

THE BABYLONIAN PROPHECIES AND THE ASTROLOGICAL TRADITIONS OF MESOPOTAMIA

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Although several literary compositions in Akkadian have been recognized as prophecy texts for quite some time, the origins and historical relevance of the genre are uncertain.¹

It has long been recognized that the predictions in the prophecy texts are couched in the phraseology of omen apodoses. Granted that there are similarities, it should be of interest to see where the literary parallels to the prophecy predictions lie, but so far no one has attempted to determine where within the vast Mesopotamian omen corpus the closest parallels are to be found.

The corpus of texts generally recognized as prophecies is a rather small one, and most of the texts can be identified by a brief descriptive designation such as "The Uruk Prophecy,"² "The Dynastic Prophecy,"³ "The Marduk Prophecy," or "The Šulgi Prophecy."⁴ The only other undisputed prophecy text, KAR 421, has been known as Prophecy Text A ever since the edition by A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert in 1964.⁵

1. The substance of this paper was read at the Rencontre Assyriologique in Leningrad in July 1984.

The designation "prophecy text" as applied to Babylonian literary works is strictly a modern one. We have no idea what designation (or designations) the Babylonian scholars would have given to these texts. Among the many text titles and designations for types of texts (see S. Parpola, "Assyrian Library Records," JNES 42 [1983] 1-29) none seems likely to have included the prophecy texts. We know that the Marduk Prophecy preceded the Šulgi Prophecy in a sequence recognized by the scholars of Assurbanipal's library since the Marduk Prophecy gives *anāku Šulgi* as the catchline for the next tablet, but there is no indication that they were considered a subseries within a larger series identifiable as prophecies.

2. Published by H. Hunger, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk*, 1 (Berlin, 1976) no. 3; see also H. Hunger and Stephen A. Kaufman, "A New Akkadian Prophecy Text," JAOS 95 (1975) 371-75.

3. Published by A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto and Buffalo, 1975), pp. 24-37.

4. Published by R. Borger, "Gott Marduk und Gott-König Šulgi als Propheten: Zwei prophetische Texte," BiOr 28 (1971) 3-24.

5. A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert, "Akkadian Prophecies," JCS 18 (1964) 7-30. Additional sources for their Text B have astrological protases, suggesting that it be excluded from the corpus of prophecies. However, the length of the major long prediction which runs to some 24 lines is without parallel in any omen text, and furthermore appears not to be associated with any omen protasis. Because of its special character, I prefer not to exclude it categorically from consideration within the context of Babylonian prophecies. It is, in any

In a recent paper that has not yet appeared⁶ I point out that the phraseology of the predictions in Prophecy Text A is largely that of astrological omens and not that of liver omens or any other omen genre. In a number of instances a phrase is known only from Prophecy Text A and astrological omens; in other instances the occurrences are overwhelmingly to be found in astrological omens. Many predictions in the Marduk and Šulgi prophecies, as well as in the Uruk Prophecy, likewise have exact parallels in the astrological corpus.

A few examples should suffice here. In Text A we read (ii 5) GIŠ.NÍG.BAR *bilassa šer-u bilassa ut[tar]*, “the date palm(??) will increase its yield, the furrow its yield.” Predictions about the yield of furrows are very common in astrological texts although they occur in other omens as well, but phrases with GIŠ.NÍG.BAR are found outside Text A only in astrology.⁷ The topos of troubles and difficulties (*ešātu*, *dalhātu*, line ii 13) occurring or clearing up is attested a number of times in astrological texts but in no other omens. The prediction of canals filling with silt (line ii 21), which also occurs in the Uruk Prophecy, is frequent in astrological texts but is not attested in any other genre of omens. The topos of good or bad winds blowing (line iii 5) is attested a number of times in astrology but not in other genres. The phrase with *dīš kušši*, “winter grass” (line iii 7), which also occurs (written Ū.BAR) in the Marduk Prophecy, is attested quite frequently in astrology but not at all in other omen texts. The phrase in line iv 17 *ummu itti mārtiša kittu itammi*, “a mother will speak truth with her daughter,” seems unattested elsewhere, but is apparently modeled on the phrase *māru itti abišu kittu itammi*, “a son will speak truth with his father,” which is usually preceded by the phrase “there will be justice in the land.” This phrase is not found in any omens except the astrological corpus. There are several other phrases from Prophecy Text A which are common in astrological omens but rare in other genres. If Text A were better preserved, one would no doubt find a number of other specific parallels between the prophecy predictions and the apodoses of astrological omens.

case, so rich in typical prophecy topoi—such as famine when mothers bar their doors to their own daughters, friends and relatives killing one another, the re-establishment of regular offerings that had ceased, etc.—that it aids in restoring broken passages in the unquestioned prophecy texts. Grayson and Lambert’s Texts C and D have been incorporated by R. Borger into his editions of the Šulgi and Marduk prophecies.

6. R. D. Biggs, “Babylonian Prophecies, Astrology, and a New Source for ‘Prophecy Text B,’” in Francesca Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner* (in press).

7. ACh Adad 4 i 11, 21:5 and 7.

Since many geographical names appear in the prophecy texts, it should also be of interest to examine these names within the context of geographical names occurring in the omen corpus as a whole. First of all, however, it should be mentioned that there are notable differences between the various prophecy texts. Text A, the Uruk Prophecy, and the Dynastic Prophecy all refer to Babylonia as Akkad; the Marduk and Šulgi Prophecies, on the other hand, do not mention Akkad at all, and have instead numerous references to Babylon (KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI). Babylon is referred to in the Uruk Prophecy as ŠU.AN.NA.KI and in the Dynastic Prophecy as DIN.TIR.KI. Assur occurs in the Marduk and Šulgi Prophecies and in the Dynastic Prophecy, but not in the others.

While I have not examined every single published omen text, I have gone through a high proportion of them, and several patterns emerge. Except in the well-known phrase with *amūtu*, such as *amūt Ibbi-Sin . . .*, “omen of Ibbi-Sin . . .,” in which a geographical name usually occurs, relatively few specific geographical or ethnic names occur in the Old Babylonian extispicy corpus. The predictions tend to be less specific; thus one finds *tibūt nakrim*, “attack by an enemy,” instead of a specific enemy being mentioned. In the Old Babylonian corpus there are two occurrences of *šēp Elamtim*, literally “foot of Elam,”⁸ two occurrences of *tibūt Elamtim*, “attack by Elam,”⁹ one reference to Šubarū: *tibūt Šu-ba-ri-[im]*,¹⁰ four occurrences of *Ummān-ba-da*, published in transliteration only, perhaps for *Ummān-manda*.¹¹ The huge corpus of Standard Babylonian extispicy texts likewise yields only a small number of occurrences. I counted nine examples with Elam, five of them in a single text, three examples of Amurru, one example of Akkad, one of Subartu, but none at all of Gutī or Ummān-manda. In Old Babylonian Šumma Izbu the only geographical name is a reference to the king of Sumer (LUGAL Šu-mi-ri-im).¹² In Standard Babylonian Izbu there are three occurrences of Akkad, three of Elam, and two of Amurru. Nippur occurs once in an esoteric writing which is explained in the commentary as *Ni-ip-pu-rum*.¹³ There are no occurrences in the Izbu text from Susa published by R. Labat, but in the

8. YOS 10 20 r. 22 and 50/51:3.

9. YOS 10 20 r. 25, RA 65 (1971) 71:10.

10. RA 44 (1950) 12:5.

11. RA 44 (1950) 16:5-8. For discussion of the Ummān-manda in omen texts, see G. Komoróczy, “Ummān-manda,” *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 25 (1977) 43-67, especially pp. 55-59.

12. Leichty Izbu p. 206:42.

13. Tablet IV 38.

extispicy texts there are three occurrences of Elam and one of Amurru. There are no geographical names at all in the oil omens or the smoke omens.

In some unpublished Old Babylonian astrological texts—which I know of through the courtesy of Francesca Rochberg-Halton—there are a number of mentions of Šubarū, Akkad, Amurru, Elam, and Gutī, but the city of Uruk also occurs. In the case of the later astrological texts—and here I have considered that the seven volumes of texts published by Virolleaud and the volume of reports published by Campbell Thompson form an adequate sample—the picture is quite different than in other omen genres. Particularly because of the association of the quadrants of the moon with the cardinal directions, one expects frequent mention of Elam, Akkad, Amurru, and Subartu (also associated sometimes with Gutī). This is indeed the case, and they occur in innumerable predictions throughout *Enūma Anu Enlil* and not merely in the lunar omens, but in the solar omens, the planetary omens, and the meteorological omens as well. I have made no attempt to break down the examples by which specific tablets of the astrological series they belong to. It may be of interest to note, however, that in the Venus Tablet of Ammišaduqa there is a single occurrence of the phrase “destruction by the Ummān-manda” but no geographical name or other ethnic designation occurs.

The astrological texts include a large number of specific cities, ethnic groups, rivers, and sanctuaries, sometimes associated with specific constellations.¹⁴ There is in fact a considerable congruence between the names attested in both the prophecy texts and in the astrological omens; the overlap would without doubt be still more extensive if the prophecy texts were better preserved. Nippur, for example, occurs in all the prophecy texts except the Uruk Prophecy and is found in a number of astrological texts as well. The Tigris and Euphrates occur frequently in astrological texts but also occur in the Šulgi Prophecy. Hatti occurs in the Marduk Prophecy and in astrology as well, and Sippar likewise. Ur occurs in the Šulgi Prophecy and also in astrology; in fact, the temple *Ē-giš-nu_x-gál* in Ur occurs more than once in the Marduk Prophecy and is also to be found in astrological texts. On the other hand, there are several geographical names found in the prophecy texts which apparently do not occur in the astrological omens: Tupliaš in Prophecy Text A, Girsu, Lagaš, and Isin in the Šulgi Prophecy.

14. See especially E. Weidner, “Astrologische Geographie im Alten Orient,” *AfO* 20 (1963) 117-21.

The features shared by the prophecy texts and by astrological omen texts—particularly the predictions not found in other omen genres and the concern with specific cities, rivers, sanctuaries, and ethnic groups—suggest a literary relationship between the two genres. It would be easy to suggest that the writers of the prophecy texts borrowed from the astrological corpus, but with the early textual history of the astrological omens not much more secure than that of the prophecy texts, this would be difficult to maintain. If that is not the case, there is still the possibility that both derive from some other source that is lost to us.

In any case, the correspondences between the prophecies and the astrological corpus—especially the *topoi* and phrases that are unique to the two genres and the geographical concerns of both genres—suggest that the literary associations of the prophecy predictions are with the astrological corpus and not with any other genre of Mesopotamian omens.