Sally Freedman, If a city is set on a height: The Akkadian omen series Shumma alu ina mele shakin. Vol. 1: tabets 1-21 (OPSNKF 17), Philadelphia 1998, pp. 1-14 (Introduction)

Introduction

Throughout a large part of the ancient world and a lengthy period of ancient history, divination was accepted as an objective principle, a realistic means of foretelling the future. Although in classical times the philosophical validity of divination came to be questioned,[1] in ancient Mesopotamia the belief in divination is attested by thousands of texts that constitute a permanent record of Mesopotamian interest in omens and respect for the science of interpreting them.

The principle of divination was that of communication between humans and the supernatural forces that shaped their world. Such communication might be the result of specific inquiry by a person, provoked through sacrifices, consultation of oracles or casting of lots, or communication might be initiated by the gods, by means of unprovoked phenomena that occurred naturally but could be recognized and interpreted by people as having special significance.

Mesopotamian divination was concerned with both provoked and unprovoked omens. Certain types of provoked omens (such as those derived from observation of patterns of smoke or pools of oil on water) never seem to have gained scholarly recognition, and the practice of recording these omens seems to have died out early in Mesopotamian history. Another technique of discovering provoked omens, however, achieved high status as a science in Mesopotamia: The practice of extispicy, eliciting omens from the study of animal entrails, became one of the most important and long-lived forms of Mesopotamian divination and had a wide influence in the rest of the ancient world.[2]

Within Mesopotamian culture as a whole, divination from unprovoked omens seems to have held an even more significant place than divination from provoked omens. The majority of the great collections are of unprovoked omens taken from astronomical phenomena, from monstrous human and animal births, from human physiognomic peculiarities, from dreams and from a myriad everyday occurrences in people's lives.

Omen collections were viewed by the Mesopotamians as scientific reference works. The collections were edited and organized by being written on a number of clay tablets of specific content that succeeded each other in a certain order to form "series." The series were given titles, usually the first line of the first tablet in the series, and these titles were used for cataloging and reference purposes. In addition, each tablet within a series was given a title that served as a sort of subtitle or chapter-heading. Catalogs of the series were written, listing titles of individual tablets in order. Series were edited, revised and abridged. They were used as references works that might be consulted and quoted in other contexts, such as private letters and reports. Scholarly commentaries were written upon the series, explaining passages that posed difficulties even for the ancient scribes. Apotropaic rituals were recorded, offering practical advice about what to do in ominous situations.

The enormous number of omen and omen-related texts indicates the importance of the part played by augury in the lives of the ancient Mesopotamians. Augury was a critical concern not only of the scribes who were interested in divination as a scholarly discipline but also of the individuals who observed omens, worried about them, consulted diviners about them and paid for rituals to protect themselves. The influence of this "omen-mindedness" on the psychological climate of Mesopotamia and the mental

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[1] For a disputation on the validity of divination, see Cicero, *De Divinatione*.

[2] A detailed analysis of crosscultural influence between Mesopotamian divination techniques and techniques used in the rest of the ancient Near East is beyond the scope of this book. Such influence was widespread. To the Greeks and the Egyptians, the Babylonians were known as astronomers and astrologers par excellence. In the Greek world, other forms of Mesopotamian divination were largely ignored, but in the western Mediterranean, traditions of Mesopotamian divination had a greater continuity. The influence of Babylonian divination techniques can be seen clearly in the haruspicy of the Etruscans, in various forms of official Roman augury and in popular soothsaying practices in the Roman world. Even as late as the first century B.C., Diodorus Siculus was aware of the full range of Babylonian divination methods (see Book II 29).

processes of the people is something that is only superficially understood by modern readers, who tend to be skeptical of what they call superstition. But there is ample evidence that the ancient Mesopotamians took the business of omens very seriously indeed. In the reign of Esarhaddon, hundreds of letters testify to the king's concern about the omens that affected his daily life.[3]

Certain divination procedures seem to have been directed primarily at acquiring information about the welfare of the state or the king or the probable success of royal ventures. Omens taken from the internal organs of sacrificial victims and omens taken from astronomical phenomena fall generally into this category of "public" omens.

Many of the omen series deal to a far greater extent with the fate of private persons. Omens taken from some monstrous births, from physiognomic characteristics and from dreams belong in this category of "private" omens.

Private omens are the particular subject of a series of omens taken from miscellaneous occurrences in people's everyday lives. This series, one of the largest of the ancient omen collections, is known from its first line as Šumma Alu ina Mele Šakin, "If a City Is Set on a Height." Like other omen collections, Šumma Alu developed over the course of several hundreds of years. Around the middle of the seventh century B.C., it was standardized into a series that consisted of as many as 107 tablets, some of which contained more than 200 lines. The total number of omens included in the standard series Šumma Alu was probably near 10,000.

Not all of these omens have been preserved to the present day. Of the standard series, something less than half now exists. But from ancient catalogs, excerpts, abridgments and related texts, the subject matter of at least part of about 90 percent of the 107 tablets of Šumma Alu can be identified, and continuing examination of unread and unpublished texts will certainly yield new material.

Of the tablets of Šumma Alu that are currently preserved, the following generalities can be made.

Tablets 1 and 2 of the series were devoted to an examination of the ominous aspects of cities. Tablets 3 through 18 seem to have dealt with various aspects of houses. Tablets 19 through 21 indicate the ominous significance of the appearance of demons and supernatural entities. Tablets 22 through 49 deal with appearances and actions of animals: snakes, scorpions, lizards (Tablets 22 through 31), small rodents and insects (Tablets 32 through 36), and larger animals, including cattle, horses, wild beasts, dogs, cats and pigs (Tablet 37 through 49). Tablets 50 through 52 represent a little-known group of omens taken from the appearance of fire in various places. Tablet 53 concerns the king. Tablets 54 through 59 give omens from occurrences in fields and gardens. Tablets 60 through 62 list omens occurring in rivers and marshes; Tablet 63 concerns aquatic creatures. Though there are some gaps, it seems clear that Tablets 64 through 79 recorded omens taken from birds (eagles in Tablets 64 and 65, hawks in Tablets 66 and 67, chickens and various other birds in Tablets 71 and 72, crows in Tablet 79). Tablet 80 lists omens taken from anomalous sexual behavior of animals. Tablets 81 through 86 describe the ominous significance of a person's behavior while sleeping and immediately upon waking. Tablet 87 records miscellaneous sorts of human behavior. Tablet 88 records various happenings in a country. Tablets 92 through 94 describe the appearance of strange lights. Tablets 95 through 96 examine incidents that occur to a person on his way to prayer. Tablets 103 through 106 appear to list omens taken from human sexual behavior and familial relations.

The extensive range of subjects treated in Šumma Alu gives the series almost the scope of an encyclopedia of the physical surroundings and common occurrences of daily life in ancient Mesopotamia. Because of this, the series is a potential source of information about many aspects of Mesopotamian civilization.

There are many difficulties associated with the publication of Šumma Alu. First among these is the confusion of variant traditions. Over the course of several centuries, the series was copied and recopied, abridged and edited a number of times. The texts that

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[3] For analysis of these letters, see Parpola Letters 1970 (AOAT 5/2), Introduction and Parpola Letters 1993 (SAA 10), Introduction.

exist today represent several different redactions of the series. No complete edition of any one coherent tradition has been preserved. Sorting out the different traditions is a painstaking and often frustrating task.

Another complication in the study of Šumma Alu is the fact that omens from this series appear verbatim in other series where similar topics occur. When an incomplete cuneiform fragment is preserved, it is sometimes difficult (and sometimes impossible) to tell whether it belongs to a text of Šumma Alu or a text of another series.

Besides these difficulties, there are others which are not unique to Šumma Alu but which Šumma Alu presents in no modest way. There are variants and extracts. There are unplaceable fragments. There are esoteric notes and glosses. There are lexical problems. There are, incorporated into the omen texts, parenthetical rituals which constitute an entirely dissimilar literary genre.

None of these difficulties is impossible to cope with. Indeed, these are the problems of the study of ancient texts. But in Šumma Alu these problems are compounded in tablet after tablet, and their cumulative effect can be overwhelming. More than one assyriologist has begun work on the series and later abandoned it.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

The earliest publication of Šumma Alu omens was of isolated tablets, in cuneiform copy only. Such tablets appeared in G. Smith, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia III* (1870); F. Lenormant, *Choix de textes cunéiformes inédits ou incomplètement publiés* (1873-1875); T.G. Pinches, *Texts in the Babylonian Wedge-Writing* (1882); and S.A. Smith, *Miscellaneous Assyrian Texts of the British Museum* (1887).

Later a number of Šumma Alu texts were identified in C. Bezold's *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kuyunjik Collection* (1889-1899), and a photograph of one of them was provided in volume 5.

Next, Šumma Alu tablets appeared in the first collections of omen and divination texts. A. Boissier's *Documents assyriens relatifs aux présages* (1894) and C. Virolleaud's *Fragments de textes divinatoires assyriens du Musée Britannique* (1903) provided cuneiform copies. Boissier's *Choix de textes relatifs à la divination assyro-babylonienne* (1905-1906) and Virolleaud's "De quelque textes divinatoires," *Babyloniaca* 3-4 (1910) represent the first attempts at published transliteration and translation of those texts.

In 1909 J. Hunger's *Babylonische Tieromina nebst Griechisch-römischen Parallelen* (MVAG 14/3) offered translations of several Šumma Alu texts, within a general context of animal omens. L. Dennefeld's *Babylonische und assyrische Geburtsomina* (1914) also contained translations of fragments later identified as parts of Šumma Alu.

Throughout the early 1900's, isolated Šumma Alu texts were identified and published, with transliterations and translations that reflected contemporary knowledge of omen literature and terminology. Occasionally, fragments of Šumma Alu were misidentified and published as something else entirely, as in Virolleaud's *Astrologie chaldéenne* (1912) and R.C. Thompson's *Assyrian Medical Texts* (1923).

As the publication of cuneiform copies proliferated, fragments of Šumma Alu tablets began appearing in many different contexts. Examples include P. Handcock's copies of *Cuneiform Texts of Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* 28 (1910) and 30 (1911), E. Ebeling's *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur, religiösen Inhalts* (1920-1923) and P. Thureau-Dangin's *Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du temple d'Anu* (TCL 6, 1922). H. Holma's *Omen Texts from the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Concerning Birds and Other Portents* (1923) brought together copies of some of the diverse texts that would later be identified as Šumma Alu.

With the publication of *Cuneiform Texts of Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* 38-41 (1925-1931) came the first attempt to treat the series Šumma Alu as a whole. C.J. Gadd published copies of all known British Museum texts of Šumma Alu and made identifications of specific tablets as to their number and position in the series, where possible. In addition, he introduced the subject of ancient catalogs, noted some parallels to the British Museum texts in texts from other collections, and published copies of a number of commentaries.

F. Nötscher used CT 38-40 as the basis for his study of Šumma Alu, the only study of the series as a whole that has been published to date. This appeared in three

volumes, *Die Omen-Serie Šumma Alu ina Mele Šakin* I-III (Or. NS 31 [1928], 39-42 [1929] and 51-54 [1930]). At the time, this work represented an ambitious and useful contribution. It is, however, by no means a comprehensive treatment of the series. It consists only of transliteration and translation of previously published texts, along with a certain amount of lexical commentary. No systematic attempt was made to consider and include unpublished omen material. Discussion of the structure and order of the series was minimal. No attempt was made by Nötscher to place the series within its literary or historical context.

Since the publication of Nötscher's volumes, occasional duplicates of Šumma Alu texts have been published, as in E. Ebeling and K. Köcher, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur* (1953) and O.R. Gurney, *The Sultantepe Tablets* (1957). Occasional identifications of individual texts have been made, as in R. Borger, "Ein Omentext aus der Sammlung de Liagre Böhl," *BiOr* 11 (1954), and an analysis of a group of omens belonging to Tablets 81 and following was presented by F. Köcher and A.L. Oppenheim in "The Old Babylonian Omen Text VAT 7525," *AfO* 18 (1957-58).

Duplicates of Šumma Alu omens have appeared in texts editions of other omen series, such as R. Labat, *Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux* (1951); R. Labat, *Calendrier babylonien des travaux, des signes et des mois* (1965); and E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (TCS 4, 1970). Other publications that probably include Šumma Alu omens as borrowings within the ancient texts are F. Kraus, *Texte zur babylonischen Physiognomatik* (AfO Beiheft 3, 1939) and A.L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956).

More recent work on Šumma Alu has concentrated not on the omens but on the apotropaic rituals incorporated into some of the tablets of the series. These rituals have been studied by E. Ebeling in "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Beschwörungsserie Namburbi" (RA 48, 49 and 50, 1954-56); R.I. Caplice, "Namburbi Texts in the British Museum" (Or. NS 34, 36, 39 and 40, 1965-1971); and S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1995).

Most recently, Šumma Alu texts have appeared in the volumes of *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk-Warka* 1 (1976), edited by H. Hunger, and 2-4 (1983, 1988, 1993), edited by E. von Weiher, and *Cuneiform Texts from Nimrod* 4, by D.J. Wiseman and J. Black.

Unpublished sources

In the mid-1970's, as the first step in a collaborative effort to produce a text edition of the complete series Šumma Alu, Erle Leichty of the University of Pennsylvania devised a plan for isolating and examining the mass of unpublished omen material known to exist in the British Museum's Kuyunjik collection. This project was carried out in 1975 and 1976 by two graduate students, Ann Guinan and myself. We culled from Bezold's *Catalogue* all the texts identified generally as "omens" or "forecasts"—approximately 5,300 texts. We then made an attempt to identify as many of these texts as possible, using all published material, including bibliographies and collections of autograph copies, as well as the detailed entries in the catalog. Scholars working on other types of divination texts—notably Erica Reiner, the late Ulla Jeyes and D.A. Kennedy, and Ivan Starr—provided invaluable assistance, checking over our long lists of tablet numbers and making available to us lists of their own. We thus eliminated from consideration approximately 3,000 published and unpublished texts that could be identified as something other than Šumma Alu.

The list of texts remaining included some 200 texts that had been identified as Šumma Alu, a certain number of published texts that were ambiguous, and some 2,000 texts about which there was no useful information. We consulted with W.G. Lambert, who generously and graciously provided us with transliterations of some 600 texts, including both texts he had identified as belonging to Šumma Alu and ambiguous fragments, along with working notes he had made during several years of studying the series. Reiner provided a few dozen unpublished hand-copies made by F.W. Geers at the University of Chicago (a complete copy of several hundred transliterations by Geers was later made available to us). Over the course of several summers, Leichty examined the remainder of the texts about which there was no published information; he eliminated those that could be identified as belonging to a series other than Šumma Alu, ordered photographs of approximately 50 texts that could be identified as belonging to Šumma Alu, and transliterated some 1,200 texts that were ambiguous.

At the same time, in a somewhat less formal way, we collected all the Šumma Alu material we could from sources outside the British Museum. We identified a number of published texts, and we received an extraordinary degree of international cooperation from scholars with access to other museums, who provided us with hand copies, photos, transliterations and manuscripts of works in progress.

For my doctoral dissertation,[4] I examined Lambert's and Leichty's transliterations in detail, together with the Geers copies and other copies of unpublished texts from various sources, in addition to published copies of uncertain nature. I was able to eliminate approximately 200 more texts. Working with both published and unpublished texts, I made a preliminary reconstruction of the series as a whole, detailing tablet order, contents and known sources. At that point, approximately 250 published and 200 unpublished texts had been identified as Šumma Alu texts as a result of the whole collaborative effort. Although the majority were British Museum texts, there were some 40 texts from Berlin, a dozen texts from Baghdad, half a dozen from Turkey, and isolated texts from Leiden, Montserrat, New Haven, New York, Paris and Teheran.

There remained some 1,500 transliterations of unpublished texts that might belong to Šumma Alu. These provided a continuing resource for the text editions of individual Tablets that I prepared during four years of full-time postdoctoral research. This work involved numerous trips to the British Museum, where the Western Asiatic Antiquities Department made available to me for collation many, many texts, both published and unpublished; glued together dozens of joins; and took more than 200 photographs.

In recent years, new texts have been excavated, notably at Sippar and in the Hamrin, but these are not yet available for study.

ANCIENT SOURCES

Information about the series Šumma Alu comes from a variety of ancient sources, including catalogs, standard texts, excerpt texts, reports, *aḫu*-omens, extra-standard texts and commentaries, as well as related omen series (Iqqur Epuš, Enuma ana Bit Marṣi Ašipu Illiku, Šumma Izbu and Šumma Katadugga) and rituals.

Catalogs. Like modern scholars or librarians, the ancient scribes compiled catalogs of literary works for various purposes.

One type of catalog listed the individual chapters or tablets that made up a given composition. This type may have been made simply as a reference work to show where each tablet belonged in the series or may have indicated the contents of a section of a library. Another type of catalog listed the titles of one principal composition along with complementary compositions (such as titles of omen texts along with commentary and ritual texts associated with those omen texts).[5] This type of catalog may have been made to record the holdings of a library or the contents of a given shelf or basket in a library;[6] some may have been intended as outlines of study programs or curricula for use in the scribal schools.[7] A third type of catalog appears to record the transfer of texts from one library to another.[8]

Two catalogs that enumerate the chapter-tablets of Šumma Alu are known (see Appendix A).

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[4] Sally M. Moren, *The Omen Series Šumma Alu: A Preliminary Investigation* (University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich. 1978)

[5] For a reference to Šumma Alu on such a text, see Rm.150 (RA 28 136). The context is as follows:

9. UD AN ^{d}en-lil $EŠ_2$.GAR_3 DINGIR.MEŠ
10. *a-di ṣa-a-ti-šu$_2$*
11. URU *ina* SUKUD GAR DIŠ *iq-qur*-DU_3-*uš*
12. *a-di* BAR.MEŠ *ṣa-a-tu mu-kal-lim-tu*

K.957 (CT 39 50, RA 48 60) (see Appendix A) seems to be an eclectic variant of this type: After presenting omen protases excerpted from several Šumma Alu tablets, it list the subjects of apotropaic rituals connected with the tablets, in the same order in which those subjects occur in the omen series; then it lists more omen protases.

[6] K.1400 (unpublished) is a library label. It is a lozenge-shaped tablet inscribed on one side only: DIŠ URU *ina* SUKUD GAR-*in* / *liq-ta-a-te,* "If a City Is Set on a Height series."

[7] This was suggested by Hallo IEJ 12 22-23.

[8] Several texts listing quantities and types of tablets of different compositions belonging to various people have been published in Parpola JNES 42. Parpola argues convincingly that these are records of acquisitions by the royal libraries at Nineveh. A total of at least 79 clay tablets and one writing board of Šumma Alu texts are mentioned (see nos. 1 and 2, 80-7-19, 144 (+) 262 and K.4753+K.5711+81-2-4,268 (+) K.12722).

One is a large tablet from Assur, of which two fragments have been identified. Known as the Assur Catalog, this tablet originally contained catalogs of several omen series. The extant fragments preserve titles of the last few tablets of the astronomical series Enuma Anu Enlil; then there is a heading "Incipits of Šumma Alu ina Mele Šakin series," between dividing lines, and the text lists the protases of the first lines of the tablets that make up the series Šumma Alu. The first lines of Tablets 1-22 and (after a break) of Tablet 30-62 are almost entirely preserved.

The second catalog is less well preserved. Known as the Nineveh Catalog, it seems to be similar in type to the Assur Catalog, although it may have contained the first lines of the series Šumma Alu only. First lines of Tablets 29-41 are preserved, either wholly or in part.

Standard texts. The term "standard" refers to the late, developed version of the series that the ancient scribes identified by the name Šumma Alu ina Mele Šakin. This is the text in its most complete, unified form. It contains a sequence of omens taken from specific occurrences and listed in a certain order, which can be seen to represent a certain logical progression in some portions of the series. In the early part of the series, for instance, a progression can be discerned from omens taken within a city to omens taken from the building of a house, to omens taken from the house itself, to omens taken from occurrences inside the house. Within certain tablets, similar progressions can be seen. Several of the tablets of animal omens, for example, begin with omens taken from the behavior of an animal in a city and go on to record omens taken from the behavior of the animal inside a house (see Tablet 40, 42, 46 and 49). Such examples of logic being applied to the organization of the series give evidence of the process of standardization and illustrate deliberate techniques of redaction used by the ancient scribes.

Another technique of redaction is evident in the repetition of certain sequences. Colors, for example, generally occur in the sequence white-black-brown-red-green. When an omen is recorded taken from something of a specific color, omens taken from the same thing in the other colors, in sequence, will generally occur in the same context (see Tablets 31, 35, 43 and 61). It is unlikely that all of these omens occurred in nature. More probably, the ancient scribes supplied missing omens to fill out set sequences in a scholarly effort to provide a complete compendium of relevant omens. The principles used by the scribes in composing such new omens are not clearly understood but would offer an interesting subject of study when text editions of all the omens are available for comparative purposes.[9]

The series Šumma Alu was far too large to be written on a single clay tablet. It was therefore broken down into chapters written on individual tablets.[10] These chapter-tablets were given sequence numbers within the series, and each tablet was known either by its number or by its first line ("incipit"), which served as the title of the tablet.

When copying these tablets, the ancient scribes frequently identified them by appending a colophon to the text. The colophon was a short passage at the end of the tablet, ruled off from the main text. In its most complete form, it included a tally of the omens recorded on the tablet, the number or first line of the tablet and a "catchline" that gave the incipit of the next tablet in the sequence. Abbreviated colophons contain only one or more of these elements of information.[11]

So far as is presently known, Šumma Alu consisted of at least 107 tablets. The highest tablet number recorded in a colophon is 104.[12] The catchline of this tablet is also preserved as the incipit of another tablet, which thus represents Tablet 105. This tablet also preserves a catchline, which is preserved as the catchline of a tablet that thus represents Tablet 106. Though this last tablet is very broken, it also includes a

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[9] See Leichty Izbu 24-25 for remarks on the composition of supplementary omens during the standardization of the series Šumma Izbu.

[10] There are occasional cases where a single chapter-tablet of Šumma Alu has been written down on more than one clay tablet (see Tablet 61). There are also cases where two chapter-tablets have been written on a single clay tablet (see Tablet 1).

[11] For a discussion of colophons, see Hunger Kolophone. Hunger has collected and translated many colophons, grouping them by type in chronological sequence.

[12] For a tablet that contains an anomalous number 122, see Tablet 15.

recognizable catchline, indicating that the series continued for at least one more tablet. Whether Tablet 107 was the last tablet in the series is unknown.[13]

The number of omens contained on the individual tablets varies considerably. Preserved scribal tallies record a minimum of 34 omens on a standard tablet (see Tablet 103) and a maximum of 225 (see K.2685+, discussed under Tablet 11). Tablet 105 as presently preserved does not include a scribal tally, but seems complete with only 20 omens. Most of the known tablets of the series seem to contain between 50 and 100 omens, with an average of about 90 omens to a tablet. A reasonable estimate of the total number of omens originally included in the omen series Šumma Alu would thus be around 10,000.

There are indications of more than one "official" edition of Šumma Alu. Sometimes different copies of the same tablet preserve different tablet numbers. These variations may be due to scribal mistakes—the ancient equivalent of a typographical error in transcribing the number or a more complicated situation in which the scribe copied a tablet out of order and then modified the colophon to accommodate his error. In other cases, a scribe may have chosen to copy one large series tablet onto two smaller pieces of clay, thus creating two tablets where there was previously only one—or vice versa. In only one case is the discrepancy really significant: According to the Assur Catalog, the incipit that represents Tablet 27 is an omen taken from a reptile, while a cat omen represents the incipit to Tablet 45; however, the one extant tablet numbered 27 contains cat omens. There is at present no way of knowing whether this discrepancy is due to a random error or to an established variant numbering system.[14]

Excerpt tablets. In addition to the tablets identified as belonging to the standard series Šumma Alu, a large number of texts excerpted from the series are preserved. The majority of these represent abridgments of the main text. Omens from different tablets of the series are quoted, usually in the same order as in the standard edition. Sometimes excerpt tablets are divided into sections by horizontal lines. One or more sections may represent a tablet of the series. Sometimes an intercalary line is inserted between sections to identify the foregoing section; this may be done by summarizing the contents of the section, by quoting the incipit of the tablet from which the excerpt was taken or by giving the tablet number of the tablet from which the excerpt was taken.

Not infrequently, excerpt tablets are provided with colophons that include the phrase, "n-th excerpt," which indicates the position of the excerpt tablet within an excerpt series.[15] Several numbered excerpt series of omens from Šumma Alu can be distinguished among the extant fragments.

One is preserved on a number of Kuyunjik texts formatted with dividing lines between sections (but no intercalary summary lines), with catchlines and with a final line identifying the text simply as "n-th excerpt" (without naming the series Šumma Alu or giving any provenience for the text). Texts in this series include a Second Excerpt, containing omens excerpted from Tablets 6,8 and 9 of the standard series;[16] a Ninth Excerpt containing omens from Tablet 31;[17] a Fourteenth Excerpt, of which two exemplars exist,[18] containing omens from Tablets 44-45; and an Eighteenth Excerpt, containing omens from Tablets 54-55.[19]

The title Third Excerpt is given to two Kuyunjik texts: one with a catchline that corresponds to the incipit of Tablet 12[20] and another that contains excerpts from Tablet 67.[21] Either there is a scribal error or the two tablets called Third Excerpt represent very dissimilar

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[13] See Parpola JNES 42 p. 25 for the suggestion that there may have been as many as 112 or 113 tablets.

[14] This sort of discrepancy is not unique to Šumma Alu; a similar situation occurs with the series Enuma Ana Bit Marsi Ašipu Illiku, where the numbering of the series as preserved in individual colophons conflicts with the numbering preserved in the one extant catalog. For specific comparison of these sources, see Leichty AfO 24 82.

[15] The 24-tablet series Šumma Izbu was abriged into a seven-tablet excerpt series. See Leichty Izbu 22.

[16] K.6715+ (see pp.109ff).

[17] K.3974+ (CT 40 26-27).

[18] K.4038 (CT 40 41) and Sm.67 (unpublished).

[19] K.2319+ (CT 39 3-5).

[20] K.2192 (CT 40 8).

[21] K.2898 (CT 39 25).

excerpt series. Both these texts differ in format from each other and from the series described above.

Another excerpt series is represented by four texts from Uruk.[22] These texts are distinctively formatted with dividing lines between sections, lines that identify the sections as "n-th excerpt of If a City Is Set on a Height, additional, not complete" and colophons with catchlines and indications of provenience. All contain omens that relate to the latter part of the standard series, where the tablet numbers are not well established. The Twentieth and Twenty-first Excerpt contain bird omens (probably relating to tablets numbered in the late 60s or early 70s); the Thirty-eighth Excerpt contains omens taken from a person's encounters with foxes on the road (probably from Tablets 81-85); the Forty-third Excerpt contains omens taken from things that happen to a person engaged in religious activities (probably from Tablets in the 90s); and the Seventieth to Seventy-Third Excerpts contain omens taken from the 100s (the catchline of this tablet is the incipit to tablet 105). The relationship of these excerpts to the standard series is uncertain; all of them are identified as "additional," *aḫu* (see below).

There are many excerpt fragments that may or may not belong to numbered excerpt series. The state of preservation of these texts is inadequate to yield definite information about possible variant excerpt series or random extract texts.

***Aḫu*-omens.** In addition to the texts that can be identified as standard or excerpt texts, there are a number of nonstandard texts that do not fit comfortably into either category.

One type of nonstandard text contains omens that the scribes described as *aḫu*, "additional" or "extraneous." The term is used in opposition to *ša iškari*, "belonging to the series," but the exact meaning of the term *aḫu* is not clear, for omens called *aḫu* in one context can appear in standard texts as well.[23]

Besides the excerpt series from Uruk mentioned above, only one text of omens identified as *aḫu*-omens from Šumma Alu is presently known. This text contains omens taken from the activities of dogs in the palace and the temple.[24] These omens do not appear in the preserved standard text concerning dogs, but the standard dog tablets (Tablet 46-48) are incomplete. A text of omens of Šumma Alu type (taken from things that happen to "a person going about his business") is identified as *aḫu* in one exemplar.[25]

Alternate traditions. A large number of texts preserving omens of distinctly Šumma Alu type are not identified as *aḫu*, nor can they be placed in the standard series, nor can they be identified as normal excerpt texts. Though it is possible that many of these texts could be placed within the standard series if our knowledge of the series was more complete, a number of them certainly contain omens from variant traditions of one sort or another, perhaps antedating the standard series, perhaps paralleling it. One example is K.45+ (CT 40 1-4), which preserves omens that parallel various omens from Šumma Alu Tablets 5, 6 7(?) and 19 (in quite a different order).

Texts of this type can be very helpful in providing restorations for partially preserved omens within the standard series. Specific correspondences are detailed in the relevant text edition chapters.

Due to the incomplete preservation of the series, interpreting the different traditions of Šumma Alu, standard and nonstandard, is like trying to put together an unknown number of jigsaw puzzles with an unknown number of pieces missing.

Reports. The practical use of the omen series by the Babylonians can be surmised from extant texts, especially letters. When an ominous event occurred, a diviner (*barû*) would be consulted. The diviner would

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[22] W22729/10 (SBTU 2 32), W22729/7 (SBTU 2 33), W22650 (SBTU 2 34) and W22554/0 (SBTU 3 97). Three of these four texts (nos. 32, 34 and 97) and another relating to Tablet 41 of Šumma Alu (W22644, SBTU 2 35) belonged to the same person, the exorcist Iqiša. Two are identified as copies of writing boards, one from Nippur (no. 34) and one from Uruk (no. 97). One (no. 97) is dated to Year 6 of Pilpissu (Philip), King of the Land (approximately 318 B.C.).

[23] This happens in Šumma Izbu, where "the omens in the *aḫu*-group are exactly the same as those in the main series and, as far as we can tell, were excerpted directly from the main series." (Leichty Izbu 22)

[24] K.217+ (DA 1 103-105) 39: 17.MU.MEŠ BAR.MEŠ *šu-ut* DIŠ URU *ina* SUKUD-*e* GAR-*in*.

[25] BM 108874 (CT 40 48-49) r. 11: KUR_2 20+5 MU.BI (for complete colophon, see note 62 below); the later duplicate K.6278+ (CT 40 48) has no colophon.

consult the omen texts and prepare a report by citing omens relevant to the occurrence in question. If the prediction was unfavorable, a ritual could be performed to "avert the evil."[26]

Several reports from Šumma Alu have been preserved. One type of report simply lists the relevant omens and closes with a comment by the scribe, such as "These are the omens that are relevant."[27] There are reports of this type containing scorpion omens from Tablet 29,[28] wild cow omens from Tablet 44 and hawk omens similar to Tablet 79,[29] hawk omens from Tablet 66[30] and snake omens probably from Tablet 24 or 25.[31] These reports are presented in detail with the text editions of the relevant tablets.

Reports are also contained in royal correspondence. All the ones that refer to Šumma Alu omens seem to have been made in response to specific inquiries about events noted by the king or a member of the royal entourage. One responds to a question about the meaning of a creature passing between someone's legs. The relevant omen is quoted as, "If a mongoose passes between a person's legs, a king's hand or a god's hand will reach him."[32] This omen most probably comes from Tablet 32 of Šumma Alu, where mongoose omens are recorded, but it cannot be placed precisely, as the preserved text of Tablet 32 is incomplete.

Another letter replies to an inquiry about lightning striking a field. The citation is "Regarding a field inside or outside a city, (if) Adad devastates it or causes the destruction(?) of a chariot or burns something (in it) with fire, that person (whose field it is) will go about in depression and grief for three years."[33] This is a compilation of three omens from Tablet 55 of Šumma Alu.[34]

A third letter quotes three bird omens: "If a crow brings something into a person's house, that person will acquire something that does not belong to him. If a hawk or a crow drops something it is carrying onto a person's house, that house will acquire profit—profit (is) gain. If a bird is carrying meat, a bird or anything (else) and drops it onto a person's house, that person will enjoy a large inheritance."[35] Similar omens occur on various bird tablets.

Another reference in a royal letter mentions a fox that has fallen into a well in a temple precinct and informs the king that the fox was taken out of the well

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[26] For more detailed reconstructions of the way in which omen texts were used in Mesopotamia, see Leichty Izbu 7-8 and Bottero Symptomes 124-143,179-183. For a substantial discussion of omen observations and reports made to the king, see Maul 17-25.

[27] See K.743 (CT 40 21) r.3-4. *an-nu-ti* MU.MEŠ *ša ina muḫ-ḫi / qur-bu-u-ni* and K.798 (CT 28 37) r.5: *an-ni-u šu-u ina muḫ-ḫi qur-bu.*

[28] BM 65271 (unpublished).

[29] K.798 (CT 28 37).

[30] K.9572+ (CT 39 24).

[31] K.743 (CT 40 21).

[32] Rm.2, 6 (ABL 385) (Parpola Letters 1993 no.33):
r.8. DIŠ ^{d}NIN.KILIM *ina b[i-rit]*
r.9. PAP.ḪAL LU_2 *e-[ti-iq]*
r.10. *lu-u* ŠU DINGIR *lu-u* ŠU LUGAL KUR-*su.*

[33] K.185 (Parpola Letters 1993 42):
r.1. $A.ŠA_3$ *lib-bi* URU *lu-u*
r.2. *qa!-an!-ni* URU ^{d}IM *ir-ḫi-iṣ*
r.3. *lu ṭi-bi*$_2$*-iḫ ma-ga-ar-ri*
r.4. *iš-kun lu-u i-ša*$_2$*-ti*
r.5. *mi*$_3$*-im-ma u*$_2$*-qa-al-li*
r.6. *a-me-lu šu-u* 3 MU.AN.NA.MEŠ
r.7. *ina ku-u*$_2$*-ri u ni-is-sa-te*
r.8. *it-ta-na-al-la-ak.*

[34] K.2319+ (CT 39 3-5):
31: DIŠ $A.ŠA_3$ URU ^{d}IM RA-*iṣ* NA.BI $MU.3.KAM_2$ *ina kù-ṛi u* SAG.PA.LAGAB DU MEŠ
32: DIŠ *ina* GIR_3.BAL-*šu* IZI *mim+ma u*$_2$*-qal-li* ŠUB $A.ŠA_3$ NA BI UG_7
33. DIŠ *ṭi-bi-iḫ* GIŠ.GIGIR *iš-kun* DUMU.NITA BI *iš-šal-lal* NA BI UG_7

[35] 82-5-22, 169 (ABL 353) (Parpola Letters 1993 no.58):
7. DIŠ U_2.TE_3.MUŠEN *mi*$_3$*-im-ma*
8. *ana* E_2 NA *u*$_2$*-še-ri-ib*
9. LU_2 BI *mi*$_3$*-im-ma la šu-a-tu*$_2$
10. ŠU-*su* KUR-*ad*$_2$
11. DIŠ $ŠUR_2$.DU_3.MUŠEN *lu a-ri-bu*.MUŠEN
12. *mi*$_3$*-im-ma ša na-šu-u*$_2$
13. *a-na* E_2 NA *ša*$_2$*-ni-iš*
14. *ana* IGI NA *id-di*
15. E_2 BI *iš-di-ḫu* TUK-*ši*
16. *iš-di-ḫu ne*$_2$*-me-lu*
17. DIŠ *iṣ-ṣu-ru lu-u* UZU
18. *lu-u iṣ-ṣu-ru*
19. *lu-u mi*$_3$*-im-ma na-ši-ma*
r.1. <<*ana*>> *a-na* E_2 NA ŠUB-*di*
r.2. NA BI *zi-it-tu*$_2$ *ra-bi-tu*$_2$
r.3. *ik-ka-al*

This letter is also translated in Oppenheim Letters 166.

and killed.[36] No omen is quoted in the letter, and none of the fox omens preserved from Tablet 42 refers to a fox falling into a well, but the incident is similar to the sorts of incidents reflected in Šumma Alu omens.

In another letter, there may be an indirect reference to a report on a Šumma Alu omen, where the scribe mentions a previous message about an owl, but no details of the message are given in the preserved text.[37] There may be a further reference to Šumma Alu in a letter that mentions crows, but the context is too broken to provide specific information.[38]

Another reference to a Šumma Alu report occurs on a fragment too small and broken to classify. It contains only part of the series title ("Height"), the words "as a report," and traces of a name and "he wrote."[39]

In addition to reports that cite omens, references to Šumma Alu may occur in other contexts. One letter from a scholar in Babylon to King Sargon II of Assyria, for instance, describing his scholarly credentials as a scholar, notes Šumma Alu among a long list of works he has read and mastered.[40]

Commentaries. As Babylonian literature developed over a long period of time, the scribes themselves came to find difficulties in the texts. They established the practice of writing commentaries on difficult words or passages, to elucidate them if they could.

Two styles of commentary include citations from Šumma Alu. One is written on a tablet divided into columns and sections. The word to be commented upon appears in the left-hand column and the explanation in the right-hand column. This explanation may consist of a translation (if the word to be explained is a Sumerian), an Akkadian synonym, a simplified grammatical form, an explanatory phrase or even the scribe's confession, "I don't know." The commentary is usually divided into sections. At the end of each section, the tablet is ruled across and a line of text going the width of both columns gives the number of the series tablet from which the citations were taken for commentary. Another style of commentary is written not in columns but continuously, with only a double-wedge colon separating the entries. The tablets commented upon are identified by incipit rather than by tablet number.

A number of commentaries to Šumma Alu texts were published in CT 41 and treated in R. Labat's *Commentaires assyro-babyloniens sur les Présages.* These include commentaries to Tablets 17-20, 29-32, 41-44, 48, 49, 57-58, 94alt. and 103-104alt. (These numbers refer to my reconstruction of the series; there are some discrepancies between these and the numbers indicated on the commentary texts. See Tablet Sequence, below.) Commentaries not treated by Labat are also known. These include commentaries to Tablet 1,[41] Tablets 14-15,[42] Tablets 22-23,[43] Tablet 25,[44] Tablet 42 (perhaps),[45] Tablet 45,[46] Tablet 54,[47] Tablets 54-55[48] and bird omens.[49]

Commentaries are treated with the relevant Šumma Alu tablets in the text edition chapters below.

Other omen series. The problem of confusion between Šumma Alu and parts of other omen series is an awkward one. Certain omens that are identical, word for word, occur both in Šumma Alu and other series. The specific patterns of identical omens vary. In some cases only isolated individual omens are the same; in

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[36] K.551 (ABL 142) (Parpola Letters 1993 no.127).

[37] K.915 (ABL 1278) (Parpola Letters 1993 no.183).

[38] K.4680 (ABL 1015).

[39] K.8655 (Hunger Kolophone no.558): [...] *me-le-e* [...] / [...] *ru ana taḫ-sis-ti* / [...] x x x *iš-ṭur*

[40] K.3034+ (ABL 1321 and CT 54 106) (Parpola Letters 1993 no.160)

[41] Rm.307 (unpublished, see p.44-45)

[42] VAT 14481, 14482 and 14483 (LKU 4-6); they were not treated by Labat because of their extremely poor state of preservation.

[43] BM 129092 (unpublished, courtesy Walker).

[44] Funck 2 (AfO 21 46 and pl.9-10).

[45] W22226/1 (SBTU 1 78). This very fragmentary text contains Alu-type vocabulary and appears to refer to cattle omens.

[46] W22758/3 (SBTU 2 36).

[47] K.4387 (2R 47).

[48] Rm.122 (RA 13 27-33).

[49] W 22319b (SBTU 1 77), W22659 (SBTU 3 99) and K.4229 (RA 17 140-141).

other cases, whole groups of omens are the same. Even within a given series, comparison with Šumma Alu may reveal some cases of isolated correspondences and some cases of group correspondences.

Isolated correspondences between series do not seem to indicate direct borrowing or even direct descent from a common prototype. Such correspondences are probably more or less coincidental, arising out of the common background of omen literature.

A closer relationship must have existed between texts that preserve a number of identical omens in a cluster, especially when such clusters preserve even the same sequence of omens. Such cases seem to indicate direct borrowing. Sometimes omens that seem contextually at home in one of the series in which they occur seem intrusive in the other, making it fairly clearly which series borrowed from which. Sometimes the nature of the omens is ambiguous, and the direction of the borrowing cannot be determined.

The reasons for these borrowings are not at all clear. Borrowing does not seem to have been done systematically or comprehensively. It is possible that if our knowledge of all the relevant series were complete, some significant pattern of borrowing would emerge. Perhaps detailed textual analysis of all the correspondences will clarify the situation. When a complete text edition of Šumma Alu has been made, the problem of borrowings between series should be studied. In the present context, however, only general indications of the issues will be given.

A. *Iqqur Epuš*. This series has been published by Labat as *Un calendrier babylonien des travaux, des signes et des mois (séries Iqqur Ipuš)*. It describes the ominous significance of various activities, primarily construction, according to the month or sometimes the day of the month on which the activities are undertaken. The series as a whole is related in some ways to another genre of Mesopotamian literature, hemerologies, but is properly classed as an omen series.

As treated by Labat, the series occurs in two different formats. In one format (*série générale*), a single ominous happening occurs at a different times: in Nisannu, in Ayyaru, in Simanu, etc. In the other format (*séries mensuelles*), the omens are grouped by month: all the things that happen in Nisannu, then those that happen in Ayyaru, then those that happen in Simanu, etc.

Quite a number of omens from the *série générale* of Iqqur Epuš appear also in Šumma Alu. Specific correspondences occur as follows:

house omens (Alu T. 5)	IE §2,3,1,5
king's activities (Alu T.11)	IE §38
repairs (Alu T.11)	IE §33,32,31
digging a well (Alu T. 17)	IE §43
snake omens (Alu T. 22)	IE §58
fields, gardens (Alu T. 54-55)	IE §42,57
rivers and floods (Alu T. 61)	IE §103-104

However, not all Šumma Alu omens that indicate the specific date or month of an occurrence can be found in Iqqur Epuš. Tablet 55, for instance, includes omens about cultivating a field inside a city during specific months that do not seem to occur in Iqqur Epuš.[50]

There do not seem to be any correspondences between Šumma Alu and the *séries mensuelles* of Iqqur Epuš, though there are several places where one might expect to find correspondences. For instance, in Šumma Alu Tablet 22 there is a long section of snake omens that occur in the month of Nisannu. In no tablet of the *séries mensuelles*, however, are there more than one or two snake omens. In Šumma Alu Tablet 61, there are several sections of river and flood omens grouped together by month. These do not correspond to the *séries mensuelles*, but a later section of Tablet 61 corresponds to the *série générale*.

B. *Enuma ana Bit Marṣi Ašipu Illiku*. This is a medical treatise published by Labat in *Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux* (TDP). This series records diagnoses and prognoses of certain illnesses in omen form.

In the first two tablets of the series, things that may happen to an exorcist on his way to a sick person are described. These were apparently seen as bearing upon the sick person's chances of recovery. Many of the

[50] See K.3900:1-2 and 95-4-6,1:6-11 (both CT 39 7), and Labat Calendrier p.106 n.1.

situations are similar to the sorts of situations described in the omens of Šumma Alu, and some omens from Tablet 2 of TDP also occur in Šumma Alu. Some specific correspondences occur as follows:

snake omens (Alu T.22)	TDP T.2:19-30
scorpion omens (Alu T.28)	TDP T.2:31-36
lizard omens (Alu T.30)	TDP T.2:43-48

Other parts of Tablet 2 that might be expected to appear in Šumma Alu do not appear. TDP Tablet 2:78-81, for instance, deal with the appearance of fire and lights. Tablet 94, which is preserved in only a short excerpt of Šumma Alu, deals with the appearance of lights around a sick person, but no specific correspondences can be identified. It may be that this is because Tablet 94 of Šumma Alu is only incompletely preserved. However, in the case of light-flashes (*birṣu*), the complete Šumma Alu tablet on this subject is preserved (Tablet 21), but the omens taken from light-flashes listed in TDP Tablet 2:72-75 are not included.

With regard to TDP and Šumma Alu, borrowing does not appear to have been direct. Some omens occur in both series; some that might be expected to appear in both series do not. Where omens do occur in both series, they do not occur in identical groups, nor in the same order. Some occur with different apodoses.[51]

C. *Šumma Izbu.* Leichty's *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* treats this collection, a 24-tablet series dealing with the import of extraordinary human and animal births.

So far as is presently known, Šumma Alu did not contain any omens based on human births, which are the subject of Šumma Izbu Tablet I-IV; nor does the description of anomalous newborn humans (*izbu*) occur in Šumma Alu, as it does in Šumma Izbu Tablet VI-XVI. However, Šumma Izbu Tablets V and XVII-XXIV treat animal births, and many similarities occur between these tablets of Šumma Izbu and the animal tablets of Šumma Alu.

Correspondences are to be found in the following tablets:

Izbu T.V, XVII-XVIII	Alu T.37-38	(sheep, goats)
Izbu T.XIX	Alu T.40	(cows, oxen)
Izbu T.XX-XXI	Alu T.41	(mares)
Izbu T.XXII	Alu T.49	(pigs)
Izbu T.XXIII	Alu T.46-48	(dogs)
Izbu T.XXIV	Alu T.42	(gazelles)

Although some of the omens included in both Šumma Izbu and Šumma Alu refer to births and are thus characteristic of Šumma Izbu, others refer to general behavior of animals and are thus more typical of Šumma Alu, seeming intrusive in Šumma Izbu. Still, there is no doubt that behavioral omens belong to Šumma Izbu, for they occur on clearly identified tablets. When an unplaced text is fragmentary, it can be difficult to assign it with certainty to Šumma Izbu or to Šumma Alu. If protases are preserved, the spelling of *šumma* can provide a clue: DIŠ is characteristic of Šumma Alu, while BE is characteristic of Šumma Izbu. Though there are some omens that begin with *šum$_4$*(BE)-*ma* in clearly identified Alu texts, these are confined to short sections (usually two or three omens) in larger texts that begin with DIŠ; omens that begin with BE are very rare in Šumma Alu.

D. *Šumma Katadugga.* This series of quasi-wisdom, quasi-omen literature was published by F. Kraus as "Ein Sittenkanon in Omenform" in ZA 43 77-113 and Or NS 16 199-205. Possible correspondences between it and Šumma Alu occur on an unusual tablet similar to the Sittenkanon that includes omens taken from human behavior, personality traits and physiognomy, and aspects of a house.[52]

Ritual texts. An indirect source of information about Šumma Alu is provided by the rituals that relate to the omen texts. These rituals were originally designed to ward off the evil predicted by an omen. This was often accomplished by sympathetic magic, wherein the evil predicted for a person was transferred to an inanimate object and the object destroyed, thereby obliterating the evil.[53]

Such apotropaic rituals, called *namburbû* or "releasing" rituals, occur in several different contexts. A literary series was made of them, similar to other

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[51] For instance, for the omen "If a snake falls onto a sick person," TDP §2:20 predicts "he will die in three days," whereas Šumma Alu Tablet 22:81' predicts "his illness will be long, but he will live" (CT 38 36:72 and duplicates).

[52] See S. Moren JCS 29 65-72.

[53] For a fuller description of the nature and structure of this kind of ritual, see Caplice SANE 1-13.

series such as the omen series.[54] Catalogs were made both of the series and of other collections of *namburbû rituals*.[55] A number of these rituals deal with the same subjects as Šumma Alu omens.[56] In addition, a substantial number of Šumma Alu texts actually have rituals incorporated in them, usually at the end of the tablet before the colophon, sometimes inserted directly into the body of the omen text.

A slightly different genre of ritual text is known from a few published fragments.[57] This type of text seems to be a practical summary of the various sorts of evil that may be averted by a certain ritual. The text lists the sorts of evil in brief lines reading, "against the evil (ḪUL) of so-and-so"; then it offers the instruction, "You say the incantation," and details incantation and ritual. Many of the things enumerated in the lists of evils in the first part of these texts can be identified as subjects of Šumma Alu omens. Others cannot be identified in the preserved Šumma Alu texts but may well give some indication of subjects of omens that have been lost or not yet identified.

Chronology. The earliest texts of Šumma Alu type come from the old Babylonian period. One clear forerunner of the Šumma Alu bird omen tablets preserves 25 omens of classic Šumma Alu type.[58] One of these omens recurs verbatim on a Kuyunjik tablet.[59] None, however, can be precisely identified with omens of the standard series Šumma Alu.[60]

Another Old Babylonian forerunner of Šumma Alu preserves 25 or 26 omens taken from various animals, including mice, pigs, chickens and snakes.[61] None of these has yet been identified with standard Šumma Alu omens.

Other evidence for the existence of Šumma Alu-type omens in the old Babylonian period comes from an OB tablet of physiognomic omens.[62] This tablet can be related to Šumma Alu tablets describing things that happen to a man while sleeping. It also has a Hittite parallel. Other omens that exist in Hittite, though dating to the time of the Middle Hittite Kingdom, suggest the existence of Šumma Alu type omens in the Old Babylonian period, since the majority of Hittite material taken from Akkadian is known to have come from Old Babylonian prototypes.[63]

The earliest Šumma Alu-type text that can be dated is identified as containing 25 *aḫu* omens on "a copy from the land Subartu" and dated to the reign of Mešipak.[64] According to the chronology established by Brinkman, this would be between 1186 and 1172 B.C.[65] A much later Kuyunjik duplicate of this tablet[66] testifies to the continuity of the tradition. Though this late duplicate is not identified as belonging to the series, context suggests that the omens relate to those taken from the activities of people on Tablets numbered in the 90s.

Several Assur tablets relating to Šumma Alu have been dated on stylistic grounds to the reign of Tiglath Pileser I (1109-1077 B.C.).[67] While these are of distinctly Šumma Alu type, they cannot be identified with specific sections of the later standard series.

The vast majority of Šumma Alu tablets date to the middle of the seventh century B.C. In this period, copies of texts from all over Mesopotamia were made

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[54] See Ebeling RA 48, 49 and 50.

[55] See Caplice Or NS 34 108-116.

[56] See Caplice Or NS 42 514-517.

[57] See K.3844+ (CT 41 23-24), VAT 10759a+10180a (KAR 387) and VAT 10180b (KAR 388).

[58] BM 113915 (Weisberg HUCA 40 87-104).

[59] BM 113915 ii 16-21 and Sm.1376 (CT 39 25) + Sm.1952 (CT 41 14) r.9-10.

[60] Weisberg states (p.104) that Sm.1952 r.9-10 is the catchline of Tablet 67, but this is not firmly established.

[61] BM 109228 (unpublished, courtesy Finkel).

[62] VAT 7525 (AfO 18 62-77).

[63] See remarks Labat L'akkadien 3-4. For specific parallels between an Akkadian Old Babylonian text of Šumma Alu type and a Hittite text, see Köcher and Oppenheim AfO 18 68 and Güterbock AfO 18 78.

[64] BM 108874 (CT 40 48-49) r.10-11: KUR_2 20+5 MU.BI GABA.RI KUR.SU.BIR_4.KI ITI.APIN.DU_8.A UD.8.KAM_2 MU.3.KAM_2 3.KAM_2 *me-li-ši-pak* $ŠAR_4$.

[65] The double numbering of regnal years (MU.3.KAM_2 2.KAM_2) is not unique in Kassite chronology, but its meaning is not clearly understood. For discussion see Brinkman Materials I 410-411 and Rowton JNES 25 255-256.

[66] K.6278+ (CT 40 48).

[67] See Weidner AfO 16 197-215 (texts 91-93 are snake omens; 94, bird omens; 95, lizard omens).

and deposited at Nineveh in the palace archive that constituted the Library of Assurbanipal.

A number of Šumma Alu texts in neo-Babylonian script show the continuity of tradition down through the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C., though the texts cannot be dated exactly.

The latest Šumma Alu texts come from Uruk, from the period of the last flowering of Babylonian scholarship. The latest accurately datable text is identified in its colophon as Tablet 36 of the series Šumma Alu and dated to the second of Šabatu, Seleucid Era 84.[68] According to the chronology established by Parker, this would be February 2, 228 B.C.[69]

The span of the Šumma Alu texts thus covers more than 1,500 years.

Geography. Šumma Alu texts have been found at sites all over Mesopotamia and in several peripheral regions. Within Mesopotamia, both standard and nonstandard texts may appear at the same site. In the peripheral regions, only nonstandard texts have been found.

The largest number of Šumma Alu texts come from Assyria. Most are from Nineveh, but some come from Assur. Fragmentary texts are also known from Kalḫu (Nimrud).

Both standard and nonstandard texts come from Babylonia. A number are identified as coming from Babylon itself, and a number of Kuyunjik tablets are identified as copied from Borsippa originals, indicating that the series Šumma Alu must have existed there. Several texts and commentaries come from Uruk. A number of texts are catalogued in the British Museum as coming from Sippar.

In the peripheral regions, Šumma Alu-type omens come from Boghazkoi, both in Akkadian and Hittite.[70]

Two texts from Susa may bear some relation to Šumma Alu.[71] One refers to the birth of piglets and may more properly be associated with Šumma Izbu. The other seems to make predictions based on the physical characteristics of birds. Šumma Alu bird omens are generally based on the actions rather than the appearance of birds, but omens taken from animal physiognomy do occur in the series.

Tablets from Sultantepe contain snake omens closely related to those in the standard Tablets 22-23 of Šumma Alu and lizard omens very similar to those recorded on an Assur tablet associated with Tablet 32.[72]

Text history. Until a complete text edition of Šumma Alu has been made, no text history of the series can be written. So far as can be deduced from the evidence currently available, the history of Šumma Alu seems to parallel the history of Šumma Izbu, as outlined by Leichty in his study of that series.[73] This began in old Babylonian times with the writing down of a previously oral tradition of omens. Old Babylonian versions of the omens were copied by the Hittites. Within Mesopotamia the Old Babylonian texts were edited and enlarged down through the centuries. Sometime in the Middle Babylonian or Kassite period, several traditions were standardized and disseminated inside Mesopotamia. In the seventh century B.C., Ashurbanipal collected these various traditions for his library at Nineveh. Some became incorporated into the standard series; others were simply recorded. Both standard and nonstandard texts continued to be copied in Babylonia into the Seleucid period.

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[68] MLC 1867 (BRM 4 21) r.11: ... ITI.DU_6 UD.2.KAM_2 MU.60+20+4.KAM_2 *si-lu-ku* LUGAL. This is Tablet 38 in the current reconstruction.

[69] See Parker Babylonian 39.

[70] See Köcher and Oppenheim AfO 18 62-77. For Hittite text see Güterbock AfO 18 78-80. See also KBo XIII 28-29.

[71] See Labat Textes littéraires no.7 and no.10.

[72] See STT 2 321-322 and 323.

[73] See Leichty Izbu 21.

Ann Guinan, "The Perils of High Living: Divinatory Rhetoric in Shumma Alu," in H.Behrens et al. (eds.), DUMU.E2.DUB.BA.A: Studies in Honor of Ake W. Sjöberg (OPSNKF 11), Philadelphia 1989, pp. 227-235

The Perils of High Living: Divinatory Rhetoric in *Šumma Ālu*

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Divination is a unique form of communication: it must be clear enough to be interpreted yet sufficiently obscure to remain privileged as otherworldly. Its appropriation of "scientific" modes of expression, the clarity of its binary concepts, and its apparent logic are external points of reference and authorization; the real process of divination takes place below this structure. Divinatory logic appears to pursue formal lines of reasoning but in fact achieves its effects through indirection, ambiguity, equivocation, contradiction, and subtle shifts from the logical to the figurative.

Šumma ālu is one of the largest omen collections[1] in an Akkadian genre characterized by textual engorgement. The generations of scribes who copied and redacted the compendia were driven by a desire to be systematic and comprehensive. They augmented sequences of omens and applied them to every possible context. The extensive texts that developed as a result are both detailed and exhaustive. They have aptly been described as pointillist.[2] It is unfortunate for us that this abundance of material goes hand-in-hand with an apparent poverty of meaning. There are few genres whose conceptual structures remain so intransigently opaque. The considerable advances that have been made to our understanding of individual aspects in divinatory discourse have not diminished our sense of estrangement from the signifying structures at its heart.

The scribes who produced *Šumma ālu* expended considerable effort to systematize the text. They classified omens, organizing them

1. The omen series *Šumma ālu* is a collection of omens based on urban life. The text details the ominous signs that occur inside and around the boundaries of man's created environment. At the heart of the text is human enterprise. Signs occur as distinguishing features of the cities and houses man builds and the orchards and fields he cultivates; they are observed during the course of a variety of undertakings and ventures.

For a general introduction to the series see Sally Moren, "The Omen Series *Šumma ālu*: A Preliminary Investigation" (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1978).

The following discussion relies on a new text edition of the first twenty-two tablets of *Šumma ālu* by Sally Moren, which will be published under the auspices of the Šumma ālu project of the University of Pennsylvania. The previous text edition is that of F. Nötscher, Die Omen-Serie *šumma ālu ina mēlê šakin* (Or 31, 39-42, 51-54 [1928-30]). The text citations here are from CT 38-40; the numbering of omens is from Moren's edition. The interpretations discussed in the present article were developed during my analysis of the text which forms part of my doctoral research. Further discussion and the relevant documentation will be found in my doctoral dissertation, "The Human Behavioral Omens of *Šumma ālu*: An Analysis of Mesopotamian Divinatory Rhetoric" (University of Pennsylvania).

2. Jean Jacques Glassner, "Pour un lexique des termes et figures analogiques et usage dans la divination Mésopotamienne," Journal Asiatique (1984) 16. For other discussions of the development of the late omen compendia see Ivan Starr, The Rituals of the Diviner, BibMes 12 (1983) 12; A. Leo Oppenheim, "Man and Nature in Mesopotamian Society," Dictionary of Scientific Biography 15 (1978) 634-62; Mogens Trolle Larsen, "Reflections on Science, Divination, and Literacy," in Francesca Rochberg-Halton (ed.), Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner, AOS 67 (1987) 213-16.

on topically coherent tablets arranged in a logical sequence. By the 7th century B.C. the series contained over 100 tablets and an estimated 10,000 omens.

A variety of schemata[3] generated the expansion of the text. Omens were structured into standardized classes and recorded in ever-expanding contexts. *Šumma ālu* is a kaleidoscope of classification.[4] It maximizes contiguous connections, producing new structures on the border of the old. The text as a whole is a matrix of interconnections.

The configuration in the protasis of an omen is an isolated reading intersecting several schemata. A single omen is the compound product produced by a combination of discrete entities. For example:

										city
										square
										street
		mountain-	lichen							temple
		plain-	lichen			right		outer gate		palace
If	white		lichen	is seen on the	left	in the	entrance	of a	house	
	black						foundation			
	red						threshold			
	green						wall			
							roof			

An omen is a natural phenomenon which is read as a message from a suprasensory realm. We assume therefore, that the scribes originally recorded what they actually observed. But the omen compendia, though based on a core of observations, are by and large the creation of language: in extending the classification patterns, the scribes not only formulated new omens but also determined their predictions. By what process did they balance the cognitive demands of analysis and occult communication?

We stand outside the system of thought that governed the production of predictions, because we are not in possession of the signifying code. In order for this enormous corpus to yield meaning in proportion to its size we need to recover what we can of the interconnections between omens and their recorded predictions[5] by studing the larger signifying patterns formed by groups of omens.

It is my belief that the scribes did not simply add omens to fill the gaps in empirical observa-

3. For a general discussion of the "schema concept" see Ronald W. Casson, "Schemata in Cognitive Anthropology," Annual Review of Anthropology 12 (1983) 429-62.

4. The text expands laterally from center to periphery: from contexts inside the city, to agricultural areas in the immediate outskirts, and the marshes and rivers beyond. The extension was also vertical: individual fields of observation were subdivided into parts (head: forehead, eyes, ears, nose, mouth; arm: forearm, hand, finger; house: roof, threshold). Entries were extended according to standard systems of classification. The sequences of signs included, on the one hand, categories of concrete objects arranged in culturally determined classification systems (such as animals, plants, minerals, categories of people) and, on the other, attributes of the objects, consisting of universal classes of properties and qualities (such as color, orientation, sound, or shape).

5. For an analysis of the relationship between the protases and apodoses see Glassner, JA (1984) 16-46; Ulla Jeyes, "Death and Divination in the Old Babylonian Period," in B. Alster (ed.), Death in Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia 8 (1980) 107-121; J. Bottèro, "Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne," in J.P. Vernant (ed.), Divination et rationalité (Paris, 1974) 162.

tion, but rather, through the generation of the text, were themselves involved as diviners in a process of divination.[6] Novel connections and patterns of association coalesce around the intersecting schemata and emerge without conscious control as divinatory meaning.[7]

The manipulation of lexical items is the corollary in language to the common divinatory technique of manipulation of code objects.[8] The African Ndembu for example toss objects, each of which signifies a cultural concept, into a basket; then study the configurations that appear at the top of the heap in the basket. Victor Turner's description of Ndembu divinatory symbolism might just as easily be applied to the Mesopotamian omen compendia. He refers to "the brittle segmentation" of the semantic structure of divinatory symbols: "I mean by this that a divinatory symbol possesses a series of senses, only one of which is relevant at a time, that is, at the inspection of a configuration of symbols."[9]

A similar cognitive strategy may underlie the formulation of the Mesopotamian omen predictions. There is evidence to suggest that the scribes were using writing as a tool of divinatory inquiry. An omen is a reading across a juncture of categories. The resulting syntagm is analogous to the configurations that occur when actual objects are physically shaken and rearranged.

The omen compendia translate divinatory science into textual structures. They require a strategy of reading that seems to operate on contradictory levels. The correlation of classification patterns provides an initial entry into the system.

Divinatory language is inherently binary. The benefic or malefic predictions in the apodoses define a basic binary structure. Sets of polar pairs such as "high"/"low," "front"/"back," and "right"/"left" are the most salient features of the protases.[10] This configuration suggests a structure that can be expressed as a balanced equation.

Binary oppositions based on normal and reverse polarity are tools of divination.[11] Binary logic based on the correlation of two pairs of symmetrically polar oppositions are a constant in all of the omen collections. A favorable or unfavorable prediction is determined by the compound product of a positive or negative attribute of a sign ("bright"/"dim") and of a positive or negative attribute of the context ("right"/"left"). Ivan Starr found that in extispicy an anomalous feature on the right or the left is related to an auspicious or inauspicious prognostication according to objective principles. "When the advantageous condition is attested on the right: the prediction is favorable to the 'ego'; when attested on the left, it is favorable to the enemy. Con-

6. A detailed discussion and documentation will be found in my "Human Behavioral Omens" (see n. 1).

7. The Rorschach tests used in psychiatric evaluations are based on the same cognitive strategy.

8. Meyer Fortes, "Religious Premises and Logical Techniques in Divinatory Ritual," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London 1966, B 251, 420.

9. Victor Turner, Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual (Ithaca, NY, 1975) 232.

10. Categories based on primary egocentric perceptions of the physical world have an inherent polarity: what is above and in front is positive, below and in back, negative. John Lyons, Semantics II (Cambridge, 1977) 690-691. Negative and positive values vary little from culture to culture, but the uses they are put to as conceptual tools are infinitely variable.

11. Many forms of divination require both a positive and a negative answer for a valid reading. For example: "Is he guilty? Yes. Is he innocent? No." See Encyclopedia Britannica (1981) 918 s.v. Divination; E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "Consulting the Poison Oracle Among the Azande," in W. Lessa and E. Vogt (eds.), Reader of Comparative Religion (New York, 1965) 351.

versely, when a disadvantageous condition (that is, the opposite of an advantageous one) is attested on the right: the prediction is unfavorable to the 'ego'; when attested on the left it is unfavorable to the enemy."[12]

The correlation of binomial values in the protases is a fundamental aspect of the divinatory code. It establishes base values for primary sets of attributes which in turn lead to the recovery of coded items that are not intrinsically polar. Such a systematic or meaningful pattern of association is not initially apparent in the text of *Šumma ālu*. In fact, when polar oppositions in the protases of omens correlate directly with the benefic and malefic polarity of the apodoses, the values in the sets themselves carry the meaning of the omen. Consequently, our understanding never rises above what is already known. Since it is well known that the right side is auspicious and the left side is inauspicious, it is only when there is a reverse correlation between the plarity of the predictions in the apodoses and the polarity of the attributes in the protasis that we get a glimpse of the underlying divinatory logic. The explanation lies in connections that are not immediately apparent. For instance, we can look at three *Šumma ālu* omens:

> "If a man starts out on business and a falcon stands on the right and then comes near by the man, he will have profit wherever he goes."[13]
>
> "If a man starts out on business and a crow stands and caws (to) the left of a man, he will go where he intends, he will enjoy profit."[14]
>
> "If a man starts a journey and a crow stands on the right and caws, that man will not go where he intends, he will be unhappy."[15]

The unexpected auspicious prediction in the second omen refers us back to the sign. The prediction cannot be accounted for by the negative meaning of the left side alone. The malefic value of the crow in combination with left-sided context produces a double negative. The obvious opposition of right and left leads the interpreter to a less apparent opposition of the appearances of the crow and what seems to be an auspicious falcon in similar omens.

The paired elements function in a divinatory

12. Starr Rituals 16. For a discussion of this structure in astrological omens, see Francesca Rochberg-Halton, "Benefic and Malefic Planets in Babylonian Astrology" in E. Leichty, et al. eds., A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs (Philadelphia, 1988) 325. The same pattern exists in *Šumma izbu*, although the values appear at first glance to be reversed: an ominous feature on the right is bad and one on the left is good. Doubling reverses the polarity. thus two ominous features on the right were good and two on the left are bad (E. Leichty, The Omen Series *Šumma izbu*, TCS 4 (New York, 1970). In fact the same pattern applies: in a divinatory procedure which judges malformations to be either auspicious or inauspicious a defect on the right is bound to be malefic and conversely a defect on the left which leaves the right side unaffected must be the benefic component.

13. DIŠ NA KIMIN(=*ana* A_2.$AŠ_2$-$šu_2$ ZI-*ma*) SUR_2.DU_3.MUŠEN 15 NA *iz-ziz-ma ta-ḫe-e* NA DU-*ak* NA.BI KI DU-*ku* A_2.TUK TUK-*ši* (CT 40 48:2).

14. DIŠ NA KIMIN(=*ana* A_2.$AŠ_2$-$šu_2$ ZI-*ma*) UGA.MUŠEN GUB-*ma* GUB_3 NA KA-*si* NA.BI KI IGI.MEŠ-$šu_2$ GAR-*nu* DU-*ma* ḪA.LA KU_2 (CT 40, 48:3).

15. DIŠ NA *ana* KASKAL ZI-*ma* UGA.MUŠEN *ina* 15 NA GUB-*ma* KA-*si* NA.BI KI IGI.MEŠ-$šu_2$ GAR-*nu* NU DU-*ak* $ŠA_3$-*bi* NU DUG_3.GA (CT 40, 48:7).

code.[16] In many cases, the reversals in *Šumma ālu* are caused by the presence of the negative member of a secondary polar opposition in the protases.

By integrating the oppositional pairs that operate in the protases, we can begin to apprehend elementary aspects of a divinatory code. Sets of attributes exist in relation to each other; they can adapt themselves to different divinatory contexts, and interact with other figurative patterns. Complex secondary patterns of polarity based on sets with more than two lexemes occur throughout this text. When applied to new contexts the resulting configurations produce meaning in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Analyses based solely on polar patterns, ultimately remain static. The semantic content is so reduced that there is little to be learned about Mesopotamian thought. Coded items in the protases are the tools that operate on the surface of the Mesopotamian text like the above mentioned tossing of lots in African divination.

At this level the polarity of the code fosters a sense of objectivity, but divination issues from a base that is essentially cryptic and recondite. The schematic structure of the text, with its contiguous and sometimes logical connections, is the aspect of divinatory procedure that can give a reader an uncanny sense of veracity, while at the same time the controlled permutations and unique combinations of schemata disrupt standard patterns of association and are the catalyst of new meaning.

The first two omens of *Šumma ālu* demonstrate one aspect of this process of thought:

> Omen I 1: "If a city is situated on an elevation, as for the inhabitant(s), (the mood of) that city will be depressed"[17]

This first omen of *Šumma ālu*—which provides the title of the monumental omen series—contradicts the essential processes of Mesopotamian urban life. Cities grew upward, both naturally and by design. Elevation had strategic value. The proudest, most secure, and presumably, happiest city, had "summits as high as mountains."[18] The obvious contradiction of these norms at the beginning of a compendium whose subject is urban life is too startling to be anything less than a significant rhetorical device. The second omen of *Šumma ālu* opposes the content of the first and thereby reinforces it:

> Omen I 2: "If a city is situated in a depression, (the mood of) that city will be elevated."[19]

Together these two omens form an antithetical unit whose ominous signs are linked by the opposition of *mēlû* and *mušpalu*, "high ground" and "low ground," and by the shared language of their apodoses. The referential contradiction of Mesopotamian cultural conventions is reinforced at figurative levels of language. The reversal of the expected polarity in the opposition of "high" and "low," provides a clue that leads us to meaning not apparent on a first reading of the text and points to an interpretive strategy.

16. See CT 40, 48:1-12 (Nötscher, Or 51-54 176).

17. DIŠ URU *ina me-le-e* GAR DUR_2.A $ŠA_3$ URU.BI NU DUG_3.GA. The spelling DUR_2.A is unusual. My reading follows the CAD (A/2, 429 s.v. *āšibu* which takes the form as a participle. AHw (3, 1483 s.v. *wašābu*) reads DUR_2.A as a verb with city understood as the subject. I have taken the form as a *casus pendens* construction—a stylistic feature that occurs frequently in Tablet I. See for example, UR.BI $ŠA_3$ UN.BI (CT 38 1:27).

18. For citations of this expression see CAD E 126 s.v. *elû*.

19. DIŠ URU *ina muš-pa-li* GAR $ŠA_3$ URU.BI DUG_3.GA (CT 38, 1:2).

These two omens are uncharacteristically condensed: a single lexical item ("elevation" in omen I, 1 and "depression" in omen I, 2) carries the value of each omen. The polarity of high and low inherent in "elevation" and "depression" are superficially similar to elementary polarities, but in fact they represent a shift in another direction. Unlike the procedure discussed above which directs the attention of the reader backwards in order to find undecoded items in the protases, the structure of these omens requires a strategy of reading oriented forward in order to find semantic connections linking the protases to their apodoses. It is this very development that allows us to find thematic content at higher levels of integration and begin to treat the compendia as a text. Divinatory meaning emerges from minimal rhetorical deviations when omens are integrated with each other in a restricted context, such as the same tablet. New interpretations occur on the periphery of previous ones. We can proceed in single steps to the resolution of more difficult omens and in some cases, to the solution of philological problems. The following examples are taken from Tablets I, V, and VI of *Šumma ālu*.

Pairs of examples from Tablet V

> V 94: "If a house is situated on a height, that house will be torn down; alternatively, it will be laid waste."[20]
>
> V 95: "If a house is situated in a depression, the house will be inhabited; alternatively, it will endure."[21]
>
> V 66: "If a house's doors are high, that house will disappear."[22]
>
> V 67: "If a house's doors are low, that house will be inhabited."[23]
>
> V 89: "If a house prospers during construction, the owner of that house will not satisfy his desire."[24]
>
> V 90: "If a house is already too small during construction, the owner of that house will satisfy his desire."[25]
>
> V 22: "If the foundation of a house encroaches on to the street, the house will be abandoned and its owners will keep moving away."[26]
>
> V 23: "If the foundation of the house "recognizes" (the boundaries) the street, the owner of that house will be lucky; the house will last a long time."[27]

These omens are concerned with the building of a house. The first two pairs of omens in the examples above are an antithetical pair whose protases and apodoses are inversely related. The protases of the first pair repeat in a new context the inversion observed in the protases of the first two omens of Tablet I. The placement of a house on a height augurs its destruction. When placed in a low lying area, a house will fulfill the goals of its builders. The same distinction applies to the height of the doorways. The opposition of high and low by itself is unrevealing but, correlated with

20. DIŠ E_2 *ina mu-le-e* GAR E_2.BI *in-na-qar* KIMIN A.RI.A-*ub* (CT 38, 12:73).

21. DIŠ E_2 *ina muš-pa-li* GAR E_2.BI DUR_2-*ab* KIMIN SUMUN-*bar* (CT 38, 12:74).

22. DIŠ E_2 KA_2.MEŠ-$šu_2$ $ša_2$-*qu-*u_2 E_2.BI ZAḪ$_2$ (CT 38, 11:56).

23. DIŠ E_2 KA_2.MEŠ-$šu_2$ *ša-ap-lu* E_2.BI DUR_2.A (CT 38, 12:56).

24. DIŠ E_2 *ina* DU_3-*šu šu-šu-ur*$_2$ EN E_2 BI *la-la-*$šu_2$ *ul i-*[*še-eb-bi*] (cited from S. Moren's edition; cf. CT 38, 12:68).

25. DIŠ E_2 *ina* DU_3-*šu šu-um-ṭu*$_2$ EN E_2.BI *la-la-su*$_2$ *i-*[*še-eb-bi*] (CT 38, 12:69).

26. DIŠ $UŠ_8$ E_2 ina SILA *il-qe*$_2$ E_2.BI ŠUB-*ma* EN.ME-$šu_2$ *it-ta-nak-ki-ru* (CT 38, 10:22). For the translation "encroaches," see CAD L 135 s.v. *leqû*, "to take," in the sense of "to take from."

27. DIŠ $UŠ_8$ E_2 *ana* SILA u_2-*ad-di* EN E_2.BI DINGIR TUK-*ši* E_2.BI *ul-tab-bar* (CT 38, 10:23).

another similarly structured pair, a secondary level of contrast is exposed. What is the hidden feature that distinguishes apparently similar houses? Why does one house prosper and another perish?

The third set of omens from Tablet V (89-90), like the other two, is based on the opposition (*šūšur/šumṭu*[28]) and the reversal of expected polarity. It is in their deviation that we catch a glimpse of an underlying structure. In the fourth set of omens (V 22-23) a house that "encroaches on the street" contrasts with one that "recognizes its boundaries." This pair is not structurally related to others, but is the catalyst that brings the others into focus. The ominous features derive from the planning stages of construction. They pose an inverse relationship between initial conception and ultimate achievement: they comment on the risks of aiming too high. When outward extension becomes over-extension it achieves the reverse of what was intended. Plans that are grandiose or overreaching deplete resources.

The examples from Tablet V connect initial design to end result. Four omens from Tablet VI (Omens 3-5 and 9) contrast what is patent on the exterior with what is concealed behind:

VI 3: "If the structure of the house on the outside is alluring, it will not endure."[29]

VI 4: "If the structure of a house is unprepossessing, its inhabitant will be happy."[30]

VI 5: "If the structure of a house is somber, its inhabitant will be happy."[31]

VI 9: "If a house's awning (catches the light so that it) shines on the inside, its inhabitant will be happy."[32]

These examples from Tablet VI detail the ominous configurations of a finished house. The series begins with a sequence of signs derived from exterior features. The outside face does not present the truth of the situation. An unprepossessing house has a propitious future. A somber exterior protects and hides interior good fortune. The oppositional pairs of omens are based on the contrast between ostentation and modesty. A consistent pattern of benefic and malefic outcomes emerges from semantic contrasts.

The apparent discrepancy that connects "high" to a malefic prediction in Šumma *ālu* V 1 is resolvable in this context. The lexical set *elû* and *šaplu* that defines spatial relationships on a vertical axis, also expresses a contradiction between what is outwardly voiced and what is inwardly contained: "above with his lips he speaks friendly words, but below his heart is full of murder."[33] The opposition of above and below ("lips" and "heart") gives voice to the discrepancy that can exist between the face one shows to the world and the secrets one hides from it. This usage corresponds to the omens: both place the truth of the situation

28. The pair *šūšur/šumṭû* also occurs in opposition in a SB prayer to Marduk: "You cause the upright to prosper (*tušteššir*) and you put down (*tušamṭa*) the wicked" (AfO 19 [1959-60] 63:49).

29. DIŠ E_2 MIN(=*ši-kin-šu*$_2$) *ṣu-u*$_2$*-uḫ* E_2.BI *ul u*$_2$*-lab-bar* (B: *u*$_2$*-lab-bar*) (cited from S. Moren's edition, cf. CT 38, 14:3). The same sequence of verbs which describes the general nature or appearance of a house (CT 38, 14:1-7) also applies to its awning (CT 38, 14:19-24). Gadd's copy of VI 3, which is based on K2159+, does not preserve the negative element. The negative is preserved on K190+, and on both variants of VI 21: DIŠ E_2 MIN (= *ta-ra-an-šu*$_2$) *ṣu-u*$_2$*-uḫ* EN-*šu* NU LIBIR.RA.

30. DIŠ E_2 MIN(=*ši-kin-šu*$_2$) *na-a-aṣ* $ŠA_3$ DUR_2.BI DUG_3.GA (CT 38, 14:4). The meaning of this passage can be supplied by equation of *nâṣu* and *šâṭu* II. See CAD N/2 53 s.v. *nâṣu*, "to scorn," and AHw 3, 1205 s.v. *šâṭu* II.

31. DIŠ E_2 MIN(=*ši-kin-su*$_2$) *ṣil*$_2$*-la-ni* KI.MIN(=$ŠA_3$ DUR_2.BI DUG_3.GA) (CT 38, 14:5).

32. DIŠ E_2 *ta-ra-an-šu*$_2$ *ina* $ŠA_3$*-šu*$_2$ $ZALAG_2$*-ir* $ŠA_3$ DUR_2*-šu* DUG_3.GA (CT 38, 14:9).

33. *eliš ina šaptēšu itammâ ṭubbāti šaplānu libbašu kaṣir nīrtu* (Streck Asb 28 iii 80). See CAD E 97 s.v. *eliš*).

below the surface. The omens value concealment. Good fortune displayed on the surface impoverishes the interior. Aspirations that are hidden are more easily realized. In the context of Tablets V and VI the opposition "high"/"low" does not contrast objects in a vertical dimension, but rather turns on the distinction between appearance and reality and on the reversal of expectations. They pose an inverse relationship between the ostensible and what is hidden from view.

The omens in the second and third sets of examples from Tablet VI reverse the common metaphor which expresses happiness and unhappiness as a visual contrast between brightness and darkness. Light and dark exterior features are inversely related to the mood of the residents inside. The reversal of metaphor takes us back to the pair of omens that began the text of Tablet I: If a city is elevated, its people will be depressed; conversely if a city is placed in a depression, the mood of its inhabitants will be elevated.[34]

The rhetorical significance of the introduction might be lost were it not powerfully reinforced by four malefic omens that closely follow this initial pair:

> I 15: "If a city lifts its head to the midst of heaven (i.e., if a city towers to the sky), that city will be abandoned."[35]
>
> I 16: "If a city rises like a mountain peak to the midst of heaven, that city will be turned to a ruin.[36]
>
> I 17: "If cities go up like a cloud to heaven, cities will experience calamity."[37]
>
> I 18: "If cities' temples continually lift their heads to the heavens, the foundation of the land will not be secure, the throne will change and the land will be unhappy."[38]

The omens are cast in architectural images that valorize height—figures that come from the core of the literary reportoire.[39] As a group the omens connect the reversal of a city's fortunes to its architectural supremacy. By reversing the traditional expressions of aspiration and pride, they represent a divinatory utilization of the literary code. The omens evoke images not only of lofty cities, but also of towering ziggurats. The language of the omens looks back to Gudea, the Ensi of Girsu, the happy architect of the Eninnu Temple, a building auspicious in conception and surrounded by good omens through every stage of its construction: "They make the house grow up like a mountain, make it sail up like a cloud through the heavens. . . . In heaven and earth the house has raised its head to heaven like a mountain."[40] One is led perhaps to see the religious imagery as an explanation of the omen: a city which reaches for the preeminence reserved for sacred structures assures its own downfall. This reading however is undercut by what follows.

The apodoses of all four omens are the negation of what the protases assert. The first

34. The metaphoric conceptualization of mood as height is less common in Akkadian than the metaphorical structure based on luminosity. See *libbu šapālu*, AHw 3, 1169.

35. DIŠ URU SAG-*su ana* $ŠA_3$ AN-*e* IL_2 URU.BI ŠUB (CT 38, 1:15). For other citations of *rēša našû*, see CAD N/2 107-108 s.v. *našû*.

36. DIŠ URU GIM ŠU.SI KUR *ana* $ŠA_3$ AN-*e* IL_2 URU.BI *kar-meš im-me* (CT 38, 1:16). Unlike the previous omen, *našû* here is intransitive (cf. CAD N/2 103 s.v. *našû* 5).

37. DIŠ URU.MEŠ GIM IM.DIRI *ana* AN-*e* *il*[-*lu*-u_2] *di-bi-ri* IGI (CT 38, 1:17). For other citations, see CAD E 303 s.v. *erpetu*, "cloud."

38. DIŠ URU.MEŠ E_2.KUR.MEŠ SAG-*su-nu a-na* AN-*e* *it-ta-na-aš-ša-a* SUḪUŠ KUR NU GI.NA GIŠ.GU.ZA NIŠ-*ni* $ŠA_3$ KUR NU DUG_3.GA (CT 38, 1:18). The arrangement of omens 13-16 is based on logographic writings for parts of the body: 13: KA, 14:IGI.MEŠ; 15:SAG, 16:ŠU.SI.

39. See D.O. Edzard, "Deep-Rooted Skyscrapers and Bricks: Ancient Mesopotamian Architecture and Its Imagery," in M. Mindlin, *et. al.* (eds.), Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East (London, 1987) 15.

40. Line 19, e_2 ḫur-sag-gim im-mu-mu-ne; line 20, DUGUD-gim an-sa-ge im-mi-in-ib_2-diri-diri-ne; line 23, e_2-e ḫur-sag-gim an-ki-a sag an-$še_3$ mi-ni-ib_2-il_2 (Gudea Cyl. A xxi 19, 20, 23).

three employ a single opposition: rise and fall. The fourth omen, the culmination of the group, varies from the others. The protases introduces an additional component: it is not the cities themselves, but their temples, that rise to the heavens: "If cities' temples are persistently lifting their heads to the heavens . . . ." Of equal importance with its ascent to the sky is the foundation of the temple on earth. The architectural metaphors invoke the solidity of the temple's base as well as the soaring height of its summit.[41] Called dur.an.ki "the bond between heaven and earth" the temple forges a link between the two. The first part of the apodoses, "the foundation of the land will not be secure," is an astonishing subversion of this essential religious metaphor. The temple's height undermines the foundation of the land, the very thing it is supposed to assure. While temples are praised in figurative descriptions that stresses both verticality and stability,[42] the language of the omen, paradoxically turns the former against the latter. The second part of the apodoses, "the throne will change," contrasts throne to temple. The addition of the term "throne" as the second term of a second pair of oppositions enlarges and contains the paradox. The height of the temple is set in opposition to the security of the throne. In this light, the first part of the apodoses appears now to refer to political instability.

As these limited examples demonstrate, the scribes used a variety of rhetorical inversions as devices to express different levels of divinatory meaning. Recognition that these devices exist allows the modern reader to isolate and and identify them.

41. Edzard, in Figurative Language 15.

42. Edzard, in Figurative Language 15.