
Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Volume II: Literary and Scholastic Texts of the First Millennium BC edited by Ira Spar and W. G. Lambert

New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005. Pp. xlvi + 354 + 132 plates. ISBN 2-503-51740-4. Cloth \$75.00

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art holds more than 500 cuneiform tablets which range in date from the Early Dynastic III period of the third millennium BC to the latest cuneiform documents written in the first century AD. The present volume, the second of four publishing the whole of the Museum's collection,¹ contains just over 100 literary and scholastic texts from the first millennium BC. Apart from one tablet [No. 33], all of the tablets were purchased from London antiquities dealers by the Reverend William Hayes Ward and acquired by the Museum in 1886. No. 33 was obtained *via* the Rogers Fund in 1956 and has been subject to some modern fakery through the addition of meaningless wedges and trimming of the broken edges to make the tablet appear complete and therefore of greater value. Nothing can be said of the provenance of the tablets bought by Ward except what can be learnt from the texts themselves, which seems to indicate that most of the tablets originated in Babylon during the Hellenistic period.

The tablets are presented in copies drawn by Ira Spar together with translations and commentaries by a range of specialist scholars. Photographs of some of the more interesting tablets are also included. A general introduction to the text corpus and the context of scholarship in first millennium Babylonia is provided by W. G. Lambert, and the editions of each group of texts is preceded by an introductory essay by that group's editor. These essays range in scope from a

¹ Volume 1 (1988) contains tablets, cones, and bricks from the third and second millennium BC and Volume 3 (2000) contains tablets from private archives of the first millennium BC.

short overview of the tablets in a group, to detailed discussions of the tablets and related published and unpublished examples in other collections. As such, the volume acts not only as a means of publishing the Metropolitan Museum's tablets, but also provides an extremely useful introduction to Late Babylonian scholarship as a whole.

Several of the tablets published in this volume relate to Babylonian science in its various forms. These include magical and medical texts [Nos. 30–33, 69–70], celestial omens [Nos. 36–38, 71], other omens [Nos. 34–35, 39–41], mathematical texts [Nos. 72–77], and astronomical texts [Nos. 78–88]. In the following, I will confine myself to the mathematical and astronomical/astrological texts.

Six mathematical texts [Nos. 72–77] are edited by J. Friberg. All were first published by Otto Neugebauer and Abraham Sachs in *Mathematical Cuneiform Texts* in 1945. Nos. 72–76 contain exclusively lines of long sexagesimal numbers. Nos. 72–74 actually are part of the same tablet, though do not join. They are part of the first tablet of the original table of reciprocals. Friberg believes that Nos. 75 and 76 together with a tablet in the Liverpool Free Public Museum are disconnected fragments of the reverse of a copy of the presumed first tablet of the total 12-place table of reciprocals. The final text [No. 77] is a fragment from a mathematical problem text. The text is apparently a collection of problems, similar in style to some Old Babylonian problem texts. The only more or less fully preserved problem deals with the repair of hoes.

The astronomical texts edited by C. B. F. Walker and the celestial omen texts edited by the late Erica Reiner are of particular interest. I briefly discuss each text in turn below:

- No. 36 is a copy of *Enūma Anu Enlil* Tablets 26 Part III and 27 Part II. It concerns omens drawn from the appearance of the Sun at sunrise and sunset.
- No. 37 contains excerpts of Jupiter omens from *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Those omens well enough preserved to be identified concern the position of Jupiter next to the Moon.
- No. 38 is very fragmentary. It contains omens drawn from the visibility of Mercury. The tablet is of special interest because its colophon indicates that the tablet was copied from a leather scroll, something that is extremely rare in cuneiform sources.

- No. 71 is a commentary on *Enūma Anu Enlil* Tablet 4 (the heading for this tablet mistakenly says Tablet 5). The tablet is badly preserved and no translation is offered by Reiner. It is interesting to note that the commentary contains alternative explanations for some omens, attributing them to ‘another oral source’ and ‘a third oral source’.
- No. 78 is a list of *zippu* stars.² Three traditions of *zippu* star lists are known outside of MUL.APIN. One list, the most well known because it is found on our best preserved source, AO 6478, and also on a Neo-Assyrian tablet from Nineveh, lists 26 stars. The most common version of the *zippu* star list contained only 25 stars and is identical to the 26 star list except for omitting an entry for the distance between the front and rear Twin stars. A third *zippu* star list, known only from one source, contains a completely different list of 14 stars. No. 78 contains part of the 25 star list. The text’s editor restores the intervals in time-degrees and double hours between the stars from AO 6478, and therefore is incorrect to remark in the commentary that No. 78 contains the same distances.
- No. 79 is a fragment of a lunar ephemeris for Seleucid Era (SE) 263 calculated by System A; it was previously published by Neugebauer in his *Astronomical Cuneiform Texts* [1955, No. 18]. According to Neugebauer, a fragment in Berlin is a part of the same tablet.
- No. 80 is another fragment of a lunar ephemeris giving eclipse possibilities for at least the years SE 177 to 199(?). Again, the tablet was previously published by Neugebauer [1955, No. 61].
- No. 81 is an extremely interesting and important procedure text for the Moon which partially duplicates Neugebauer 1955, No. 201 and some unpublished tablets in the British Museum. It gives rules for the calculation of the so-called ‘lunar four’, intervals between sunrise and moonset (or *vice versa*) around opposition. These rules are at present only imperfectly understood and careful study of No. 81 and the other duplicates will be necessary to reconstruct them.
- No. 82 is a large fragment of a Normal Star Almanac containing predicted planetary passages by a group of reference stars (known as ‘Normal Stars’), planetary phenomena, and eclipses

² *Zippu* stars are stars whose culmination is used for timekeeping.

for the year SE 70. This is the first complete translation of a Normal Star Almanac into English. Accompanying the translation is a study of the accuracy of the predicted planetary positions by N. A. Roughton.

- No. 83 is an almost complete Almanac containing predicted planetary phenomena and eclipses for the year AD 31/32. It was previously published by Abraham Sachs [1976, 379–398]. This very late Almanac, one of the latest dated cuneiform tablets, contains several scribal practices characteristic of these late Almanacs such as indenting the second line for every month, abbreviating the name of the planet Mercury to GU₄, and so forth.
- No. 84 is a fragment of an astronomical table containing (at least) four columns. The table is of an unknown type and it is not certain whether its contents are strictly astronomical.
- No. 85 is a small fragment of a table which may be astronomical.
- No. 86 is a small fragment of a prose text that may be either astronomical or astrological.
- No. 87 is a fragment of a prose text. Walker suggests that it might be a lunar procedure text of an unknown kind due to the term *ki-sir*'s appearing several times. This term can mean something like 'lunar node', but the whole text needs close study before its meaning can be established.
- No. 88 is a small unidentified fragment which may be part of the same tablet as No. 86.

The editors and publishers of this fine volume are to be congratulated in bringing to publication this immaculate edition of an important collection of Late Babylonian cuneiform texts.

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