplars in which both of these omens are found. In Source d, the two following omens are concerned with bronze and copper "crowns," respectively, while Sources h_1 and h_2 include the omen about the Moon's copper "crown" before the omen about the bronze "crown" of the Moon. Additionally, Source c includes protases about bronze and dolerite "crowns" of the Moon in the same line, while in Sources h_1 and h_2 the omen concerned with a dolerite "crown" is found between omens focused on rainbow and Sun "crowns" of the Moon.

Table 1. Example of Omen Arrangement in *EAE* 3

Omen Protasis	Exemplar and Line Number					
	c	d	h_1	h_2	i	q
If the Moon is wearing a silver (and) gold "crown"	r.2'(?)		7'	12'	3'–4'(?)	
If the Moon is wearing a silver "crown"		4'	8'	13'	5'–6'	
If the Moon is wearing a gold "crown"	r.3'(?)	5'	9'	14'	7'	
If the Moon is wearing a bronze "crown"	r.8'	6'	11'–12'	16'–17'		2'(?)
If the Moon is wearing a copper "crown"	r.4'(?)[32]	7'	10'	15'		
If the Moon is wearing a tin "crown"	r.5'(?)	8'		18'		3'(?)
If the Moon is wearing a dolerite "crown"	r.8'		3'	8'		
If the Moon is wearing a *qullu*, limestone, (or) antimony "crown"	r.10'	9'				

In its current form, *EAE* Tablet 3 does not seem to belong to a closed, immutable canon. Instead, *EAE* Tablet 3 appears to be a text where scholars or groups of scholars decided to pick and choose which omens to include and in what order from a group of omens on a spe-

30. For important discussions of the terms *iškāru* and *aḫû*, see Civil, Green, and Lambert 1979: 168; Rochberg-Halton 1984 and 1987; and Lieberman 1990.

31. These are *EAE* 3 Source h1:1'–12' (K 4768—Nineveh) and Source h2:6'–16' (K 6291—Nineveh), as well as *EAE* 3 Source v: 6'–10' (BM 32373—Babylonia) and Source z: 2'–6' (ND 4405/2:1'–7'—Kalhu); for these sources, see Verderame 2002: 88–90 and 99–100. Of the fifteen sources regarded by Verderame as neither commentary nor excerpt, thirteen come from Nineveh, one comes from Kalhu, and one comes from Babylonia.

32. Verderame (2002: 83) reads the final signs of this line as ZA.ʳBARʾ […], and thus associates it with the omen concerned with the Moon wearing a bronze "crown." After collating a photograph of this text, I can say that this reading seems to be incorrect, and that the end of the line should probably be read as ʳMULʾ […]. With this new reading, it seems preferable to tentatively associate Source c:r.4' with the omen concerned with the copper "crown" of the Moon, whose variant apodosis is the same as the apodosis of the omen focused on the bronze "crown." Moreover, Source C preserves a protasis that mentions the Moon wearing a bronze "crown" later on in the text.

cific topic. Moreover, though *EAE* Tablet 3 was not a standardized, immutable text, at least three, and perhaps as many as twelve commentaries concerned with this tablet are extant.[33] Here, at least, it seems that commentaries could interpret texts that had not been rendered static by canonization.

Further indications that *EAE* was not an immutable composition come in the form of interactions between *aḫû*, or "extraneous," omens and *iškāru*, or "standard," texts. Though *iškāru* compositions are seemingly the "standard" versions of important Mesopotamian texts, the exact relationship between *iškāru* and *aḫû* is not entirely clear. In some cases, such as the assumed twenty-ninth *aḫû* tablet of *EAE*, elements of *aḫû* omens are similar to entries in the corresponding tablets of *EAE*, even if the specific content of these omens is different.[34] In other instances, such as the so-called Venus Tablet of Ammiṣaduqa (labeled as both *EAE* 62 and 63 in different exemplars), omens designated as *aḫû* are identical to their *iškāru* counterparts, though they may be arranged in a variant manner.[35] With the often inconsistent picture of the differences between *iškāru* and *aḫû*, it may be best to think of *aḫû* traditions as appendices, insofar as the decision to include something in a text body or to include it in an appendix can seem arbitrary to the reader.[36]

In Rochberg's and Koch's work on *aḫû* and *iškāru* in *EAE*, each scholar cites a number of examples of *aḫû* omens within an *iškāru* tablet of the series.[37] Of the examples cited, only two are conclusively *iškāru* tablets of *EAE* that include *aḫû* omens: K 2330 and the so-called Venus Tablet of Ammiṣaduqa.[38] In both of these examples, the *aḫû* omens are clearly set off from their *iškāru* counterparts by rulings and subscripts. In interpreting the phenomenon in question, Rochberg argues that the fact that *aḫû* omens are identified as such in subscripts "underscores the separation between the traditions of 'canonical' and 'extraneous' omens."[39] Though the labeling of *aḫû* omens as *aḫû* within *iškāru* compositions shows that scholars tried to maintain a distinction between the two traditions,[40] the mere fact that *aḫû* omens

33. Verderame (2002) considers Sources g, l, and m (and perhaps n and r) to be commentaries of *EAE* 3, while Frahm (2011: 137–38) treats seven more sources as commentaries as well (*EAE* 3 Sources c, e, h1, h2, i, u, and perhaps o). As most of the *EAE* 3 commentaries identified by Frahm only include a few comments (if that), it is unclear whether one should regard them as commentaries or source-texts.

34. For example, some *aḫû* and *iškāru* lunar-eclipse omens are similar in that they focus on the day of the month in which an eclipse occurs. That being said, many omens in the assumed twenty-ninth *aḫû* tablet of *EAE* discuss lunar eclipses on the twelfth or thirteenth of the month, while these days are not mentioned in the lunar-eclipse tablets of *EAE* (for this and other similarities and differences between omens from the assumed twenty-ninth *aḫû* tablet of *EAE* and *EAE* lunar-eclipse tablets, see Rochberg-Halton 1984: 137–40). The twenty-ninth *aḫû* tablet of *EAE* is qualified as "assumed" because of the identification of its incipit with the last entry in the Assur catalogue of *EAE*, VAT 9438 + 10324, before the editorial remark "a total of 29 *aḫû* tablets" (for the Assur catalogue, see Fincke 2001 and citations there).

35. For the Venus Tablet of Ammiṣaduqa, see Reiner and Pingree 1975. In this tablet of *EAE*, entries labeled as *aḫû* in subscripts of the fourth section are actually omens that are taken from the first and third sections and rearranged according to month (noted in Koch-Westenholz 1995: 90).

36. For this idea, see Lieberman 1990: 308.

37. See Rochberg-Halton 1984: 142–43 and Koch-Westenholz 1995: 90 for the texts in question.

38. For K 2330, which is labeled in its colophon as *EAE* 57, see ACh Ishtar 23; for the Venus Tablet of Ammiṣaduqa, see above.

39. Rochberg-Halton 1984: 143.

40. But see the possibility raised by Koch-Westenholz (1995: 91; specifically in reference to the celestial divinatory reports), that other *aḫû* omens may be included in various texts without being labeled as *aḫû*. Indeed, because the only way scholars today can be sure that an omen is *aḫû* is if it is labeled as such, it is unclear how frequently *aḫû* omens are included in texts without being labeled as *aḫû*. The potential problem of unrecognized *aḫû* omens is highlighted in *Šumma Izbu*. Here, certain omens are labeled as *aḫû* in the rubrics of specific *Šumma Izbu* exemplars, though these same omens are not labeled as *aḫû* in other exemplars of the tablets in question (see, for example,

are included within *iškāru* compositions has interesting consequences for the idea of an unchangeable canon.

For scholars who accept the idea of a cuneiform canon, the *iškāru* tablets of a series are the canonical tablets of that series. If *iškāru* is regarded as the standard tradition, then *aḫû* constitutes a tradition that exists outside of that standard tradition. Moreover, because of the very meaning of the term, the designation *aḫû* could only have come about to describe an alternative tradition after (or at the same time as) the formation of the *iškāru* tradition from which it was differentiated. This means that for scholars who think that cuneiform texts were canonized at the end of the second millennium, the formation of *aḫû* traditions must have been coeval with or subsequent to the canonization process. If canonical cuneiform texts, which include *iškāru* divinatory series, were considered to be immutable, then the inclusion of *aḫû* elements within some of the tablets of those series is problematic. The inclusion of *aḫû* omens could not have happened before the texts themselves were canonized, as the term *iškāru* was applied to standard or canonical textual elements, and the notion of *aḫû* would only have been meaningful in this case when contrasted with standard, or *iškāru*, omens. Indeed, *aḫû* omens within *iškāru* texts would signify that at some point after the texts had become canonical, outside elements were added to these immutable compositions. The idea of an immutable cuneiform canon is thus at odds with the evidence gleaned from certain *iškāru* versions of *EAE*.

Additional evidence against the paradigm of an unchangeable Mesopotamian canon giving rise to independent exegetical texts comes not from *EAE*, but from the extispical series *Bārûtu*.[41] The series *Bārûtu* is composed of ten sub-series, or chapters, with each of the first nine focused on different mantically important parts of the animal. The tenth chapter, known as *Multābiltu*, analyzes various aspects of exptispicy that come from both earlier in the series *Bārûtu* and the larger extispical tradition.[42] In terms of dating, exemplars of *Multābiltu* are known from the libraries of Kalhu and Nineveh, though there is no evidence for this chapter prior to the eighth century, and so *Multābiltu* may have been a first-millennium addition to *Bārûtu*.[43] Though no colophons of *Multābiltu* label it as a *mukallimtu-* or *ṣâtu-*commentary,[44] it clearly interprets various elements of extispicy through protases and whole omens selectively chosen from the first nine chapters of the series *Bārûtu*. Because of this

Source D [K 3966] and Source Ex2 [K 4031] of Tablet 4 in De Zorzi 2014). In both Leichty's and De Zorzi's editions of this text, those *aḫû* omens that are identical to standard entries are incorporated into the text edition of *Šumma Izbu* while those *aḫû* entries that cannot be easily integrated into the series are set aside, and in the case of De Zorzi, published in an appendix (for the omens that could not be incorporated into the series from *aḫû* tablets, see Leichty 1970: 198–200 and Appendix 2 in De Zorzi 2014: 922–26). If certain *aḫû* omens are identical to omens in *Šumma Izbu*, then the possibility of differentiating between *aḫû* and *iškāru* omens seems all but impossible without a label.

41. Of this important first-millennium, ten-chapter series, only chapters 3–5 and 10 have been critically edited so far; for the former, see Koch-Westenholz 2000; for the latter, see the following note. According to Jeyes (1997), scholars under Assurbanipal were responsible for organizing and standardizing the series *Bārûtu*, as well as adding apodoses that pertained to his reign; conversely, Koch-Westenholz (2000: 25–31) argues that the extispical series, like other omen series, was standardized at the end of the second millennium, while the naming of the extispical series *Bārûtu* only came about after the Neo-Assyrian period. For the Ninevite influence on Urukean extispicy, see Beaulieu 2010. For extispicy in the Old Babylonian period, see Jeyes 1989.

42. For *Multābiltu*, see Koch 2005 and Heeßel 2008.

43. So Koch (2005: 5–6), who notes that an exemplar of a catalogue of *Multābiltu* copied by Nabû-zuqup-kēnu (active [at least] 718–684) alludes to a Babylonian original for the text. Based on this, *Multābiltu* at least dates from the eighth century, though it is almost certainly older.

44. In fact, *Multābiltu*, like other chapters of the extispical series, has its own *mukallimtu*-commentary, for which, see Frahm 2011: 188–89.

exegetical bent, modern scholars have either described *Multābiltu* as a commentary or have dealt with it as such.[45] Moreover, even if one does not classify *Multābiltu* as a true commentary to the rest of the extispical series, it clearly interprets parts of *Bārûtu*. As both a chapter of *Bārûtu* and a text that comments on extispicy in general and portions of the extispical series in particular, *Multābiltu* poses a unique challenge to the hypothesis that exegesis is born from an unalterable canon. According to the hypothesis in question, if *Bārûtu* were not immutable then it would not require exegesis, as explanations could be added to opaque entries or unintelligible omens could be changed; if *Bārûtu* were closed, then another chapter could not have been added to the end of the series. Yet portions of *Bārûtu* were interpreted by its last chapter, *Multābiltu*, and so its apparent immutability could not have been the impetus for its explanation.

There is evidence against the theory that interpretation is a reaction to canonization in the Hebrew Bible as well. Though there is neither objection to the existence of a biblical canon nor to its interpretation, there is question as to whether biblical exegesis only emerged after canonization. In his discussion of inner-biblical exegesis, Levinson argues against the idea that canon is a necessary precondition for exegesis. Specifically, he states that "interpretation is constitutive of the canon; it is not secondary to the canon in terms of either chronology or significance."[46] Indeed, the idea of inner-biblical exegesis is predicated upon a text that is authoritative but not yet immutable, so that additions can be made that explain or rework the text in question.[47] Though I have used the term "text" to this point, in the ensuing discussion of inner-biblical exegesis, the term "book" and the modern names of biblical books are employed for the sake of clarity even though such terms are anachronistic and inappropriate when discussing this phenomenon; standardized biblical books as we know them did not exist when scholars composed and compiled portions of text that would later become part of the Bible and that also interpreted parts of (an)other composition(s) that would be considered biblical as well.

Unlike most Mesopotamian commentaries, which are separated from their source-texts, some forms of inner-biblical exegesis are appended to or included within the texts that they interpret. But in many other cases, ideas or passages from one book are reinterpreted in another. Here, as in Mesopotamia, interpretation is spatially separated from the source-text. Though examples of inner-biblical exegesis that are spatially separated from their source-texts reinterpret biblical passages, they do not do so by systematically atomizing and explaining different aspects of the source-texts in question. Additionally, these reworked texts do not explicitly comment on their source-texts but are grounded within their own narrative, legal, or prophetic frameworks. In these cases, it can be difficult to definitively argue that the source-texts were not considered immutable by the time they were interpreted. But in certain circumstances, instances of inner-biblical exegesis found in a specific biblical book (b) rework ideas in another book (a) that also includes passages that are demonstrably con-

45. For the former, see Heeßel 2008: 119; for the latter see Frahm 2011: 186–89, who notes that "even though one can debate whether [*Multābiltu*] is a text commentary in its own right, there can be no question that it shares many features of the *mukallimtu*-commentaries on *bārûtu.*"

46. Levinson 2008: 18 (and similar thoughts on pp. 84 and 89–94).

47. The amount of literature on inner-biblical exegesis is tremendous (as are the number of examples of this phenomenon). For the seminal articulations of inner-biblical exegesis, see Fishbane 1985 and Levinson 1997; for a critique of Fishbane, see Eslinger 1992 (as well as the response to Eslinger in Sommer 1996); for a recent discussion of how inner-biblical exegesis differs from inner-biblical allusion and intertextuality, see Meek 2014; for an evaluation of inner-biblical exegesis in concert with and opposition to other models of biblical text creation (including the documentary hypothesis), see the discussion in Sanders 2015.

temporary with or later than the first book (b). These cases are especially helpful for arguing against the hypothesis that exegesis is a response to an unchanging canon, as they clearly illustrate that the source-text (a) was not considered closed or immutable when it was interpreted in another composition (b). An example of this specific arrangement can be found in the complex interactions between the books of Deuteronomy and Exodus.[48]

Deuteronomy appears to reinterpret a number of laws found in Exodus, including those concerning the altar. The altar laws of Deut. 12:13–15 rework the altar laws from Exod. 20:24–26 [MT 20:20–22].[49] Though the former restricts the offering of sacrifices to a central altar, and in response to this, allows for non-cultic animal-slaughter in towns, the latter envisions cultic sacrifice as the only way to consume meat and allows for the construction of packed-earth or fieldstone altars in numerous locations. The Deuteronomic authors do much more than alter the law in Exod. 20:24–26; they employ many of the same lexemes as Exod. 20:24–26 in order to reinterpret, subvert, and retroject the idea of a cultically central altar upon an originally diffuse sacrificial system.[50] This was necessary as the normative altar "law [of Exod. 20:24–26] could not be dispensed with or bypassed. In order to justify their departure from it, the authors of Deuteronomy tendentiously reworked it by means of studied, transformative exegesis, appropriating its very wording to express their own innovative agenda."[51]

Though Deuteronomy interprets portions of Exodus, there are passages in Exodus that seem to be contemporary with and even postdate Deuteronomy. One of the difficulties in arguing for the relative dating of parallel texts is ascertaining the direction of influence between the compositions in question. Though deducing routes of interaction between parallel texts is notoriously difficult, Carr has suggested a number of factors that tend to differentiate earlier compositions from later parallels, based on comparisons of passages from texts that share commonalities with, but are ultimately later than, what would become the MT pentateuchal books.[52] Whereas Carr analyzes Exod. 34, Zahn employs this methodology to investigate Exod. 13:1–16.[53] These verses in Exodus deal with a number of laws for the consecration of firstlings and the festival of *Maṣṣot*, and as Zahn shows, fulfill the conditions put forth by Carr to assess posteriority. Exod. 13:1–16 seems to parallel and augment

48. Though the books of the Pentateuch are made up of various sources that are not confined to any one book, the discussion here centers on books rather than sources because the book, as opposed to the source, was eventually chosen by scholars of different communities as the canonical unit. Thus, for the theory that interpretation arises from canonization to be valid from a biblical perspective, a book must be immutably canonized before it is interpreted.

49. See already the position of Wellhausen (1899: 203), who recognizes that the altar laws of Deuteronomy "polemicize" those of Exodus without examining how the former comments upon the latter (see also Wellhausen 1885: 29–30); for a detailed analysis of how Deut. 12:13–15 reworks Exod. 20:24–26, see Levinson 1997: 28–36.

50. See Levinson 1997: 33.

51. Levinson 1997: 33–34.

52. Such as the Temple Scroll. See Carr 2001, who lays out six criteria that he argues tend to indicate that a text is later than its parallel:

1. The later text verbally parallels the earlier text but includes substantial additions to it;
2. The later text augments its parallel with fragments culled from other parts of the Bible;
3. The later text fills an apparent gap in its parallel;
4. The later text expands direct (including divine) speech;
5. The later text adds elements that seem to be adaptations to new circumstances or ideas;
6. The later text combines linguistic features from different parts of the Pentateuch.

It is important to note that while this methodology for deducing the anteriority of sources is useful, it is by no means foolproof.

53. See Zahn 2004; for an earlier argument that Exod. 13:1–16 is a harmonizing composition that postdates P, see Gertz 2000: 57–73.

portions of other parts of the Pentateuch, including Deut. 6, Deut. 16, and Exod. 34. The text is concerned with divine speech and divine authority, as Exod. 13:1–16 begins with a short command to Moses by YHWH and continues with Moses's speech to the people. Exod. 13:1–16 seems to connect a number of ideas found in Deuteronomy and Exodus to YHWH's actions in Egypt while only mandating their observance once Israel enters its land. And Exod. 13:1–16 employs a mix of lexical and grammatical elements that are otherwise found in different strata of the Pentateuch, such as the Covenant Code, D, or P.[54] According to Zahn's analysis, "the author of Exodus 13 drew upon the language of the Covenant Code, D, and P in order to integrate the range of pentateuchal prescriptions on Mazzot and Firstlings and to present this new law as divine revelation within the Passover narrative itself."[55] Exod. 13:1–16 would thus comment upon parts of Deuteronomy, even though portions of Deuteronomy rework passages found in Exodus. Because explanations of Exodus are incorporated into Deuteronomy while at least one part of the former book seems to reinterpret a portion of the latter book, it does not appear that ancient scholars considered Exodus to be a static composition when it was commented upon in Deuteronomy.

If a standardized, immutable canon is not necessary for interpretation, then what are the factors that encourage the emergence of commentaries? As Glenn Most emphasizes, commentaries are socio-cultural constructs;[56] as such, their creation and development are culturally inscribed, so that what is true for the germination and growth of Mesopotamian commentaries may not hold true for other cultures' exegetical compositions. Moreover, as with most other complex cultural developments, there were probably a number of circumstances that contributed to the creation of cuneiform commentaries. Scholars have isolated two main factors that laid the groundwork for the advent of the commentary tradition in Mesopotamia: the institution of divination and a tradition of bilingualism typified by lexical literature.[57]

Ancient scholars understood the cuneiform divinatory tradition itself as a hermeneutical enterprise. Ontologically, both provoked and unprovoked methods of divination were seen as forms of divine communication that could only be understood through scholarly interpretation. The communicative aspects of divination are emphasized through locutions such as "the heavenly writing" (Akk. *šiṭir šamê*/*šamāmi*/*burūmê*) and "the tablet of the gods" (Akk. *ṭuppu ša ilī*), as well as the idea of Shamash writing on animal livers, notions that are used to describe the stars, liver, and practice of extispicy, respectively.[58] These terms illustrate the connection between writing and divination while intimating that divination was at its core a process of reading and interpreting. As Veldhuis notes, because divination is considered the writing of the gods, "divination is hermeneutics, no less than reading a traditional cuneiform

54. See Zahn 2004: 43–50.

55. Zahn 2004: 43.

56. See Most 1999: vi–vii.

57. For these sentiments, see Frahm 2011: 12–23 and Gabbay 2012: 271–74. Frahm's treatment is more in-depth than Gabbay's, and includes discussions of how the lexical tradition and imbedded glosses were grounded in, while helping to create, a Mesopotamian tradition of interpretation. Additionally, see Finkel 2014, who points to bilingualism and the inherently multifaceted nature of the cuneiform writing system as the key factors in the advent of Mesopotamian commentaries.

58. For these ideas, see Rochberg 2004: 1–3 and Frahm 2010: 98 as well as citations there. For more about divination as divine-human communication, see Rochberg 2003. Another divinatory example of the confluence of language and worldview is the term *têrtu* (for which, see CAD T: 357–67), which means "message" or "order," as well as "extispicy (and aspects and results thereof)" and even "liver"; in certain circumstances, the term simply refers to omens or oracles of any sort.

text."[59] In an echo of the exegetical basis of divination, certain omens were constructed with the help of traditional interpretive techniques, such as homophony and homography. Key lexemes in the protasis and apodosis created an associative bridge between the different parts of the omen based on common forms of Mesopotamian wordplay.[60] This effort finds parallels among omen commentaries, where exposing (and creating) connections between protases and apodoses through traditional exegetical means is a hallmark.[61] As an exegetical enterprise, divination laid the groundwork for Mesopotamian commentaries. While divination interprets divine communication, commentaries expound upon these interpretive efforts, often employing the same techniques to interpret omens that the omen texts use to interpret the divine messages.

Though divination is an interpretive enterprise that utilizes many of the same exegetical strategies that are later deployed by commentaries, it is hardly the fount from which such techniques sprang. Examples of wordplay that take advantage of the cuneiform script in ways reminiscent of divinatory and exegetical compositions are known from non-omen and non-commentary texts.[62] Moreover, the potential for wordplay was embedded within the multifaceted and polysemous cuneiform script itself, which originated from and matured within a multilingual environment. The lexical tradition showcases the interpretive and creative potential of the cuneiform script in its manipulation of words, signs, and meaning.[63] As early as the Old Babylonian period, lexical texts employed various forms of wordplay that took advantage of both Sumerian and Akkadian to expand lexical correspondence and organize compositions.[64] The same kinds of wordplay that function as associative and organizational strategies in the lexical tradition became the interpretive backbone of Mesopotamian commentaries.

In addition to common associative techniques, certain commentaries are similar to lexical texts with respect to format. One of the defining visual features of lexical texts is their layout, where words or short phrases are arranged in two or more parallel columns and entries on the same line in different columns are associated with one another. This distinct layout is also found in a class of commentaries common in the Neo-Assyrian period. These texts, dubbed tabular commentaries by Frahm because of their format, are similarly arranged in multiple columns with entries from the base text in the left-most column and associated words on the same line in each subsequent column.[65] As early as the OB period, scholars leveraged this tabular format in creating so-called mixed vocabularies, a type of lexical text constructed from words and phrases drawn from literary texts. Like commentaries, these mixed vocabularies were texts (at least partially) created from other compositions. Moreover, mixed vocabularies employed the same associative techniques known from other examples

59. Veldhuis 2003: 28.

60. For examples of protases and apodoses linked through wordplay, see Noegel 2007: 11–24; Bilbija 2008; Frahm 2010; and Noegel 2010: 150–51.

61. For examples of this phenomenon in the Neo-Assyrian celestial-divinatory commentary series *Šumma Sîn ina Tāmartišu* ("If the Moon at Its Appearance"), see those outlined in Wainer 2016: 44 n. 83; for examples in the Late Babylonian commentaries of the first tablet of the series Sa-gig, see George 1991.

62. For examples, see Maul 1999.

63. For similarities between the lexical tradition and commentaries in terms of interpretive techniques, see Cavigneaux 1987.

64. See Crisostomo 2014, who focuses on the place of analogical hermeneutics (what we have described here as wordplay) in the Old Babylonian lexical tradition.

65. For this term and a discussion of its layout, see Frahm 2011: 34–35. It is interesting to note that tabular commentaries from Nineveh are often written in Babylonian script, and so may represent a largely Babylonian tradition.

of the lexical tradition, and which would later become hallmarks of Mesopotamian commentaries.[66]

Along with a shared layout and associative strategies, lexical and certain exegetical texts are both denoted as *ṣâtu* in the scholarly tradition, a term whose exact meaning is uncertain.[67] Before the advent of commentaries, the term *ṣâtu* was employed to describe lexical compositions; by the first millennium, both lexical and commentary texts are designated as *ṣâtu*. Though the impetus for the use of *ṣâtu* in lexical and some exegetical texts may have been the tabular format shared by these compositions, *ṣâtu* was not simply an emic term for such a layout. In terms of commentaries, *ṣâtu* is almost exclusively used in reference to tabular compositions in the first half of the first millennium, but *ṣâtu* becomes a designation for any exegetical format by the later first millennium.[68] Though the exact meaning of *ṣâtu* and the reasons for its usage as a descriptor for both lexical and commentary texts remain uncertain, it is clearly another bond between the two traditions in question.

From similarities in interpretive techniques to common layouts and designations, the lexical and divinatory traditions were the most important scholarly antecedents to the cuneiform commentary. The importance of lexical and divinatory texts to the Mesopotamian exegetical tradition is also evident in the sheer number of commentaries based upon these genres. Of the 888 commentaries noted by Frahm, 759 have been identified by subject. Among commentaries with known subjects, 682—or about ninety percent—are based upon divinatory or lexical texts.[69] Moreover, if one were only to consider commentaries from before the Late Babylonian period, the ratio of lexical and divinatory commentaries to all other exegetical texts would be higher still.[70] All of this is to say that the lexical and divinatory traditions played an important role in the development of cuneiform commentaries, which in turn focused on lexical and divinatory texts above all others.

While the lexical and divinatory traditions were important sources for the emerging commentary, other factors catalyzed the creation of Mesopotamian exegetical texts. If the immutable, canonical status of a text was not a requirement for interpretation, then why were source-texts commented upon? Put another way, if the plain meaning of a text did not accurately reflect the scholarly understanding of that composition, then why did scholars preserve the outdated wording of the text if the text itself was not unchangeable? Instead of writing commentaries that explained the source-text, why not simply alter the source-text to reflect the meaning of the commentaries? Though any answers to these questions must be conjectural, I think that the key lies in Mesopotamian conceptions of textual authority and tradition.

66. For the so-called mixed vocabularies, see now Crisostomo 2016 and citations there to earlier studies.

67. Although the precise meaning of *ṣâtu* as used in both lexical texts and commentaries is uncertain, scholars have offered a number of alternatives, including "excerpts," "glossary," and "explanation"; for these, see Frahm 2011: 48–50 and Gabbay 2012: 272–73 n. 13.

68. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Frahm 2011: 55; though the shift in meaning may simply reflect chronological development, there may be a geographical component as well. The problem lies in the fact that almost all evidence for *ṣâtu*-commentaries from the early first millennium comes from Assyria, whereas all *ṣâtu*-commentaries from after the fall of Assyria come from Babylonia.

69. These statistics are based on data taken from the online Cuneiform Commentaries Project on September 5, 2017; within commentaries on divinatory texts, I have included those exegetical compositions on the diagnostic-prognostic series Sa-gig.

70. Consider the ratio of divinatory and lexical to all other commentaries in the Late Babylonian centers of Uruk and Sippar (very few extant commentaries can be reliably traced back to Babylon at present, though this is obviously more of a result of the excavation history of the site and the luck of the find than ancient "facts on the ground"). In Uruk, seventy-six exegetical texts have been identified with known subjects; of these, sixty-one—or about 80%—are commentaries based on either divinatory or lexical texts. From Sippar, forty-five commentaries have been identified with known subjects, and thirty-one—or about 69%—are based on divinatory or lexical compositions.

In Assyriological discussions of canonization, where questions of authority have played an outsized role, scholars across the canon–non-canon spectrum have widely agreed that certain texts were considered authoritative by the first millennium.[71] In making this point, these modern scholars have turned to a small group of independent compositions that connect divine, semi-divine, or scholarly author-editors to certain works that are known primarily from first-millennium copies.[72] By associating scholarly works like the bilingual literary text *Lugal-e* (or "Ninurta's Exploits") with individuals of renown like the god Ea,[73] compositions such as the "Catalogue of Texts and Authors,"[74] the "Enmeduranki Text,"[75] and sources that discuss the editorial activities of Esagil-kīn-apli underscore the significance of textual authority in the first millennium.[76] But was authority the only motivation in associating specific individuals and compositions, and what did textual authority mean in a practical sense?

Drawing on recent scholarly inquiries into ancient Jewish authorship, Eva Mroczek has argued that associating famous individuals with written texts does more than simply impart authority to these texts. According to Mroczek, connecting important personalities with different compositions often has to do with augmenting the stories of these characters on the one hand, and on the other, imparting traditional attributes associated with these individuals to, or contrasting them with, different facets of the compositions in question; in the case of certain psalms, "it is the desire to reflect and elaborate upon particularly compelling aspects

71. See Lambert 1962; Rochberg-Halton 1984; Hallo 1991; Veldhuis 1998; Hurowitz 2001; Röllig 2009; Frahm 2011; and Gabbay 2012.

72. In addition to these independent compositions, certain literary works such as the "Babylonian Theodicy" (for which, see Lambert 1960: 63–89) and the "Epic of Erra" (see the *editio princeps* of Cagni 1969 and the more recent English translation in Foster 2005) include the names of their scholarly authors within the texts themselves.

73. This association is known from the so-called Catalogue of Texts and Authors I: 3–4, the most complete edition of which is still Lambert 1962; for *Lugal-e*, see van Dijk 1983.

74. As its name suggests, this text is a list of compositions that are associated at various points with gods, mythical figures, and scholars.

75. This text describes various aspects of the diviner and his craft, and gets its name from its opening lines, which describe how Enmeduranki, the legendary king of Sippar, received knowledge of different divinatory techniques from Shamash and Adad. Enmeduranki then passes these techniques, along with *EAE*, commentaries, and mathematics, on to the citizens of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon. For a complete edition of this text, see Lambert 1998 and citations there.

76. Esagil-kīn-apli's editorial activities are known from a number of different texts, including a catalog of incipits of Sa-gig that discusses how Esagil-kīn-apli created a new edition of Sa-gig from earlier exemplars during the reign of the late second-millennium king Adad-apla-iddina (see Kinnier-Wilson 1956 and 1962 for ND 4358 + 4366 [for a copy of this text, see CTN 4 71: pl. 44–45], and Finkel 1988 for BM 41237 + 46607 + 47163; for the latest edition of the catalogue, without the colophon, see Heeßel 2000: 13–17). Another indication of Esagil-kīn-apli's work comes from VAT 10493 + VAT 10543, published in Heeßel 2010, which includes omens from, and similar to, the physiognomic omen series *Šumma Alamdimmû* ("If the Form"), along with a subscript after the first section of text of the third column that states that the text derives from an old version of *Šumma Alamdimmû* from before the editorial efforts of Esagil-kīn-apli. Additionally, the "Exorcist's Manual" (KAR 44 and duplicates) includes various incipits of texts and incantations germane to the craft of the *āšipu* (normally translated as "exorcist"), with a brief remark in the middle of the composition that associates Esagil-kīn-apli with some of these texts (for the majority view that Esagil-kīn-apli should be connected with the end of this composition, see Bottéro 1985: 92–96; Finkel 1988: 150; Beaulieu 2000: 15; George 2003: 30; Heeßel 2004: 101 n. 9; Al-Rawi and George 2006: 54–55; Clancier 2009: 111; and Heeßel 2010: 160–61. For a more recent dissenting view connecting Esagil-kīn-apli with the beginning of the "Exorcist's Manual," see Jean 2006: 62, 72–74 and Frahm 2011: 324–26). While it is unclear whether Esagil-kīn-apli should be connected to the texts at the beginning or end of the "Exorcist's Manual," it is clear that this ancient scholar was seen as an important figure in the composition, or at the very least compilation, of texts connected to the exorcist's trade (for the most recent editions of the "Exorcist's Manual," see Geller 2000: Text E [with prior editions cited there]; Jean 2006: 62–82; and Clancier 2009 for a transliteration and translation of the source SpTU 5, 231).

of David's character—David the sufferer, the penitent, the pursued" that is operative in their connection with David.[77] A text such as *EAE* was associated with a number of illustrious figures in antiquity, such as Ea in the "Catalogue of Texts and Authors,"[78] Shamash, Adad, and Enmeduranki in the "Enmeduranki Text,"[79] and Esagil-kīn-apli in the "Exorcist's Manual."[80]

Each of these figures was connected to positive characteristics germane to a text such as *EAE* in antiquity: The god Ea was associated with both abstract wisdom and practical specialized knowledge; Shamash and Adad were the gods most closely connected to divination in the Mesopotamian pantheon; Enmeduranki was the legendary king of Sippar purported to have taught mankind various divinatory techniques he had learned from Shamash and Adad; and Esagil-kīn-apli was the late second-millennium royal scholar allegedly responsible for compiling and perhaps standardizing various divinatory and scholarly texts. Through associations with these important figures, ancient scholars emphasized different facets of *EAE* and intertwined this celestial-divinatory text *par excellence* with larger traditions about the characters themselves.

While textual authority was not simply a result of associations with important figures, some Assyriologists have argued that the authority accorded to a text rendered that composition immutable. Because such assertions are not supported by the available evidence, I would argue instead that an authoritative text, along with its general contents, structure, and organization, was well known and esteemed (at least in scholarly circles).[81] Moreover, authoritative compositions were culturally normative and, as such, were consulted by scholars "in dealing with the many imponderables of practical action and with the infinite uncertainties of the meaning of existence."[82]

EAE, which is known from hundreds of copies throughout the late second and early first millennium, and which was definitively employed by scholars in their discussions and interpretations of celestial events with the Assyrian monarchs Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal,[83] was clearly authoritative.[84] Modern scholars agree that tablet numbering schemes of *EAE* vary from exemplar to exemplar, and that multiple recensions are the rule rather than the exception for most of the series. Moreover, certain tablets of this same text are only roughly standardized—while the focus of the omens is for the most part constant, the order of omens as well as the omens themselves vary from text to text, as argued above. As an authoritative text, *EAE is* a composition that, on the macro level, is quite stable. Its title was known to ancient scholars, the succession of major topics dealt with throughout the series was estab-

77. See Mroczek 2016: 61–63.

78. *EAE* appears in the "Catalogue of Texts and Authors" I: 1.

79. For *EAE* in this composition, see l. 18.

80. *EAE* is mentioned in l. 39 of this text.

81. Though scholars have discussed how the invocation of important figures from the past lent the texts that they supposedly authored or edited authority, it is important to note that a text would ostensibly have been deemed authoritative in its own right before being considered the work of a god or legendary scholar.

82. Most 1999: viii.

83. For these reports, see Hunger 1992. The hundreds of reports are comprised of thousands of celestial-divinatory omens, many of which are also known from *EAE*; for associations between omens in the reports and those in the first six tablets of *EAE*, see Verderame 2002: 255; for the idea that many entries in the reports may derive from the commentary series to *EAE, Šumma Sîn ina Tāmartišu*, as opposed to *EAE* itself, see Veldhuis 2010 and now Wainer 2016.

84. See the similar sentiments in Rochberg 2016.

lished and constant,[85] as were the topics of specific tablets.[86] Because of its place within the scholarly tradition, its association with the gods Ea, Shamash, and Adad, the legendary king Enmeduranki, and the scholar Esagil-kīn-apli positively contributed to the lore associated with these characters. On the micro level—that is, the level of the individual tablet and omen entry—scholars could choose which omens to include and in what order.[87] Indeed, there is no notion that this variability on the micro level affected the authority or prestige given to *EAE* by Mesopotamian scholars. As Rochberg notes in her recent work on the importance of power, as opposed to textual stability, in a putative Mesopotamian canon, "The power of the canonical text was not due solely to its textual structure or because its wording was standardized. Nor was it simply because it was attached to hoary antiquity. As a vehicle for traditional norms and values, cosmic and political ideals, a text could be valued by and binding upon members of the literate community that used it."[88]

How then does this specifically Mesopotamian idea of textual authority factor into the advent of the commentary tradition, and why did scholars compose commentaries as companions, as opposed to replacements, for their respective source-texts? Though culturally important, Mesopotamian authoritative compositions could be ambiguous and difficult to understand. Discerning the appropriate circumstances for the application of these texts could be equally challenging. In an effort to better understand, and perhaps re-appropriate the meaning and practical scope of the compositions in question, scholars who were invested in these authoritative texts began interpreting and commenting upon them.[89] Before this commentary tradition existed in a written form, it almost certainly existed, and was transmitted, orally.[90] At some point at the end of the second or beginning of the first millennium, scholars began writing down commentaries, perhaps because Akkadian was rapidly being supplanted by Aramaic as the spoken language of Mesopotamia.[91]

Though authoritative texts such as *EAE* were not static, individual omens were fairly stable and there were clear ideas about what constituted specific compositions. This particular sense of tradition, or decorum, possessed by scholars and borne out of the authority they accorded to the text in question, demanded that they differentiate between omens that were or could be a part of certain tablets of *EAE* and ideas that were not traditionally appropriate in such contexts, such as widespread interpretations of those omens. In the previously discussed examples of *aḫû* omens incorporated within *iškāru* tablets of *EAE*, scholars showed a similar

85. These topics are lunar omens, lunar eclipse omens, solar omens, solar eclipse omens, weather omens (in addition to phenomena that we would consider under the rubric "weather," these omens also centered upon other happenings, including earthquakes or the appearance of the day and night), as well as stellar and planetary omens.

86. By specific tablets I am not referring to numbered tablets, as numbering varied from recension to recension. Rather, I am talking about the tablet divorced from its number and instead imbedded within a relative sequence of tablets, which varied insofar as tablets were combined or separated depending, according to Fincke 2013b, on tablet format and number of omen entries.

87. Though it seems that the license scholars took varied from tablet to tablet.

88. Rochberg 2016: 227.

89. For the interactions between commentaries and authoritative texts, see Most 1999: viii and x, who notes that "one function of a commentary is to (re-)confirm, (re-)distribute, and (re-)impose within a society an authority whose meaning is no longer entirely self-evident."

90. The best evidence for this is the related phrases "oral lore" and "according to the scholar" (Akk. *šūt pî* and *ša pî ummāni*; literally, "those of the mouth" and "of the mouth of the scholar") applied to Mesopotamian commentaries; for these phrases, see Gabbay 2012: 279 and citations there.

91. For this, see Röllig 2009: 46–48 and citations there; for more evidence of the "Aramaization" of Mesopotamian scholars in the early first millennium, see Frahm 2011: 278–79 and 336–37; for the "Aramaization" of Neo-Assyrian officials, see the famous letter from Sargon II to Sin-iddina of Ur castigating him for asking to write in Aramaic (SAA 17 2).

sense of decorum by differentiating *aḫû* omens within the *iškāru* texts in question through rulings and subscripts. While compositions such as *Šumma Izbu* warn that clearly differentiated *iškāru* and *aḫû* features may turn out to be the exception rather than the rule, scholars adhered relatively stringently to the convention that separated commentaries on omens from the divinatory compendia that they interpreted in first-millennium Mesopotamia.[92]

Indeed, the omens of *EAE* were not simply replaced by their interpretations because of scholars who acted with a certain sense of textual decorum in their copying and recopying of this authoritative composition. Even in the commentary texts themselves, there is little to no slippage between source-text and commentary. Moreover, source-text and commentary are often separated from one another within exegetical texts, with each format relying on distinct strategies to differentiate between the two.[93] As in the example of the reworking of the Exodus altar laws by Deuteronomy, the new, interpretive composition cannot simply dispense with the source-text because of the authority and normativity of the source-text itself. Indeed, the interpretation must capitalize upon and re-appropriate the authority of the source-text if it is to thrive.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACh	Virolleaud 1905–1912.
CAD	I. J. Gelb et al., eds. 1956–2010. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
CTN 4	Wiseman and Black 1996.
KAR	Ebeling 1919–1923.
SAA 17	Dietrich 2003.
SpTU 5	von Weiher 1983.

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92. For *iškāru* and *aḫû* in *Šumma Izbu*, see n. 40 above.

93. Tabular commentaries normally separate source-text from comment spatially (as described above); indentation commentaries either indent the comment from the left-justified source-text or frequently place the comment after the source-text; cola commentaries often separate comment from source-text by way of the so-called *Glossenkeil*, though when no *Glossenkeil* separates the two, the comment simply follows the source-text. For these formats, see Frahm 2011: 34–37.

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