

Oral and Written in Sumerian Literature

Sam Mirelman

SOAS, University of London, sm106@soas.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2605-2170>

DOI: [10.56004/v3.2sm](https://doi.org/10.56004/v3.2sm)



Published under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license.

Abstract: This article seeks to demonstrate that Sumerian literary texts, including ‘curricular’, liturgical and incantation texts, were usually recited and written from memory in pedagogic contexts. This feature of Mesopotamian scribal culture is suggested by various forms of evidence, including especially the abbreviation of texts in manuscripts from all periods.

Keywords: Orality, memorisation, Sumerian

Introduction

Orality is a topic which has attracted numerous studies and debates. The following approaches the topic from a specific perspective. I am not attempting here to deal with orality in Sumerian or Mesopotamian literature, in general. For example, the question whether ancient poetic texts were composed orally or in writing is not the focus of the following contribution.¹ Similarly, the question whether Sumerian literature belonging to ‘the curriculum’ was performed in antiquity, in musical and/or dramatic contexts, is not debated here.² Instead, this study is focused on the transmission of Sumerian

¹ On this topic see for example Vogelzang and Vanstiphout (1992), with earlier literature. There has been much discussion of the references to the creation of ‘literary’ texts within the texts themselves. In some of these instances oral primacy is suggested, but in other examples the ‘literary’ texts suggest that ancient compositions were created and/or recorded in writing (Metcalf 2015: 143–6). See also most recently Zgoll (2022), who emphasises the oral primacy of Mesopotamian ‘literary’ creation. On this topic see also Jáka-Sövegjártó (2020), who argues that references to the role of scribes in Sumerian literature may not reflect the original context in which such compositions were produced, but instead the Old Babylonian scholarly environment in which the compositions were transmitted and possibly redacted.

² Sumerian literature is often divided into texts belonging to the ‘curriculum’ and those belonging to ‘praxis’, including liturgical compositions and incantations (Tinney 2011). However, this division is challenged here. For arguments supporting the idea that ‘curricular’ Sumerian texts were indeed performed, see e.g. Maiwald (2021), and the review

‘literary’ texts within contexts which we assume to have been pedagogic, but may also have been performative. It argues for the existence of fixed compositions,³ which were transmitted orally, but which also utilised writing. This assumes the existence of a culture dominated by the practices of memorisation and verbatim repetition. Importantly, it also assumes that reading and writing in such pedagogic contexts involved recitation, and was thus ‘performative’.⁴ In this environment, it is proposed that writing was used as an *aide-mémoire*, but also as a means of ensuring, or attempting to ensure, consistency and uniformity in recitation.⁵ Writing may also have been used in such contexts as a pedagogic aid, and a means of practicing or ‘rehearsing’ compositions for recital within the context of memorisation, but also perhaps for formal performances. The principal question which is addressed below is whether, and to what extent, writing was utilised as a means of fully or only partially representing a memorised composition, which was recited in pedagogic contexts. The principal evidence which allows us to answer this question lies in the numerous examples of abbreviation in manuscripts from all periods. Indeed, Mesopotamian cuneiform texts are privileged with regard to such questions and debates, due to the fact that the omission of particles, words or even multiple lines is evident by comparison with parallel manuscripts, or in some cases by scribal annotations which make such abbreviations explicit. Indeed, the representation of Sumerian compositions in text employed varying degrees of abbreviation and/or omission, many aspects of which we are able to reconstruct and analyse.

The corpus of Sumerian ‘literature’

The term ‘literature’ is used to refer to a variety of textual genres, both in general and within Ancient Near Eastern Studies. The term here refers to narratives, hymns, prayers and incantations.⁶ Much of our knowledge of Sumerian literature, especially for the Old Babylonian period (2000–1600 BC), is known from cuneiform tablets written by advanced

of Maiwald 2021 in Mirelman (2020b); for a more sceptical review of this approach see Wasserman (2023). For the interpretation of a Sumerian literary composition as a theatrical work see also Wilcke (2012), but note the sceptical review of Kleinerman (2016). The following study is not concerned with the liturgical corpus, for which the evidence of ancient performance is abundant (Mirelman 2024, with earlier literature).

³ ‘Fixed composition’ here refers to the idea of a composition being fixed for a particular place and time, as opposed to the notion that a composition could be composed or improvised in performance. The term ‘fixed composition’ is not intended to imply that compositions did not change over time, or that they could not exist in more than one version at the same time.

⁴ See below for the debate whether silent reading existed in ancient Mesopotamia.

⁵ The use of writing in such an oral or ‘performative’ context is not a characteristic of all Mesopotamian written culture. Indeed, it can be demonstrated that the scholarly context of writing, even for texts which we know were performed, was also important. On this question of the performative versus scholarly contexts of writing in the case of Mesopotamian incantations see Mirelman (2018).

⁶ Thus, the division which is often made in modern scholarship, between ‘curricular’ versus performative or ‘praxis’ texts, is not followed here. Within Ancient Near Eastern Studies ‘literature’ is also sometimes used to refer to all

apprentice scribes. This clear pedagogic setting is often placed in opposition to the corpus of Sumerian compositions which we know to have been regularly performed in a ritual context in antiquity. The most important ‘performative’ genres in question are liturgical prayers and incantations. The term ‘liturgical’ is used here to refer to Sumerian prayers which we know to have been performed in regular Babylonian temple rituals, at least in the first millennium BC but probably also earlier. Sumerian liturgical prayers were written in a register of Sumerian known as *Emesal*. The prayers were performed by a priest known in Sumerian as the *gala* and in Akkadian as the *kalû*. The content of the prayers is generally concerned with the hypothetical destruction of cities and temples. According to descriptions in Mesopotamian mythology together with other evidence, such prayers functioned as a means of pacifying the deity. In the case of Sumerian liturgical prayers we have explicit evidence to show that they were not only recited, but sung together with musical instruments.⁷ Incantations were usually performed by a priest who has often been described in modern scholarship as an ‘exorcist’. Incantations were recited in specific ritual contexts, and they were usually conceived as a means of purifying places and objects, and dispelling demons.⁸

In modern scholarship, the clearly ‘performative’ genres of liturgical prayers and incantations are often contrasted with Sumerian ‘literature’, for which clear evidence of a performative context is lacking (e.g. [Tinney 2011](#)). It is important to note that the distinction between ‘literature(-like)’ and ‘liturgical’ is a matter of available evidence. It is likely that many works of Sumerian literature were indeed performed in temple liturgies, although we are lacking explicit evidence.⁹ The approach followed here is that most if not all Sumerian literature was ‘performed’, in the sense that it was spoken, recited or sung out loud, either in the context of a classroom and/or a ritual context.

In general, most of our knowledge of Sumerian literature dates to the Old Babylonian period. It is important to note that Sumerian died out as an every day language at some time around 2000 BC, but it remained as an important language of scholarship and liturgy until the late first millennium BC. Indeed, the liturgical and incantation literature continues to be transmitted into the late first millennium BC, in Sumerian but also generally including interlinear Akkadian translations. Earlier corpora are also known from the Early Dynastic III period, (ca. 2600–2340 BC) and the later third millennium. The existence of

texts which were copied, for pedagogic and/or scholarly purposes. This could also include lexical texts, divination and various other genres. For an overview of Sumerian literature see [Rubio \(2009\)](#).

⁷ This is certain at least for the first millennium BC, although the designation ‘liturgical’ is also used to refer to prayers of the same type from the second millennium BC, a period during which we have limited explicit evidence concerning the performance of such prayers in temple rituals. Sumerian liturgical prayers have received recent detailed studies by [Gabbay 2014a](#) for the first millennium BC, and by [Delnero \(2020\)](#) for the Old Babylonian period.

⁸ For an introduction to Mesopotamian magic and incantations see [Schwemer \(2011\)](#).

⁹ See references in n. 2.

Sumerian ‘literature’ before the Early Dynastic III period, known as the ‘Archaic’ period, is disputed. Writing was invented in the city of Uruk in southern Iraq during the late fourth millennium BC, mostly for writing administrative and lexical texts. However, there are a few possible examples of narrative dating to the Archaic period, which will be discussed below. The cuneiform script was in use for approximately three millennia, during which it developed in various contrasting ways. The nature of orality and its relationship to the texts also changed, both in terms of historical period, and in terms of the genre of text in question. The following will focus on the question of the oral and written with reference to these various periods and the important changes and developments which took place.¹⁰

The ‘lecto-oral’ model of writing, reading and performance

The model of writing and its relationship to performance followed in this study relies on the work of Jack Goody. Goody demonstrated that it is in fact literate cultures that are characterised by verbatim memorisation and repetition, particularly in the context of religious texts. Purely oral cultures may claim to practice verbatim memorisation, but this may not be the case as shown by the observation of ethnographers. Verbatim memorisation requires the use of written texts to maintain the correct rendering of a composition through time. What Goody calls the ‘lecto-oral’ refers to this realm of orality which is dependent on a written text (Goody 2010: 153–61). ‘Performance’ in this context refers not only to singing, but also to reading. If we accept the notion that reading in antiquity was mostly not silent but ‘out loud’, the simple reading of a text in a scholastic context may be considered here as a ‘performance’.¹¹ Reading, and recitation or singing, in such a context does not necessarily imply full comprehension of the text. Indeed, various ethnographic examples from around the world, including the recitation of the Koran, demonstrate the phenomenon of ‘phonetic literacy’ as opposed to ‘comprehension literacy’. ‘Phonetic literacy’ is especially characteristic of pedagogic contexts in which religious texts are taught, with the aid of both a teacher and a written text. Mesopotamia was a society characterised by highly restricted literacy, at least in the case of the

¹⁰ I have already discussed the topic of the following section of the article in detail in Mirelman (2020c). In order to avoid repeating myself, most of the arguments are summarised here. For further information and for full references please see this article.

¹¹ Most of the evidence points towards reading aloud in ancient Mesopotamia as the usual practice (Grayson 2000). However, there are a few possible suggestions that silent reading may have also been practiced in some instances (Chapin 2010: 41–2). Worthington (2012: 290, with n. 945) is critical of the view that reading aloud was the most common practice in Antiquity. However, this critical approach is based on recent studies of the topic concerning Classical sources, as opposed to the Mesopotamian material.

transmission of literature.¹² The function and role of writing in such an early society is in many ways distant from the practice of reading and writing in contemporary Western culture. To 'read' literature in ancient Mesopotamia, as in certain religious contexts today, did not mean to read freely, but to recite a text which had already been memorised and internalised, with the help of a written text which served as a mnemonic aid (Goody 2010: 159). A comparison between ancient Mesopotamia and the contemporary recitation of the Vedas in Hinduism is possible. In the recitation of the Vedas written texts may be used, but the priest's recitation from memory is considered as authoritative, and a student would not learn a composition from the written text alone. Thus, the written text fulfills a role, but the master's oral teachings are the ultimate authority (Fuller 2001). Oral recitation is also closely associated with writing in Classical Greece (Thomas 1992: 88–93) and ancient Egypt (Eyre and Baines 1989: 94–5). In such cultures to 'read' a text probably meant to read a text which one already knows. This at least seems to be the case with regard to texts belonging to a pedagogic or cultic context.¹³

Various features of Mesopotamian scribal culture suggest that scribes routinely recited and wrote texts either in succession or simultaneously. The verbs which may be understood as 'to read' in Akkadian coincide with verbs for speaking, suggesting the absence of a conceptual distinction between reading and speaking in ancient Mesopotamia (Beaulieu 1992: 103–5). There are various indications in different genres and periods which suggest that text, or knowledge more broadly, was usually taught orally by a master, but with the aid of writing. The Old Babylonian school dialogues typically describe the environment where apprentice scribes learned, in which not only writing but also recitation played a central role. This feature is demonstrated by the often repeated image in such dialogues, of the hand and mouth remaining synchronised. According to one such dialogue a good scribe's hand and mouth keep up with each other, whereas a bad scribe's hand does not keep up with his mouth. This clearly suggests that scribes recited texts while they wrote them, which would fit a context in which such scribes wrote from memory.¹⁴ The Sumerian verbs 'to recite' (*šid*) and 'to write' (*sar*) are used together in various Old Babylonian examples of literature concerning schooling and schools, suggesting that both writing and reciting were essential parts of scribal education. Indeed, one may argue that writing and reciting,

¹² However, in certain periods and contexts it may be argued that literacy applied to a wider segment of society than has been traditionally assumed (Charpin 2010: 53–65).

¹³ Thus, it excludes texts produced for administrative purposes.

¹⁴ 'Your hand cannot keep up with your mouth' (*šu-zu ka-zu nu-ub-da-sa₂*). Sjöberg (1975: 170–71) considers this feature to be evidence of dictation. However, I consider it to be a feature of memorisation and recitation, most likely at the same time. At least in the case of Dialogue 1, 'your hand' (*šu-zu*) and 'your mouth' (*ka-zu*) is attested in three different manuscripts, and it is not contradicted by other manuscript(s) (Johnson and Geller 2015: 162 ('47'); Matuszak 2019: 16; <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager> (Dialogue 1, accessed 8 September 2026); see also Sjöberg 1970: 84 for attestations of this line in other texts). This probably suggests that an ideal scribe, at least in the case of Old Babylonian advanced education, was expected to write at the same time as he recites a given text.

most likely from memory, were considered as inseparable activities in early Mesopotamia (Delnero 2006: 73–81; Johnson and Geller 2015: 26–9). An oral study environment which features recitation is also characteristic for the transmission of commentaries in the first millennium BC, where the written texts are the products of oral dialogues between scholars and students (Gabbay 2016: 13–83).

The Archaic period (ca. 3400–2900 BC)

The invention of cuneiform writing in the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk was preceded by several stages, at least according to some scholars. From ca. 8500 BC simple clay tokens were used to record deliveries of goods. This was followed by the use of clay envelopes for documenting transactions, which was then followed by numerical tablets. The earliest phase of cuneiform writing, known as proto-cuneiform, is conventionally dated to ca. 3400 BC. Proto-cuneiform employed a repertory of hundreds of logographic signs together with numerals (Englund 2009; Woods 2020). Thus, the earliest form of cuneiform writing was probably conceived as an extension of the simple means of recording economic transactions with clay tokens. Since this earliest stage of cuneiform writing is almost entirely logographic, it may represent the most extreme example of the use of writing as a mnemonic device. It can be argued to what extent if at all this form of writing represents spoken language. If it does indeed represent language, it has also been disputed whether it was Sumerian or another language.¹⁵ If we understand writing during this period as a representation of spoken language, and if we assume as discussed above that texts were generally read out loud, it is clear that the writing system provides only a skeleton outline of the text which it is intended to represent.

Archaic cuneiform texts are mostly administrative and lexical in content. The administrative texts document economic transactions. They are written in a highly abbreviated, telegraphic manner, consisting mostly of nouns, together with numbers indicating quantities. The lexical texts are a typically Mesopotamian text genre consisting of lists of words and phrases. Examples from the archaic period include the lists of places, animals, plants and persons. The composition known as AD-GI₄, which dates to the Uruk III period (ca. 3200–2900 BC) is an extraordinary text within the archaic corpus, as it does not conform to what is expected of either an administrative or a lexical text (Fig. 1). The text is known from the Archaic period, but it was also copied in succeeding eras, up until the Old Babylonian period. It has been claimed by several scholars that it is a literary text, although

¹⁵ The majority of scholars today consider proto-cuneiform script to represent Sumerian, based on some examples of phonetic writing in the corpus (Woods 2020: 43).

this characterisation has not been universally accepted.¹⁶ An important contribution to the understanding of this text has been made by Miguel Civil, who demonstrated that it may form a narrative only if the reader completes the information which is omitted from the text but was known to the scribes in antiquity. The text itself consists mostly of nouns, together with only a few grammatical elements. Verbs, and the predicate of each sentence, are omitted in writing. The following is an extract from AD-GI₄. The text itself is given on the left side. On the right side is the reconstruction of the passage by Civil (2013: 20–1):

Enmekar,	Enmerkar and (his) wife
Enmekar-zi,	Enmerkar-zi, who knows (how
town-knowing-wife	to build) towns, (made) bricks
brickwork	and brick pavements. When
brick pavement	the yearly flood reached its
the riverbed back to banks	proper level, (they made)
irrigation ditches	irrigation canals, and all kinds
all the irrigation ditches	of irrigation ditches. They
trees	made plows and yokes [?] (out
the plow, yoke/team	of) timber, cables (out of)
reeds	reeds, threshing sledges (out
cut reed ropes	of) rushes, (and) ropes (out of)
rushes, threshing sledge	sedges.
sedges	
sedge ropes	

If Civil's understanding of AD-GI₄ above is correct, the attempt to write narrative in the Archaic period was a first, exploratory attempt at 'literature'. As shown by the copies of AD-GI₄ from the later third millennium and Old Babylonian period, the scribes of these later periods no longer fully understood the text. For this reason, in such later copies glosses, and attempts to complete the predicate of sentences were made (Civil 2013: 51). Only a handful of further possible examples of 'literature' dating to before the Early Dynastic III period are known (Wilcke 1995; Krebernik et al. 2014: 354–5, no. 22; Lecompte and Benati 2017: 23–4; Lecompte 2020). In all such possible cases, important prefixes and suffixes which are usually included in later Sumerian are usually omitted, making the comprehension of the text a challenge.

¹⁶ For example, Steinkeller (2017: 50) has suggested that this text functioned as an administrative manual. For an edition of the text see Civil (2013), with earlier literature. Note the new Old Babylonian fragment of this composition, identified after Civil's publication, for which see Wagensohnner (2019); Gadotti and Kleinerman (2021: 176, no. 476). A further possible newly identified manuscript is discussed in Kelley (2021). For online transliteration and images of the tablets see <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus> under 'Archaic Word List C'. (Accessed 14 September 2026.)

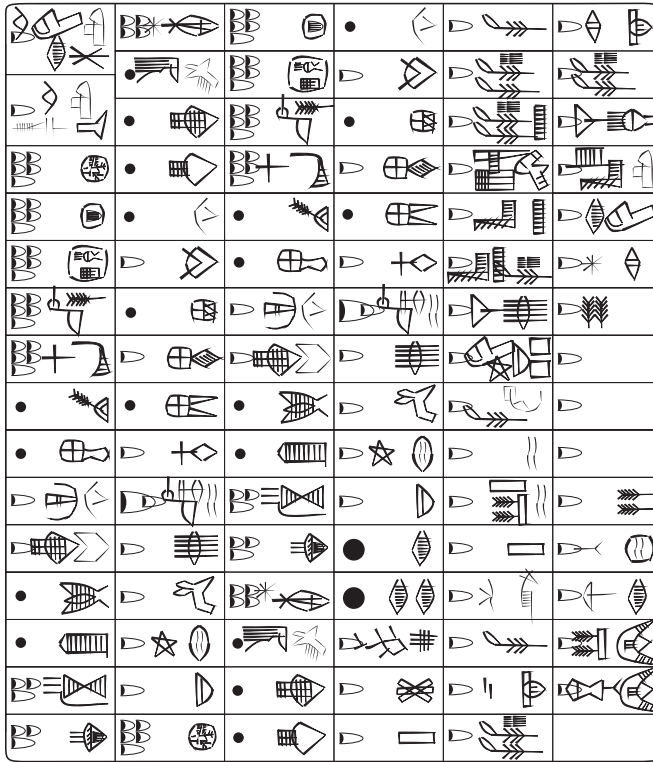


Fig. 1: Composite text of AD-GI₄ (from Englund 1998: 100, fig. 30). Licensed under CC-BY 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Proto-cuneiform_Tribute_list.svg.

The Early Dynastic III period (ca. 2600–2350 BC)

In the Early Dynastic III period the first undisputed works of Sumerian literature were documented.¹⁷ By this time the cuneiform script and writing had evolved to some extent. Syllabic writings began to be used more consistently, helping modern scholars in their decipherment. Fully comprehensible narratives began to be written. However, texts from this period frequently still omit important bound morphemes, and even predictable words.¹⁸ Taking one simple example, the following Early Dynastic III writing

¹⁷ A couple of other possible examples of cuneiform literature pre-dating Early Dynastic III have also been proposed (Krebernik and Lisman 2020: 16).

¹⁸ On this characteristic in Early Dynastic literary texts see Krebernik (1998: 317).

may be compared to how it would have been written in later Sumerian. The grammatical elements which are omitted in writing are included in brackets.¹⁹

^den-ki isimud gu₃ de₂
^{*d}en-ki-(ke₄) (^d)isimud-(ra) gu₃ (mu-un-na)-de₂-(e)

Enki was calling/will call Isimud

Sumerian gu₃ ‘voice’ and de₂ ‘to pour’ together form a compound verb ‘to call’. However, nothing else is indicated in writing, apart from the two divine names Enki and Isimud, who was Enki’s vizier. The omitted grammatical elements mark the genitive suffix (/ak/), the ergative suffix (/e/), the dative suffix (/ra/), the ventive prefix (/mu/), the dative infix (/nna/) and the 3rd person imperfective agent suffix (/e/). Thus, the text itself only indicates the bare essentials, leading to the conclusion that the composition was transmitted orally but with the aid of a written text. Not only were grammatical prefixes and suffixes omitted in this period, but sometimes also predictable words. For example, in one corpus dating to the Early Dynastic III period named the *Zame* (or *Zamim*) hymns, the subscript formula which occurs throughout can only make sense as an elliptical form. The formula consists of a divine name followed by za₃-mim ‘praise’, but omitting mu-DU₁₁ ‘he/she said’ (to Enlil).²⁰

The Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 BC)

Around 2000 BC, Sumerian died out as an every day language, but it continued to be used in contexts of scholarship and liturgy until the late first millennium BC.²¹ Despite this feature of Sumerian in general, the majority of Sumerian compositions are known from the Old Babylonian period. Thus, most of our knowledge of Sumerian literature is known from documents which were written by scribes for whom Sumerian was not a mother tongue, but instead a long dead but revered language. By the Old Babylonian period Sumerian literature began to include the full extent of Sumerian grammatical morphemes. However, since Sumerian was by this stage a language only of scholarship and liturgy, the scribes did not possess a native understanding of Sumerian in all its complexity.

¹⁹ This is the example used to illustrate the characteristic omissions of Early Dynastic III writing, by Civil and Biggs (1966: 12–13).

²⁰ Krebernik and Lisman (2020: 13–14). U. Gabbay (personal communication) also suggests that such subscripts do not necessarily represent linguistic utterances, but should instead be understood simply as labels.

²¹ Some scholars consider Sumerian to have died out either soon before or soon after 2000 BC. See Rubio (2009: 11) with earlier literature.

Not only are our sources for Sumerian literature written by non-native speakers, they were also mostly written by apprentice scribes. This is a well established phenomenon, as shown by the archaeological discovery of ‘schools’ at Old Babylonian Nippur, in which certain works of literature were found copied onto multiple tablets in the same site. The writing of such works of Sumerian literature belonged to the most advanced stage of scribal training, in which master teachers would teach Sumerian literature to Akkadian-speaking apprentice scribes. The curriculum included elementary exercises, and advanced lexical texts. The lexical texts were mostly monolingual in this period, although the Akkadian component in many lexical lists must have been supplied orally by the master teacher (Veldhuis 1997: 131–5; 1998: 208–10; 2010: 387–8). Thus, the written remains available to us most probably functioned within an oral environment, only partially preserving what was actually taught in Old Babylonian schools.

It remains an open but important question whether such Sumerian compositions were written from physical copying of other tablets, from dictation or from memory. The distinctions between the manuscripts feature minor orthographic differences, but also omissions, additions and phonetic substitution amongst other features. These characteristics have led Delnero (Delnero 2012a; 2012b: 199–207) to consider such manuscripts to most likely have been written from memory.²² If Delnero’s model is indeed correct, the types of variants and errors made by apprentice scribes suggest that many, if not the majority, of such manuscripts were written from memory. Since oral recitation is a well known technique in memorisation (Goody 2010: 153–161), it is likely that such apprentice scribes read out the text to themselves whilst writing it. This conclusion leads us to the approach taken in this article, namely that all literature was ‘performed’ in antiquity, whether in the classroom and/or in ritual contexts.

As stated above, a delineation is often made in modern scholarship, between Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts produced in a pedagogic context versus a performative context (e.g. Tinney 2011). For the Old Babylonian period, a so-called pedagogic context is shown by the production of multiple copies with only minor variations. A performative context, which is typical of the liturgical corpus, is characterised by the existence of usually only one copy of a composition, and a high degree of variability between manuscripts in cases where (near-)duplicates are known. A performative context may also be demonstrated by internal features such as the use of syllabic orthography, where the Sumerian text is written using a simplified phonetic representation of the text, suggesting that it was written and read as a means of ‘rehearsal’. Examples include writings such as *ši-im* for *šim* or *su-ku-da* for *sukud-da*, and sandhi writings such as *ga-ša-be₂* for *ga-ša-an-be₂* (Delnero 2015: 113). A performative context is also suggested by the use

²² This does not mean that all manuscripts were written from memory. There is also evidence for the visual copying of manuscripts, as shown for example, by the copying of visually similar signs (Delnero 2012b: 51–2).

of abbreviation in manuscripts (tablets), as shown by the omission of predictable words and/or lines, or the indication of only the beginnings of lines, assuming the reader is able to fill in the missing components. Often a blank space on the tablet represents the omitted text (Delnero 2015, 2017, 2020, 2021). In one example amongst many from the liturgical corpus, the scribe only wrote the first words of each line, leaving the rest of the tablet empty. In addition, the scribe utilised syllabic orthography, further supporting the interpretation of a performative context. In the following translation of an opening excerpt, the reconstructed elements which are represented by blank space on the tablet, are indicated by brackets:²³

u₃ ga-am-du (u₃ ga-am-du)
 <na-aĝ₂>-ĝe₆ <e₂>-ĝu₁₀-še₃¹ (u₃ ga-am-du)
 <lu₂>?-a-ĝu₁₀-<a> (i-bi₂ bar-ra me-en)

I want to say, Woe! (I want to say, Woe!)
 On account of my house (I want to say, Woe!)
 (It is me who looks after) my things

The omission of predictable elements is characteristic of Sumerian literature in this period, particularly in the so-called performative corpus, but also elsewhere. For example, in the following hymn to the deity Baba lines 5–8 are an almost exact copy of lines 1–4. The second half of each line is graphically separated from the first half. In lines 1–4 the second half of each line is written out in full. In lines 5–8 the second half of each line is omitted, but marked by an empty space on the tablet. In the following transliteration and translation the reconstructed lines are indicated by brackets. An attempt is made below to represent the graphic separation of each half-line, and the poetic structure of quatrains:²⁴

1. nin-ĝu ₁₀ sa ₆ -ga	dumu an ku ₃ -ga
2. hi-li du ₈ -du ₈ -a	ki-aĝ ₂ ^d en-lil ₂ -la ₂
3. ni ₂ gal gur ₃ -ru	an ša ₃ -ta e ₃ -a
4. nin mim du ₁₁ -ga	diĝir-re-e-ne
5. ^d ba-ba ₆ sa ₆ -ga	(dumu an ku ₃ -ga)
6. hi-li du ₈ -du ₈ -(a)	(ki-aĝ ₂ ^d en-lil ₂ -la ₂)
7. ni ₂ gal gur ₃ -(ru)	(an ša ₃ -ta e ₃ -a)
8. nin mim du ₁₁ -ga	(diĝir-re-e-ne)

²³ VAT 1419: 1, 3, 5. For the tablet in comparison with parallel texts, and for a photograph of the tablet, see Delnero (2021: 41–42). Note that in this example, in the first line du is a syllabic writing for du₁₁.g, and in the third line a represents aĝ₂ ‘thing’.

²⁴ CBS 6984, edited in Römer (2001: 4–17). For a transliteration and translation see also the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>, no.2.3.2 (Gudea A). (Accessed 14 September 2026.) For the tablet see the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative <https://cdli.earth>, P264398. (Accessed 14 September 2026.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. My lady, beautiful (woman), | child of holy An, |
| 2. adorned with attractiveness, | Enlil's beloved one, |
| 3. who is imbued with great fearsomeness | and issues from the interior of heaven, |
| 4. the cherished lady | of the gods. |
| | |
| 5. Baba, beautiful (woman), | (child of holy An), |
| 6. adorned with attractiveness, | (Enlil's beloved one), |
| 7. who is imbued with great fearsomeness | (and issues from the midst of heaven), |
| 8. the cherished lady | (of the gods) |

IB 1511 (Fig. 2) is a collective tablet from Isin containing The Kesh Temple Hymn, Enki's Journey to Nippur, Inanna and Ebih, a hymn to Nungal, and Gilgamesh and Huwawa (Wilcke 1987: 85–9). The tablet is written in an extraordinarily small script, where ca. 770 lines are condensed onto an object the size of a postcard.

For many lines on the tablet, where there is not enough space the scribe has only included the beginning of each line. The remainder of each line is simply omitted, and not indicated by a blank space on the tablet. For example, the opening of Gilgamesh and Huwawa is written as follows. The transliteration and translation attempts to represent the omitted text in brackets.²⁵

1. en-e kur lu₂ til₃-la-(še₃ ġeštu₂-ga-ne₂ na-an-gub)
2. en^dgilgameš₂-(e kur lu₂ til₃-la-še₃ ġeštu₂-ga-ne₂ na-an-gub)
3. urdu-da-ne₂ en-ki-du₁₀-(ra gu₃ mu-un-na-de₂-e)
4. en-ki-du₁₀ ġurgu ġuruš-e til₃-la (saġ til₃-le-be₂-še₃ la-ba-ra-an-e₃-a)
5. kur-ra ga-an-ku₄ mu-ġu₁₀ (ga-am₃-ġar)

1. The lord (set his mind to) the living one's mountain.
2. Lord Gilgamesh (set his mind to the living one's mountain.)
3. (He called to) his servant Enkidu:
4. 'Oh Enkidu, (no) man (can escape) life's end.
5. I will enter the mountain (and set up) my name'.

The occasional practice of abbreviating tablets in this way was briefly discussed by Civil (1985: 37–45). Civil identified four tablets which feature this practice, three of them from Nippur and one of unknown provenance. A 165, which is of unknown provenance, is a

²⁵ For a score transliteration of these lines see Edzard (1991: 167–69), where our manuscript appears under the siglum ISA.



Fig. 2: Obverse of an Old Babylonian collective tablet from Isin (IB 1511) containing five literary compositions in 'postcard' format (measurements: 12cm × 10.5cm). © Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. <http://publikationen.baw.de/de/A1/abb>.

witness to the Debate between Winter and Summer. The tablet includes the first three or four initial words for each line. On this tablet the beginnings of successive lines are written on the same physical line, with no separation mark. Presumably this was intended to save space on the tablet.²⁶ N 2230+, 3N-T575 and N 6281 are all from Nippur, and they all feature the abbreviation of lines. N 2230+ abbreviates the text of several Sumerian royal inscriptions. The tablet includes only the beginning, and often only the first sign, of each

²⁶ This description is based on Civil (1985: 40). I am not aware of any edition of this tablet, or of a comprehensive edition of the Debate between Winter and Summer. However, a new edition is in preparation by Irene Deubelbeiss at the University of Geneva.

line. 3N-T575 includes the first one or two words of lines of the hymn Šulgi B, as shown by the following excerpt:²⁷

209. *dumu ki-en-gi^{ki}-ra (nuĝun-ba ĝe₂₆-e-me-en)*

210. *ur-saĝ ki-en-gi^(ki)-ra ur-saĝ ĝe₂₆-e-me-en)*

209. (By origin I am a) son of Sumer.

210. (I am a warrior), a warrior (of) Sumer

N 6281 includes the first eleven lines of the school dialogue known as Dialogue 1. As shown by the following example, the tablet includes many omissions of the latter sections of lines, and the omission of one line. This excerpt is also of interest as an example of Edubba literature, which refers to the role of recitation in a pedagogic context. In this opening section the contender in the dialogue addresses his opponent, claiming superior knowledge:²⁸

1. *dumu (e₂)-dub-ba-a (u₄) ul-la-am₃*

2. *ĝa₂-[n]u ga-na (ga-ab-sa₂-sa₂-en-de₃-en)*

3. *tukum-bi nam-(dub-sar-ra i₃-zu a-na-am₃ i₃-šid)*

4. *mu AŠ.AŠ zi-ga (nam-dub-sar-ra)*

5. *niĝ₂-zi-ĝa₂-(edin-na za₃ lu₂-šu-ka-še₃)*

6. *i₃-sar egir-be₂ (gu₂ mu-e-du₃)*

7. *[a-r]_{a2} iĝi-diri (niĝ₂-ka₉ sahar-ĝar-ra za₃-be₂-še₃ i₃-zu)*

8. *KA enim-ma (nam-dumu-e₂-dub-ba-a-ka)*

(omitted line: *ga-ab-šid-de₃-en-de₃-en diri-zu-še₃ i₃-zu)*

9. *ĝa₂-nu gaba-ri-ĝu₁₀-(še₃ gub-ba in-zu ga-mu-ra-ab-til)*

(Hey,) schoolboy, it's late—come on, (let's compete!) If you (really) know the (corpus) of sc(ri)bal lore, what (then) did you recite? All the excerpted lines (of scribal lore), from the (thematic) šâ(tu-lists up to the (professions) list lu₂ = šû –) (as soon as) you've written them down, (you have (already) neglected them.) (Do you know the (calculation of)) multiplications, reciprocals, (accounts, as well as volumes?) The recitations (of scribaldom—let's recite them! I know them better than you!) Come on, (position yourself) as my rival! (I will put an end to your insults!)

²⁷ 3N-T575 is unpublished, and no photograph or hand copy is publicly available. The transliteration of these two lines follows Civil (1985: 40). My line numbering follows the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>, no. 2.4.2.02. (Accessed 14 September 2026.)

²⁸ N 6281: iii 12 ff. For a photograph of the tablet see <https://cdli.earth>, P280046. (Accessed 14 September 2026.) For a hand copy and transliteration see Cavigneaux (1996: 14–17). For editions see Johnson and Geller (2015); Matuszak (2019); <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager> (Dialogue 1, accessed 14 September 2026). My line numbering follows the tablet, not the editions. My translation mostly follows Matuszak.

MS 3176/1 is a collective tablet from the Schøyen Collection, of unknown provenance, which includes the Curse of Akkad, Two Women B, The Instructions of Shuruppak, and Inanna and Ebih. The passage from Two Women B has been recently published (Matuszak 2021, ms. X₂, see commentary on pp. 26–30).²⁹ This manuscript is written in very small script. It abbreviates lines by simply omitting the latter part of a respective line, without indicating the omission by the use of blank space on the tablet. The tablet not only omits the latter part of lines. It also occasionally omits the beginnings of lines, which is a more unusual practice. It also omits entire lines.³⁰ See for example the following lines from Two Women B:³¹

44. u₅-mu sur-sur še sa-^rsa⁷ (inda₃ gu-la du₈-du₈)
 45. (lu₂ kiĝ₂-ša₄ (a-)AK(-a) du₅-mu du-lum-ma) mu uku₂-re-e-ne
 46. (lu₂ nu-kal-la munus nu-ge-na)
 47. ^ru₄-da⁷-am₃ lu₂ ba-(an-ku₄-re-en)

44. To continually press oil, to repeatedly roast barley, (to constantly bake large loaves of bread!)
45. (Worker, child of toil), offspring of paupers!
46. (Worthless person, unfaithful woman!)
47. (Even) today, (you have entered through (the window) to meet) a man!

MS 3176/3 is an unpublished collective tablet from the Schøyen Collection, of unknown provenance, which includes The Kesh Temple Hymn, Enki's Journey to Nippur, Edubba C and Dialogue 1. The tablet features extensive abbreviations. For example, the opening of the Sumerian narrative Enki's Journey to Nippur is abbreviated to include only the first three or four signs of each line, leaving a blank space on the tablet to represent the rest of the line.³²

²⁹ See the photograph of MS 3176/1 on <https://cdli.earth>, P274469. (Accessed 14 September 2026. A complete edition of this tablet is in preparation by J. Matuszak and K. Volk.)

³⁰ In addition to the omission of occasional entire lines, I think it likely that the omission of thirty lines from the end of column v and the beginning of column vi may not be explained by a break in the upper part of the tablet (Matuszak 2021: 176), but instead as a deliberate omission. From examination of the photograph of the tablet it does not seem clear to me that the tablet is broken on the upper edge.

³¹ For a score transliteration of these lines see Matuszak (2021: 238). Our manuscript is represented there by the siglum X₂. My translation differs slightly.

³² MS 3176/3 obverse iii:10. My transliteration is from the photograph in <https://cdli.earth>, P342642. (Accessed 14 September 2026. An edition of this tablet is in preparation by J. Matuszak and K. Volk.) The Sumerian text in brackets is omitted on the tablet but restored from parallel manuscripts (for a composite transliteration, translation and bibliography of this composition see the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>, no. 1.1.4, accessed 14 September 2026). This tablet's use of extensive abbreviation is evident not only from the shortening of individual lines, but also probably from what appears to be the omission of entire sections of text (Matuszak 2019: 2–3).

1. u₄-ri-a nam (ba-tar-ra-ba)
2. mu he₂-ĝal₂ (an u₃-du₂-da)
3. uĝ₃-e u₂-šem-(gen₇ ki in-dar-ra-ba)
4. en abzu (lugal^den-ki-ke₄)
5. ^den-ki en nam (tar-tar-re-de₃)

1. In those remote days when the fates (were determined),
2. in a year when (An delivered) abundance,
3. (and) the people (broke through the earth like) plants and herbs,
4. the lord of the abzu,³³ (king Enki,)
5. Enki, the lord (who determines) fates,

A tablet belonging to the Cotsen Collection, of unknown provenance, contains a highly abbreviated excerpt from the hymn to Inana known as Ninmeshara (Attinger and Mittermayer 2009).³⁴ This tablet features extensive abbreviation, both in the form of omitted endings of some lines, but also by the inclusion of only every tenth line of the composition. In the opening lines of the tablet, the first ten lines are omitted. Thus, the text begins at line ten. In addition, the intervening lines between every ten are simply omitted.³⁵ Furthermore, the lines which are written often omit the endings of each line, as in the following example:

1. (= 10) iškur-gen₇ ki še₂₆(KA×X?) ge₄-a-za (^dašnan la-ba-ši-ĝal₂)
 (11 a-ma-ru kur-be₂-ta e₁₁-de₃)
 (12 saĝ-kal an ki-a ^dinana-be₂-me-en)
 (13 izi bar₇-bar₇-ra kalam-e šeĝ₃-ĝa₂)
 (14 an-ne₂ me šum₂-ma nin ur-ra u₅-a)
 (15 enim ku₃ an-na-ta enim du₁₁-du₁₁)
 (16 beluda gal-gal-la niĝ₂-zu a-ba mu-un-zu)
 (17 kur gul-gul u₄-de₃ a₂ ba-e-šum₂)
 (18 ki-aĝ₂ ^den-lil₂-la₂ kalam-ma ni₂ mi-ni-ri)
 (19 a₂-aĝ₂-ĝa₂ an-na-ke₄ ba-gub-be₂-en)
2. (= 20) nin-ĝu₁₀ za-pa-aĝ₂-zu-še₃ (kur i₃-gurum-gurum-e)

³³ The Sumerian abzu was the cosmic underground ocean in which the deity Enki lived.

³⁴ Cotsen Collection PARS 12/1, 123. For a photograph of the tablet see <https://cdli.earth>, P273853. (Accessed 14 September 2026.)

³⁵ As discussed by Attinger and Mittermayer (2009), the scribe counted each tenth literary line. Since sometimes two literary lines are written on the same physical line, this results in what at first appears to be an irregular selection of omitted lines, but it is in fact regular. In the transliteration above, the numbers in brackets correspond to the literary line of the composition, as reconstructed from parallel sources. For an edition of Ninmeshara see Zgoll (1997). For a transliteration, translation and bibliography see also the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>, no. 4.07.2. (Accessed 14 September 2026.)

1. (= 10) When like Iškur you roar at the earth, (no vegetation can stand up to you.)
 (11 As a flood descending upon those foreign lands,)
 (12 powerful one of heaven and earth, you are their Inana.)
 (13 Raining blazing fire down upon the Land,)
 (14 endowed with divine powers by An, lady who rides upon a beast,)
 (15 whose words are spoken at the holy command of An!)
 (16 The great rites are yours: who can fathom them?)
 (17 Destroyer of the foreign lands, you confer strength on the storm.)
 (18 Beloved of Enlil, you have imbued the Land with awesome terror.)
 (19 You stand at the service of An's commands.)
2. (= 20) My lady, at your battle-cry (the foreign lands bow down.)

The omission of parts of lines or entire lines in the Old Babylonian period may also be considered together with the question of variant recensions of certain compositions. There are numerous examples where specific manuscripts indicate the existence not only of a variant recension of a specific composition, but in some cases a significantly shorter version. One could argue that in some cases the short version(s) are not only due to recensional differences, but perhaps also motivated by the need to save space on tablets, and/or to save time in writing. A full treatment of the matter lies outside the scope of this article. However, it is striking to note that in for example one manuscript of the disputation between Bird and Fish from the Schøyen Collection, fifty lines are simply omitted in relation to the 'principal' version (Mittermayer 2014; 2019: 228–284, ms. Ams = MS 2110/1). Four manuscripts of Two Women B also feature shortened versions (Matuszak 2021: 104–6). Some of these shortened versions may possibly be attributed to scribal economy rather than recensional variation.

A further example of abbreviation in the writing of Sumerian literature may be found in the omission of long lists of deities in Sumerian liturgical prayers. So far this phenomenon is only attested from one tablet dating to the Old Babylonian period, although it is well attested in the first millennium BC. The Old Babylonian tablet NBC 1315 includes the Akkadian scribal annotation 'the gods, until they are complete' (*ilū adi iggammarū*), indicating the omission of a litany of over one hundred lines. The omitted lines may be confidently reconstructed, based on parallel manuscripts which do not omit the relevant lines (Gabbay and Mirelman 2020: 92–3). Abbreviations may also occur occasionally in the incantation corpus. The Old Babylonian tablet YBC 5637 (YOS 11: no. 72), of unknown provenance, is a highly abbreviated witness to an incantation against Namtar. The omitted lines may be reconstructed from parallel manuscripts from Meturan (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 1993: 176–181, ms. 'Z').

A further example of abbreviation from the Old Babylonian period may be found in the bilingual ritual text VAT 8382 (van Dijk 1967). This unique text omits several essential com-

ponents in each line, leaving empty space where further signs are expected. The bilingual aspect of the tablet adds a further layer of complexity, as shown by the opening five lines:³⁶

1. i₃-*ud₅ ħe₂-ku₃ ħe₂-siki_l ħ[e₂-za_lg]
2. d⁺en-lil₂-le (vac., ras.)
3. lugal-ra saĝ-*be₂-še₃ mu-un-ĝar
4. eme niĝ₂ ħul dim₂-ma (vac.)
5. šamallû(ŠAMAN₂.LA₂) ša a-nim širĥam(BALAĜ.DI-am)

1. May the she-goat fat be pure, may it be clean, may it [be radiant].
2. Enlil...
3. For the king, he (the priest) places (the she-goat fat) on his (text: 'its') head.
4. (May) the one who performs evil speech... (be silenced?).
5. **The šamallû(-priest) of Anum (sings?) a lament.**

Since this ritual text was almost certainly not performed, in the sense of being recited or sung in a formal performance, it is most likely that the use of abbreviation reflects its pedagogic context. Indeed, the text's bilingual aspect may also reflect its pedagogic context, if, as we assume, the Akkadian elements in the text record the teacher's verbal translations.³⁷

The mid-late second millennium BC

Comparatively few cuneiform texts are known from the period between the Old Babylonian period and the beginning of the first millennium BC. However, our knowledge has been significantly advanced in recent years by the discovery and publication of texts from this period, including especially texts from the First Sealand Dynasty. The rulers from this dynasty controlled the far south of Iraq, during the period which may be tentatively dated ca. 1720–1475 BC. One significant manuscript from the Sealand abbreviates the content of a liturgical composition. The tablet summarises sections of the composition by including the first signs of lines. Each of these incipits is separated by a vertical wedge, represented in the following transliteration by a vertical line. The tablet also delineates groups of incipits, which together form a section of a liturgical composition, by the use of horizontal lines, and by indicating the number of each section in sequence. In the following example, the incipit

³⁶ My transliteration incorporates collations of the tablet in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. Asterisks mark deviations from Van Dijk's readings. In my translation, when Akkadian appears without a Sumerian counterpart it is in bold.

³⁷ Note, for example, the suggestion discussed above, that Sumerian monolingual lexical lists in the Old Babylonian period reflect a bilingual teaching environment which is only seldom made explicit in the form of Akkadian glosses or translations.

is given on the left hand side, and the corresponding full form is given on the right, as reconstructed from a parallel manuscript dating from the late first millennium BC (Gabbay 2014a: 161, Table 2).³⁸

uru^{ki} niĝir-re | = uru₂ niĝir-[ra] nu-mu-un-na-ab-si₃-ga-ri ni₂-be₂ nu-mu-un-da-ab-si₃-g[a-ri]
 nu-mu-(vacat) | = [n]u-mu-un-na-ab-sig₃-ga-ri uru₂ niĝir-ra nu-mu-un-na-ab-sig₃-ga-ri
 nu-mu-^ˀun^ˀ- (vacat) | = [nu]-^ˀmu-un-na-ab^ˀ-dib-ba-ra ġuruš mu-lu-e nu-mu-un-na-dib- ba-ra

(That) city (which is not present for) the herald, (that one which is itself not present for him)!

(That one which) is not (... for him, that city which is not ... for him)!

(For him who) is not (passed by, for the lad whom a man does not pass by)!

Further examples of abbreviation, and the practice of memorisation, date to the Middle Babylonian Period (ca. 1550–1155 BC). In at least two tablets which feature literary excerpts from this period (Jiménez 2022: nos. 19 and 20),³⁹ the scribe writes a ‘cue’ in the form of the first words of the text, not even the first full line. These ‘cues’ only include (part) of the Sumerian line, where the following text is bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian. This practice is also well known in the first millennium, when the ‘cues’ are sometimes written in a script which is smaller than the rest of the tablet (Jiménez 2022: 23–4).

The first millennium BC

Sumerian literature continued to be transmitted until the late first millennium BC, but almost always accompanied by an Akkadian interlinear translation. The main corpora of Sumerian (bilingual) literature which were transmitted in the first millennium were liturgical prayers and incantations. There are many examples of abbreviation in manuscripts of Sumerian liturgical prayers in the first millennium. However, in such first millennium examples abbreviations are often, but not always, explicitly marked by means of scribal annotations. Almost without exception, abbreviations or omissions are not marked in tablets dating before the first millennium.⁴⁰

³⁸ The translation follows Gabbay (2014a: 156 col. ii: 5). As stated by Gabbay, the translation is tentative, due to the fact that it is reconstructed based on a late parallel manuscript which may be corrupt in places.

³⁹ Jiménez dates these Middle Babylonian tablets to the mid-fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BC (Jiménez 2022: 3).

⁴⁰ One exception is the Old Babylonian tablet NBC 1315 discussed above, which includes the Akkadian scribal annotation ‘the gods, until they are complete’.

A widespread type of abbreviation used in the tablets of Emesal prayers consists of the inclusion of only the first word or sign of a recurring refrain. Instead of repeating the refrain in full, the scribe would include only this one word or sign, followed by blank space, representing the omitted parts of the refrain. A more rarely attested means of abbreviation practiced occasionally in the first millennium can be found in the condensation of compositions to incipits and key phrases. This is unmarked, meaning that no scribal explanations of such abbreviations are given in the manuscript. We have already encountered this type of abbreviation in the First Sealand Dynasty. But in the first millennium BC the practice is known from several other tablets.⁴¹ The tablets BM 11391 and BM 113940, both from the city of Ur, condense Sumerian liturgical compositions by indicating only extracts or incipits in writing (Gabbay and Mirelman 2011). There are several other examples of this practice of condensing compositions, in tablets from various other Mesopotamian sites (Gabbay 2014b: 232–3). Some of the tablets which feature this form of condensation also include additional annotations concerning the performance of the composition, as shown by the following example:⁴²

KA SED lugal abzu si ^A lugal abzu si ^E (vacat)
 KA SED a-a AN.NA ^A ki[?]-la(-)am₃ ^{d+}en-ki ^I
 KA SED umun-e du₅-mu-ĝu₁₀ nun-^rna^r ^A me(-)el-la (ras.)
 KA ZI aia bu-bu ^A gu₄-ud ^re^r-re im-DU ^E

In this example each line includes a different incipit of a section of a Sumerian liturgical composition. The horizontal lines in the above transliteration represent physical delimitation lines drawn on the tablet itself. The elements marked in bold are scribal annotations indicating aspects concerning performance. KA SED signifies ‘relaxed voice’ or perhaps ‘quiet voice’. KA ZI signifies ‘loud/raised voice’. The vowels in superscript capitals almost certainly indicate extended vowels and/or melismatic sequences.⁴³

A widely attested form of abbreviation in the first millennium consists of the skipping of long litanies in Sumerian liturgical prayers. These consist of skipped litanies of gods, sometimes extending to over one hundred lines. Other lines skipped include those featuring lists of toponyms and other sections of compositions. Clearly the material which was chosen to be skipped consisted of highly predictable sequences which were committed to memory by the priests who were responsible for both performing and writing such prayers

⁴¹ The practice of citing only incipits of compositions in succession is also known from various other genres of text in first millennium BC Mesopotamia. This practice, together with the evidence provided by errors and orthography, also points towards the role of memorisation in first millennium schooling and scholarship (Gabbay forthcoming).

⁴² BM 113931: r. 7–10. See Gabbay and Mirelman (2011: 278).

⁴³ ‘Melisma’ refers to the singing of a syllable using more than one note (pitch). On the Late Babylonian evidence for the performance of Sumerian liturgical prayers see Mirelman (2020a) and Mirelman (2024).

(Gabbay and Mirelman 2020). The omission, and the precise number of lines skipped, are usually marked by the scribe in the form of a scribal annotation. See for example the following, where the skipping of a twenty-five-line god litany is marked by the annotation ‘twenty-five lines skipped’:⁴⁴

Let prayers be addressed to the lord of prayers,
 Let petitions be addressed to the lord of petitions by:
 (the god) An and (the goddess) Uraš; Earth, where barley sprouted;
25 lines skipped
 The faithful lady, (the goddess) Kiša, the charming woman;
 The father who begat you, (the god) Asalluhi
 The mother who bore you, (the goddess) Panunanki;

A further example of abbreviation in Sumerian literature in the first millennium includes the Akkadian scribal annotation *tayyartu* ‘return’. This annotation, which is attested in a fragment of both a Sumerian liturgical text and a Sumerian incantation, is an instruction to perform a repetitive section of a text that was not copied by the scribe (Gabbay and Mirelman 2017).

Concluding remarks

Sumerian literature is often described as consisting of ‘curricular’ versus ‘cultic’ texts, categories which are associated in modern scholarship, with contexts of education and scribalism, versus performance. This study has attempted to demonstrate that whilst such concepts reflect a real distinction in the type of evidence available to us, both categories are united by a shared lecto-oral aspect which may be understood as ‘performative’. By extension, this suggests that the imagined dichotomy between ‘pedagogic’ or ‘scholarly’ versus ‘performative’ contexts reflects contemporary assumptions about ancient writing, and the transmission of ‘literary’ texts. The evidence discussed above shows that such works were often, and perhaps usually, committed to memory, and recited and/or sung in a scribal and pedagogic setting. Writing probably functioned in such contexts as a mnemonic aid, a means of rehearsal and perhaps also as a means of maintaining accuracy and consistency in pedagogic contexts of oral recitation and/or performance, and memorisation. This seems particularly clear from the Early Dynastic to Old Babylonian period, although it is likely to also apply to periods before and after. This characterisation may also apply to cuneiform text categories beyond Sumerian literature, although a thorough examination of this topic lies outside the scope of the present study.

⁴⁴ ‘Converse Tablet’: r. 18’–r. 21’ (Gabbay and Mirelman 2020: 95).

Looking at the historical development of Sumerian literature briefly traced above, it is clear that abbreviation was practiced throughout Mesopotamian history. However, the way in which it was practiced was not consistent in all periods and genres of Sumerian literature. From the invention of writing itself until the Early Dynastic period abbreviation was in a sense integral to writing itself, due to the fact that in this period the writing system was never intended to fully represent the Sumerian language. Probably as a result of this limitation, during this period both the identification and interpretation of what may be termed 'literature' is in itself problematic for modern scholars. In the Old Babylonian period scribes, who were probably mostly apprentices, produced tablets which were the byproducts of scribal education. Such scribes probably learnt, recited and wrote in sequence or simultaneously, all within the same pedagogic context. The works in question belonged to the 'curriculum'. But in the case of both 'curricular' and liturgical texts the evidence above suggests that they were similarly memorised and recited. Perhaps the main difference with the liturgical corpus in practice was the utilisation of singing instead of simple recitation, although the possibility that the 'curricular' corpus was sung cannot be excluded. In the first millennium scribes tended to make explicit the abbreviations which were not explicit in earlier periods. This development reflects a change in the general approach to writing in the first millennium, when certain aspects begin to be included in writing which were previously normally omitted.⁴⁵ I consider it unlikely that this change in the approach to writing reflects a change in the way that texts functioned in an environment of oral recitation and memorisation.

As shown by the examples cited above, it is clear that Sumerian literature functioned in a lecto-oral environment in which the intended reader(s) was able to complement the information from the written text with their own knowledge. It may be argued that abbreviation was used for the purpose of scribal convenience and economy. Whilst this was probably a factor, it is also evidence for the role of oral transmission in scribal and pedagogic contexts. This context is clear, due to the fact that in the majority of instances it is only possible to reconstruct the material which has been omitted by comparison with parallel manuscripts. Thus, it is possible, and indeed likely, that abbreviations and omissions which are not explicitly indicated may lead to misunderstandings by modern scholars. Indeed, the material discussed above serves as a reminder that the textual sources available to us from Mesopotamian antiquity are inherently limited in various respects (Civil 1980).

⁴⁵ A full study on this topic lies outside the scope of the present study. Examples of such changes include the regular inclusion of Akkadian columns to Sumerian lexical texts in the first millennium. As mentioned above, during the Old Babylonian period the Akkadian column of such lexical texts was probably taught orally but not included in writing (Akkadian glosses were however often included in the Old Babylonian period). Another example of such changes include the addition of performative indications in Sumerian liturgical prayers. These prayers were transmitted over almost two millennia. But performative indications appear in a corpus of tablets of such prayers which date exclusively to the final stage of their transmission, namely the late first millennium BC (Mirelman 2024).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Uri Gabbay, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments to an earlier draft of this article.

Bibliography

- Attinger, P., Mittermayer, C. 2009: 'Un curieux nouveau duplicat de Ninmešara'. *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2009, no. 4: 95.
- Beaulieu, P.A. 1992: 'New Light on Secret Knowledge in Late Babylonian Culture'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 82: 98–111. DOI: [10.1515/zava.1992.82.1.98](https://doi.org/10.1515/zava.1992.82.1.98).
- Cavigneaux, A. 1996: 'Miettes de l'Edubbâ'. In O. Tunca, D. Dehesell (eds), *Tablettes et images aux pays de Sumer et d'Akkad: mélanges offerts à Monsieur H. Limet*. Mémoires de l'association pour la promotion de l'histoire et de l'archéologie orientales. Université de Liège, 11–26.
- Cavigneaux, A., Al-Rawi, F. 1993: 'Textes magiques de Tell Hadad (Textes de Tell Hadad II)'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 83: 170–205. DOI: [10.1515/za-1993-0123](https://doi.org/10.1515/za-1993-0123).
- Charpin, D. 2010: *Reading and Writing in Babylon*. Harvard University Press.
- Civil, M. 1980: 'Les limites de l'information textuelle'. In M.-Th. Barrelet (ed.), *L'archéologie de l'Iraq du début de l'époque néolithique à 333 avant notre ère. Perspectives et limites de l'interprétation anthropologique des documents: Paris, 13–15 juin 1978*. Colloques Internationaux du CNRS. CNRS, 225–32.
- 1985: 'On Some Texts Mentioning Ur-Namma'. *Orientalia (Nova Series)* 54: 27–45.
- 2013: 'Remarks on AD-GI₄ (a.k.a. "Archaic Word List C" or "Tribute")'. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 65: 13–67. DOI: [10.5615/jcunestud.65.2013.0013](https://doi.org/10.5615/jcunestud.65.2013.0013).
- Civil, M., Biggs, R.D. 1966: 'Notes sur des textes sumériens archaïques'. *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 60: 1–16.
- Delnero, P. 2006: 'Variation in Sumerian Literary Compositions: A Case Study Based on the Decad'. PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- 2012a: 'Memorization and the Transmission of Sumerian Literary Compositions'. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71: 189–208. DOI: [10.1086/666645](https://doi.org/10.1086/666645).
- 2012b: *The Textual Criticism of Sumerian Literature*. Journal of Cuneiform Studies Supplemental Series 3. American Schools of Oriental Research.
- 2015: 'Texts and Performance: The Materiality and Function of the Sumerian Liturgical Corpus'. In P. Delnero, J. Lauinger (eds), *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and*

- Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 9. De Gruyter, 87–118. DOI: [10.1515/9781614515371-004](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614515371-004).
- 2017: ‘The Silence of the Scribes, Pt. II: An Unfinished Enlil Lament from Nippur’. In L. Feliu, F. Karahashi, G. Rubio (eds), *The First Ninety Years: A Sumerian Celebration in Honor of Miguel Civil*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 12. De Gruyter, 77–97. DOI: [10.1515/9781501503696-006](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501503696-006).
- 2020: *How to Do Things With Tears. Ritual Lamenting in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records. De Gruyter. DOI: [10.1515/9781501512650](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501512650).
- 2021: ‘Texts Before Texts: Orality, Writing, and the Transmission of Sumerian Laments’. In T. Römer, H. Gonzalez, L. Marti, J. Rückl (eds), *Oral et écrit dans l'Antiquité orientale: les processus de rédaction et d'édition. Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 26 et 27 mai 2016*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 291. Peeters, 23–52. DOI: [10.2307/j.ctv2tjd73z.5](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2tjd73z.5).
- van Dijk, J. 1967: ‘VAT 8382: Ein zweisprachiges Königsritual’. In D.O. Edzard (ed.), *Heidelberger Studien zum Alten Orient. Adam Falkenstein zum 17. September 1966*. Harrassowitz, 233–68.
- Edzard, D.O. 1991: ‘Gilgameš und Huwawa A. II. Teil’. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 81: 165–233. DOI: [10.1515/zava.1991.81.1-2.165](https://doi.org/10.1515/zava.1991.81.1-2.165).
- Englund, R.K. 1998: ‘Texts from the Late Uruk Period’. In P. Attinger, M. Wäfler (eds), *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische-Zeit*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis. Univ.-Verl., 15–233.
- 2009: ‘The Smell of the Cage’. *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* 2009, no. 4: 1–27. <https://cdli.earth/articles/cdlj/2009-4>.
- Eyre, C., Baines, J. 1989: ‘Interactions Between Orality and Literacy in Ancient Egypt’. In K. Schousboe, M.T. Larsen (eds), *Literacy and Society*. Akademisk Forlag, 91–119.
- Fuller, C.J. 2001: ‘Orality, Literacy and Memorization: Priestly Education in Contemporary South India’. *Modern Asian Studies* 35: 1–31. DOI: [10.1017/s0026749x01003717](https://doi.org/10.1017/s0026749x01003717).
- Gabbay, U. forthcoming: ‘Between the Mind and the Tablet: Memorization as Part of Scholarly Training in First Millennium BCE Mesopotamia’.
- 2014a: ‘A Balag to Enlil from the First Sealand Dynasty’. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 104: 146–70. DOI: [10.1515/za-2014-0013](https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2014-0013).
- 2014b: *Pacifying the Heart of the Gods. Sumerian Emesal Prayers of the First Millennium BC*. Heidelberger Emesal Studien 1. Harrassowitz.
- 2016: *The Exegetical Terminology of Akkadian Commentaries*. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 82. Brill. DOI: [10.1163/9789004323476](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004323476).
- Gabbay, U., Mirelman, S. 2011: ‘Two Summary Tablets of Balag Compositions with Performative Indications from Late-Babylonian Ur’. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 101: 274–93. DOI: [10.1515/za.2011.014](https://doi.org/10.1515/za.2011.014).

- 2017: 'Text and Performance: Tayyartu, "Repetition," in a Mīs Pī-type Incantation and an Emesal Prayer'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 107: 22–34. DOI: [10.1515/za-2017-0003](https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2017-0003).
- 2020: "'Skipped Lines" (MU.MEŠ GU₄.UD.MEŠ) in Balaḡ and Eršema Prayers'. In J. Baldwin, J. Matuszak (eds), *mu-zu an-za3-še₃ kur-ur₂-še₃ he₂-ḡal₂*. *Altorientalistische Studien zu Ehren von Konrad Volk*. dubsar 17. Zaphon, 87–116. DOI: [10.2307/jj.18654682.10](https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18654682.10).
- Gadotti, A., Kleinerman, A. 2021: *Elementary Education in Early Second Millennium BCE Babylonia*. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 42. Eisenbrauns. DOI: [10.1515/9781646021802](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781646021802).
- Goody, J. 2010: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*. Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/cbo9780511778896](https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511778896).
- Grayson, A.K. 2000: 'Murmuring in Mesopotamia'. In A.R. George, I.L. Finkel (eds), *Wisdom, Gods and Literature. Studies in Assyriology in Honour of Wilfred G. Lambert*. Eisenbrauns, 301–8.
- Jáka-Sövegjártó, S. 2020: "'Whose Name Is Suitable for Songs"—Šulgi in Old Babylonian Cultural Memory'. In W. Sommerfeld (ed.), *Proceedings of the 63rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: Dealing with Antiquity—Past, Present, and Future*. Marburg, 24–28 July, 2017. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 460. Ugarit, 243–61.
- Jiménez, E. 2022: *Middle and Neo-Babylonian Literary Texts in the Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection, Jena*. Texte und Materialien der Hilprecht Collection 13. Harrassowitz.
- Johnson, J.C., Geller, M.J. 2015: *The Class Reunion—An Annotated Translation and Commentary on the Sumerian Dialogue Two Scribes*. Cuneiform Monographs 47. Brill. DOI: [10.1163/9789004302105](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004302105).
- Kelley, K. 2021: 'More Than a Woman? On Proto-Cuneiform SAL and the Archaic "Tribute List"'. In A. Bramanti, N.L. Kraus, P. Notizia (eds), *Current Research in Early Mesopotamian Studies. Workshop Organized at the 65th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Paris 2019*. dubsar 21. Zaphon, 9–43. DOI: [10.2307/jj.18654703.6](https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18654703.6).
- Kleinerman, A. 2016: 'Review of *The Sumerian Poem Enmerkar and En-Suhkeš-Ana: Epic, Play, Or? Stage Craft at the Turn from the Third to the Second Millennium B.C.*, by Claus Wilcke'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136: 861–63. DOI: [10.7817/jameror-iesoci.136.4.0861](https://doi.org/10.7817/jameror-iesoci.136.4.0861).
- Krebernik, M. 1998: 'Die Texte aus Fāra und Tell Abū Šalābiḥ'. In P. Attinger, M. Wäfler (eds), *Annäherungen 1: Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und frühdynastische Zeit*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 160/1. Universitätsverlag, 235–427.
- Krebernik, M., Lisman, J.J.W. 2020: *The Sumerian Zame Hymns from Tell Abū Šalābiḥ*. dubsar 12. Zaphon. DOI: [10.2307/jj.18654692](https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18654692).
- Krebernik, M., Steible, H., Yıldız, F. 2014: 'Prä-Fāra-zeitliche Texte aus Fāra'. In N. Koslova, E. Vizirova, G. Zólyomi (eds), *Studies in Sumerian Language and Literature. Festschrift für Joachim Krecher*. Babel und Bibel 8. Eisenbrauns, 327–82. DOI: [10.5325/j.ctv1bxh3kh.16](https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv1bxh3kh.16).

- Lecompte, C. 2020: 'A propos de deux monuments figurés du début du 3e millénaire: observations sur la Figure aux Plumes et la Prisoner Plaque'. In I. Arkhipov, L. Kogan, N. Koslova (eds), *The Third Millennium. Studies in Early Mesopotamia and Syria in Honor of Walter Sommerfeld and Manfred Krebernik*. Cuneiform Monographs 50. Brill, 417–46. DOI: [10.1163/9789004418080_020](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004418080_020).
- Lecompte, C., Benati, G. 2017: 'Nonadministrative Documents from Archaic Ur and from Early Dynastic I–II Mesopotamia: A New Textual and Archaeological Analysis'. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 69: 3–31. DOI: [10.5615/jcunestud.69.2017.0003](https://doi.org/10.5615/jcunestud.69.2017.0003).
- Maiwald, K. 2021: *Mesopotamische Schöpfungstexte in Ritualen. Methodik und Fallstudien zur Situativen Verortung*. Mythological Studies 3. De Gruyter.
- Matuszak, J. 2019: 'Es streite, wer kann! Ein neuer Rekonstruktions- und Interpretationsversuch für das sumerische Schulstreitgespräch "Dialog 1"'. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 109: 1–47. DOI: [10.1515/za-2019-0001](https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2019-0001).
- 2021: „Und du, du bist eine Frau?!“ Editio princeps und Analyse des sumerischen Streitgesprächs 'Zwei Frauen B'. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie 16. De Gruyter. DOI: [10.1515/9783110685381](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110685381).
- Metcalf, C. 2015: *The Gods Rich in Praise: Early Greek and Mesopotamian Religious Poetry*. Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198723363.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198723363.001.0001).
- Mirelman, S. 2018: 'Mesopotamian Magic in Text and Performance'. In S.V. Panayotov, L. Vacín (eds), *Mesopotamian Medicine and Magic. Studies in Honor of Markham J. Geller*. Ancient Magic and Divination 14. Brill, 343–78. DOI: [10.1163/9789004368088_018](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368088_018).
- 2020a: 'Performative Aspects of Litanies in Sumerian Liturgical Prayers, According to Selected Late Manuscripts'. In W. Sadowski, F. Marsciani (eds), *Litany in the Arts and Cultures*. Studia Traditionis Theologiae 36. Brepols, 71–88. DOI: [10.1484/m.stt-eb.5.119207](https://doi.org/10.1484/m.stt-eb.5.119207).
- 2020b: 'Review of *Mesopotamische Schöpfungstexte in Ritualen: Methodik Und Fallstudien Zur Situativen Verortung*, by Kerstin Maiwald'. *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 81: 197–200. DOI: [10.1086/718475](https://doi.org/10.1086/718475).
- 2020c: 'Tradition and Innovation in Mesopotamian Textuality During the First Millennium BCE: The Case of Balaĝ and Eršema Prayers'. In W. Sommerfeld (ed.), *Proceedings of the 63rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: Dealing with Antiquity – Past, Present, and Future*. Marburg, 24–28 July, 2017. Alter Orient und Altes Testament. Ugarit, 295–321.
- 2024: *The Performance of Balaĝ and Eršema Prayers in the Late First Millennium BC*. Heidelberger Emesal-Studien 4. Harrassowitz.
- Mittermayer, C. 2014: 'mušen ku₆: Viel Vogel und wenig Fisch in MS 2110/1'. *Altorientalische Forschungen* 41: 201–22. DOI: [10.1515/aof-2014-0012](https://doi.org/10.1515/aof-2014-0012).

- 2019: 'Was sprach der eine zum anderen?' *Argumentationsformen in den sumerischen Rangstreitgesprächen*. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie 15. De Gruyter. DOI: [10.1515/9783110634327](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110634327).
- Römer, W.H.P. 2001: *Hymnen und Klagelieder in sumerischer Sprache*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 276. Ugarit.
- Rubio, G. 2009: 'Sumerian Literature'. In C.S. Ehrlich (ed.), *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield, 11–75.
- Schwemer, D. 2011: 'Magic Rituals: Conceptualization and Performance'. In K. Radner, E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford University Press, 418–42. DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557301.013.0020](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557301.013.0020).
- Sjöberg, Å.W. 1970: 'Beiträge zum sumerischen Wörterbuch'. *Orientalia (Nova Series)* 39: 75–98.
- 1975: 'The Old Babylonian Eduba'. In S.J. Lieberman (ed.), *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday, June 7, 1974*. Assyriological Studies 20. Oriental Institute, 159–79.
- Steinkeller, P. 2017: *History, Texts and Art in Early Babylonia: Three Essays*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 15. De Gruyter. DOI: [10.1515/9781501504778](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501504778).
- Thomas, R. 1992: *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/cbo9780511620331](https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620331).
- Tinney, S. 2011: 'Tablets of Schools and Scholars: A Portrait of the Old Babylonian Corpus'. In K. Radner, E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford University Press, 577–96. DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557301.013.0027](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557301.013.0027).
- Veldhuis, N. 1997: 'Elementary Education at Nippur: The Lists of Trees and Wooden Objects'. PhD dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
- 1998: 'A Late Old Babylonian Proto-Kagal / Nigga Text and the Nature of the Acrographic Lexical Series'. *Acta Sumerologica* 20: 201–16.
- 2010: 'Guardians of Tradition: Early Dynastic Lexical Texts in Old Babylonian Copies'. In H.D. Baker, E. Robson, G. Zólyomi (eds), *Your Praise Is Sweet. A Memorial Volume for Jeremy Black from Students, Colleagues and Friends*. British Institute for the Study of Iraq, 379–400.
- Vogelzang, M.E., Vanstiphout, H.L.J. (eds) 1992: *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* Edwin Mellen Press.
- Wagensonner, K. 2019: 'A New Source of "Word List C"'. *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves Et Utilitaires* 2019, no. 2: 75–76.
- Wasserman, N. 2023: 'Review of Maiwald 2021'. *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* 113: 191–92.
- Wilcke, C. 1987: 'Die Inschriftenfunde der 7. und 8. Kampagnen (1983 und 1984)'. In B. Hrouda (ed.), *Isin – Išān Bahrīyāt III: Die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen 1983-1984*. Verlag der

- Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Kommission bei der C. H. Beck'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 83–120.
- 1995: 'Die Inschrift der "Figure aux plumes": Ein frühes Werk sumerischer Dichtkunst'. In U. Finkbeiner, R. Dittmann, H. Hauptmann (eds), *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens. Festschrift für Rainer Michael Boehmer*. Verlag Philip von Zabern, 669–74.
- 2012: *The Sumerian Poem Enmerkar and En-Suhkeš-Ana: Epic, Play, Or? Stage Craft at the Turn from the Third to the Second Millennium B.C.* American Oriental Series - Essay 12. American Oriental Society.
- Woods, C. 2020: 'The Emergence of Cuneiform Writing'. In R. Hasselbach-Andee (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Languages*. Wiley, 27–46. DOI: [10.1002/9781119193814.ch2](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119193814.ch2).
- Worthington, M. 2012: *Principles of Akkadian Textual Criticism*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 1. De Gruyter. DOI: [10.1515/9781614510567](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614510567).
- Zgoll, A. 1997: *Der Rechtsfall der En-ĥedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 246. Ugarit.
- 2022: 'Sacred Texts and the First Myth about the Creation of Writing'. *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 22: 258–314. DOI: [10.1163/15692124-12341333](https://doi.org/10.1163/15692124-12341333).