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On Authorship in Akkadian Literature

That the names of the authors of major works of Akkadian literature are unknown seems strange to us, to whom authorship implies a named author[1]. Only a few works of Akkadian literature can be identified with a specific author. Some of these make use of the device known as "signature", where the author's name is given in the text. Examples include the Gula Hymn of Bullutsarabi[2], and the Erra Epic (discussed below). Others use acrostics that spell the name of the author. Examples include the Theodicy[3] (the work of a certain (E)saggil-kinam-ubbib)[4], the prayers of Nabu-ušebši[5], and the acrostic hymn to Marduk by or in the name of Assurbanipal (see below). Signed compositions are rare (King, BBS 6), though scribes sometimes signed inscriptions (see Weidner, AfO 17 [1954/6], 264) or were associated with specific versions of texts (see Geller, BSOAS 53 [1990], 209ff.).

A special problem is raised by certain texts, such as the Marduk acrostic and Assurbanipal's Hymn to Shamash (see below), that mention the reigning king as if he were the author. While it is possible that some of these were actually composed by the king himself, others may be products of court poets whose work reflects the personality and interests of the sovreign[6].

For the majority of Akkadian texts, however, the author's name is unknown, and one has sometimes suspected that there was in fact no

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[1] For general discussions of Mesopotamian authorship, see Hallo, IEJ 12 (1962), 13ff.; Hecker, ArOr 45 (1977), 249ff., with additional bibliography.

[2] W.G. Lambert, OrNS 36 (1967), 105ff.

[3] W.G. Lambert, BWL, 63ff.

[4] See Finkel in E. Leichty ed., *A Scientific Humanist. Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs* (Philadelphia: 1985), 144.

[5] W.G. Lambert, JAOS 88 (1968), 130ff.; Sweet, OrNS 38 (1969), 459f.

[6] W. von Soden, *Herrscher im alten Orient* (Berlin: 1954), 5.

single author for such texts[7]. Yet the reasons for the anonymity of Akkadian literary works are to be sought elsewhere than in a simple assumption that they did not have authors as we understand the term.

Anonymity can of course be accounted for mechanically. Unless the author's name was mentioned in the text, there was no sure means of transmitting it with the text. This is because colophons to manuscripts referred to a text only by its opening line and not by its author; the rest of the colophon dealt primarily with manuscript matters such as the number of lines and tablets, who copied it and when and where, and from what original[8]. In the absence of a sure means of transmitting the name with the text, the name could be forgotten over generations of manuscript transmission. While manuscript transmission techniques might in some cases lead to the anonymity of authors, they are not by themselves a sufficient explanation, for other manuscript literatures have succeeded in transmitting the names of authors with their texts through the simple expediency of putting the author's name at the top or bottom of the composition.

Mesopotamian scholars of the first millennium had views on authorship to the extent that they paired certain literary and scholarly works with gods and sages of the past as if those had been their authors[9]. There is little reason to believe that this is reliable "bibliography" in the modern sense; it appears rather in some cases to be a claim that certain works and the disciplines these works pertained to were extremely ancient and thereby authoritative. Lists of literary works from earlier periods do not include author's names, but only titles[10].

Beginning at the primary level of inquiry, one can pose the question, "Was there an author?" While the relationship between author and text is a favorite topic of critical inquiry, so far as I know, no one has discussed seriously the possibility of an "authorless" text. On the contrary, there may be more than one author present in a Mesopotamian literary work as now known, for there can be no certainty that an Akkadian text as it is known today is all that one author wrote of it, no more, no less. Yet there was a conception in ancient Mesopotamia that such a "pristine" text was the best one, as will be shown below. For the

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[7] Black, AfO 22 (1980), 154; compare Leichty, *Studies Sachs* (note 4), 261; Livingstone, SAA 3, xii.

[8] Hunger, AOAT 2 (1968); Leichty, *Studies Oppenheim* (1964), 147ff.

[9] W.G. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 1ff.; 112; JCS 16 (1962), 59ff.

[10] Krecher, RLA 5, 478–485.

present, one has to answer "yes, always an author", but then ask, "one author or more?"

Certain compositions bear sufficient stamp of individuality in terms of language, art, content, and unity of purpose or message, as to suggest that that they are in fact primarily the work of one author[11]. Some of these same texts furthermore contain passages that imply or insist that this is the case and give the reader to understand that the circumstances of authorship are crucial to evaluating the text in question. Such passages give us clues to Mesopotamian notions of authorship.

One can best begin by citing a passage in a text that both names the author and cites the circumstances of the text's composition. This is found in the Erra Epic (Tablet V lines 40–61)[12].

šá $^d\grave{E}r$-*ra i–gu–gu–ma ana sa–pan matāti* $^{me\check{s}}$
    ù ḫul–lu–uq ni–ši–[šin] iš–ku–nu pa–ni–šú   (40)
^{d}*I–šum ma–lik–šú ú–ni–ḫu–šu–ma i–zi–[bu] ri–ḫa–ni–iš*
ka–ṣir kam–mì–šú ^{I}*Kab–ti–ilani* $^{me\check{s}}$–^{d}*Mar–duk mār* ^{I}*Da–bi–bi*
ina šat mu–ši ú–šab–ri–šú–ma ki–i šá ina mu–na–at–ti id–bu–bu
    a–a–am–ma ul iḫ–ṭi
e–da šu–ma ul ú–rad–di a–na muḫ–ḫi
iš–me–šu–ma $^d\grave{E}r$-*ra im–da–ḫar pa–ni–šú*   (45)
šá ^{d}*I–šum a–lik maḫ–ri–šú i–ṭib elī–šú*
ilāni $^{me\check{s}}$ *nap–ḫar–šú–nu i–na–ad–du it–ti–šú*
u (var: ù) ki–a–am iq–ta–bi qu–ra–du $^d\grave{E}r$-*ra*
ilu šá za–ma–ru šá–a–šú i–na–du ina a–šìr–ti–šú lik–tam–mer–ra
    hé–gál–lum
ù šá ú–šam–sa–ku a–a iṣ–ṣi–na qut–rin–na   (50)
šarru šá šu–mi ú–šar–bu–ú li–be–el kib–ra–a–ti
rubû šá ta–nit–ti qar–ra–du–ti–ia i–dab–bu–bu ma–ḫi–ra a–a ir–ši
^{lú}*nāru šá i–ṣar–ra–ḫu ul i–mat ina šip–ṭi*
eli šarri u rubê da–mì–iq at–mu–šú
^{lú}*ṭupšarru šá iḫ–ḫa–zu i–šet ina māt* ^{lú}*nakri i–kab–bit*
    ina mātī–šú   (55)

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[11] This judgment is occasionally hinted at by others, for example, Landsberger, JNES 20 (1961), 154 note 2, who refers to the "odd and confused diction of the poet" of the Creation Epic; and Reiner, JNES 17 (1958), 41, who refers to the "awkwardness of the scribe–poet" of Erra.

[12] For the text, see L. Cagni, *L'Epopea di Erra. Studi Semitici* 34 (1969), 126ff. For discussion of individual lines and other renderings, see Cagni, *Epopea*, 254ff.; Bottéro, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme, mythologie mésopotamienne* (Paris: 1989), 706f.; 717f.; Deller–Meyer, OrNS 53 (1984), 121f.; W.G. Lambert, Iraq 24 (1962), 119ff.

ina a–šìr–ti um–ma–a–ni a–šar ka–a–an šu–mì i–zak–ka–ru
    ú–zu–un–šú–nu a–pet–ti
ina bīti a–šar ṭup–pu šá–šú šak–nu ^d*Èr–ra li–gug–ma*
    liš–gi–šú ^d*Si–bi–it–(ti)*
pa–tar šip–ṭi ul i–ṭe–ḫi–šu–ma šá lim–tu šak–na–as su
za–ma–ru šá–a–šú a–na ma–ti–ma liš–šá–kin–ma
    li–kun ga–du ul–la
ma–ta–a–ti nap–ḫar–ši–na liš–ma–ma li na–da qur–di–ia   (60)
nišī^{meš} *da–ád–me li–mu–ra–ma li–šar–ba–a šu–mì*

How (it came to pass that) Erra grew angry and set out to
    lay waste the lands and destroy their peoples,   (40)
(But) Ishum his counsellor calmed him and he left a remnant:
The composer of its text was Kabti–ilani–Marduk, of the
    family Dabibi.
He (the god) revealed it in the nighttime,
    and, just as he (the god) had discoursed it
    while he (K.) was coming awake, he (K.)
    omitted nothing at all.
Nor one line did he add to it.
When Erra heard it he approved,
What (belonged) to Ishum his vanguard pleased him,
All the gods were praising his sign.
Then the warrior Erra spoke thus:
" In the sanctuary of the god who honors this poem,
    may abundance heap up.
" But let the one who neglects it never smell incense.
" Let the king who extols my name rule the world,
" Let the prince who discourses th(is) praise of my valor
    have no rival.
" The singer who chants (it) shall not die in pestilence,
" But his performance shall be pleasing to king and prince.
" The scribe who masters it shall be spared in an enemy
    land and honored in his own,
" In such sanctum where the learned make frequent mention
    of my name. I shall grant them understanding.
" The house in which this tablet is placed, though Erra be
    angry and the Seven be slaughtering,
" The sword of pestilence shall not approach it, safety abides
    upon it.
" Let this song abide forever, let it endure till eternity,
" Let all lands hear it and praise my valor,   (60)
" Let all inhabitants witness and extol my name."

This passage contains [1] a summary of the story (lines 40–41), and then [2] increasingly elaborate references to the text of the poem itself: first as a text with a human author (line 42), then as a revelation of Ishum, the divine protagonist of the poem, a revelation acceptable and pleasing to Erra, the subject (lines 45–46). Thereupon, with that divine acceptance, the text becomes [3] a "sign" (*ittu*) of Erra (line 47), that all the gods will heed and respect to their advantage (lines 49–50), and then [4] a "naming" of Erra (lines 51, 56, 61), [5] a "praising" of him (lines 52, 60), and, at last, [6] a "song" to be performed as well as studied and transmitted in centers of learning (lines 53–57). Actual manuscripts of the poem could be talismans against harm (lines 57–58)[13]. In other words, the text of the poem is a manifestation of the god its subject.

A second passage, this one from the end of the Creation Epic, offers instructive parallels, and could even be the model for the Erra passage (Tablet VII lines 145–162)[14].

li- iṣ ṣab–tú -ma maḫ–ru- u li–kal–lim (145)
en–qu mu–du u mit–ḫa–riš lim–tal ku
li–šá an–ni ma a–bu ma–ri li–šá -ḫi–iz
šá ⁱᵘ*rē'u u na–qi- di li–pat ta–a uz–na–šú–un*
la ig–gi ma a- na ᵈ*En–líl ilāni* ᵈ*Marduk*
mat–su lid–diš–šá–a šu–ú lu–ú šal–ma (150)
. . .
tak–lim ti maḫ -ru–ú id–bu–bu pa- nu–uš–šu (157)
iš- ṭur–ma iš–ta -kan ana ši–mi -e ar–ku–ti
[ta -nit–ta?]–at ᵈ*Marduk šá ib- nu–u ilāni* ᵈ*Igigi*
x x x li–š?at–at–tu ú šu–um–[šú] li–zak -ru (160)
[l]i- šas- s[u–m]a za–ma ru šá ᵈ*Marduk*
[šá] Ti–amat ik- mu–ma il -qu–u šar–ru–ti

They (the fifty names of Marduk) must be grasped:
    let the "first one"[15] explain (them).   (145)

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[13] See Reiner, JNES 19 (1960), 148ff.

[14] Cuneiform text in W.G. Lambert and S. Parker, *Enuma Eliš, The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (Oxford: 1966), 46f. For other renderings, see Bottéro, *Mythologie*, 653, 675; Speiser, ANET³, 72.

[15] CAD M/1, 109b takes this word to mean "senior" or "elder" (compare Labat, *Poème*, 172 note 145: "le plus digne"), whereas AHw, 586a lists this occurrence among terms referring to chronological priority, as interpreted here. Note that the "first one" is the first person to commit the text to writing after the discourse before Marduk (line 158), hence, in the terms used here, the author.

Let the wise and knowledgable discuss (them) together,
Let the master repeat (them) to make the pupil understand,
Let him open the ears of the "shepherd", the "herdsman",
He must not neglect the Enlil of the gods, Marduk,
So his land may prosper and he himself be safe.   (150)

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

The explanation (of the names) which the "first one"
    discoursed before him (Marduk),   (157)
He wrote down and preserved for those in
    the future to hear,
[The prais]es of Marduk, he who created the Igigi–gods,
Let them..., let them invoke his name.   (160)
Let them noise abroad the song of Marduk [17],
He who subdued Tiamat and took kingship.

This passage, in more indirect style than the preceding, conveys many of the same ideas, as the following elements in common will illustrate: [1] summary of the story (line 162), [2] reference to the text as having a human author (lines 145), an explanation or revelation (lines 145, 157) pleasing to its subject (line 157); [3] is not present, unless a form of *ittu* is to be restored at the beginning of line 160); [4] the poem is a naming of Marduk (lines 145, 160); the text is a "song" (line 161) that future scholars should transmit and understand correctly (lines 147, 158).

One important difference between the two passages is that the author is not named in the Creation Epic but is apparently referred to as "the first one". A second important difference is that the Creation Epic is an "explanation" (or: "revelation, disclosure") whereas the Erra Epic is a "composition".

In both instances the role of the human author is ambiguous. In the case of the Erra Epic, the text was revealed to the author as a final act of mercy of benevolent Ihum. The text stood as a guarantee that future generations need not suffer so much as those in the poem, because they could learn about Erra's ways through the poem, rather than through personal experience of his harshness. In the case of the Creation Epic, the text is also presented as if its composition were the climax its own narrative. As the gods proclaimed Marduk's names, each name and its

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[16] Reading on the basis of parallelism, *mār* = *mār mummi* or the like? A more straightforward translation with "father" and "son" is also possible, but less likely.

[17] See CAD M/1, 367b (collation).

explanation stood as the "text" for future generations to concern themselves with [18].

The names are presented as explanations of various roles and accomplishments of Marduk, without which his *res gestae* would be incomplete and liable to be forgotten or misconstrued. The naming of Marduk is thereby the text itself. This may be why the author only "discusses" or "discourses" the text, but does not "compose" it. He is not in his view narrating a story but revealing or explaining the significance of Marduk's names, this with the express approval of Marduk himself. The author, or "first one", mediates the text to succeeding generations, who must make the effort to preserve and understand it.

The third example is fragmentary, and more problematic (Atrahasis Tablet III col. VIII 9–16) [19].

ki–ma ni–iš–ku–[nu a–bu–b]a
a–wi–lum ib–lu–ṭ[ú i–na ka–ra–ši]   (10)
at–ta ma–li–ik i–[li ra–bu–ti]
te–re–ti–iš–[ka] ú–šá–ab–ši GA–a[b/p–(x)]
ša–ni–it–ti–iš–[ka] an–ni–a–am za–ma–[ra]   (14/15)
li–iš–mu–ma ᵈ*I–gi–g[u] li–iṣ–ṣí–ru na–ar–bi–ka*
a–bu–ba a–na ku–ul–la–at ni–ši ú–za–am–me–er ši–me a

"How we brought about the [flood]
"(But) a man survived the [catastrophe],   (10)
"You, counsellor of the [great] gods,
"At [your] command have I brought a... [ ] to be,
"This song (is) for your praise.   (14/15)
"May the Igigi–gods hear, let them extol your greatness
    to each other.
"I have sung of the flood to all peoples:
"Listen!"

Lines 9–10 are another example of a "plot summary" (compare Creation and Erra Epics [1] above); lines 11–12 a reference to Enki's intervention in the production of the text (compare Creation and Erra

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[18] See Bottéro in M. deJ. Ellis, ed., *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein* (Hamden, CT: 1977), 5ff.

[19] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra–ḫasīs, The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: 1969), 104. See also von Soden, OrNS 38 [1969], 432; Bottéro, *Mythologie*, 554.

Epics [2] above); and lines 14–16 a reference to the other gods' heeding the message of the text (compare Erra Epic [3] above). Finally, the text is pronounced by the ever conciliatory Enki to be a work of "praise" for the might of Enlil, executed at his own command (compare Creation and Erra Epics [5] above). The restoration of line 12 is uncertain, but one expects here a reference to the composition of the text; the following line would expand this idea by parallelism [20]. It is probable that Enki is speaking at least lines 9–12, and perhaps 14–16 as well, although, here, as in the next example, the poet's speaking voice and that of his divine inspirer are impossible to distinguish grammatically, perhaps deliberately so.

A passage in Agushaya alludes to the circumstances of the text's composition in the context of a blessing on the reigning king (col. vii 23–29), and mentions composition of the text again in col. viii 11–17 [21].

ù šar–rum ša an–ni–a–am za–ma–ra–am (23)
i–da–at qu-úr–di–ki ta–ni-it ta-ki iš–mu–ni
Ḫa–am–mu ra–bi an–ni–a–am za–ma–[ra–am] (26)
i–na pa–li- šu ta–ni–it–ki in -né–ep–šu
lu šu–ut–lu–um–šu ad–da–ar ba la-ṭú (29)

As for the king who heard (from me?)   (23)
This song, your praise, signs of your valor,
Hammurabi, in whose reign   (26)
(By means of) this song, my praise of you (Ishtar) was made,
May he be granted life forever!   (29)

This refers obliquely to the text as a "sign of your (Ishtar's) might" (line 25, compare Erra Epic [3]). As it appears, the verb used for the composition of the text is passive, though the author refers to himself twice in the stanza quoted below:

lu–na–id Ištár šar–ra- tu i–la–tim (11/12)
A–gu–ša–ia du un–na–ša ki–ma te-li–i [   ]
la-ì -iš -ta ᵈŠa–al–ta ša aš²–šu–mi–ša (15)
ib–nu–ú–ši ᵈÉ–a ni-iš–ši–i–ku

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[20] Following Lambert–Millard, dictionaries and all translations I have seen restore *qab[lam]* "battle" (CAD Q, 15f. "catastrophe"). If this is correct, the reference to the text begins in the next line.

[21] See Groneberg, RA 75 (1981), 127f.; Bottéro, *Mythologie*, 214.

i–da–at du–un–ni–ša   (18)
ka–la ni–ši ú–še–eš–me
ub–ta–an–ni ta–ar bi–a–ta–ša   (20)

Let me praise Ishtar, queen of the gods,   (11/12)
Agushaya, (whose?) might, like the Capa[ble Lady's...]
Clamorous (?) Saltu, whom Ea the leader,   (15)
Created on account of her (Ishtar),
The signs of her might I/he   (18)
Made all the people hear,
I/he have/has made fair her glorification.   (20)

In this stanza, a brief summary of the story is given (lines 14–17),
compare Creation and Erra Epics [1] and, through grammatical
ambiguity (compare above, Atrahasis), the poet seems to attribute both
to himself and to Ea the genesis and dissemination of his text, as well as
its extraordinary artfulness.

A fifth example is found in the Old Babylonian hymn to Ishtar
stanza xiv [22].

bi–be–el li–ib–bi–i–ša za–ma–ar la–le–e–ša
na–ṭú–um–ma a–na pi–i–šu si–iq–ri É–a i–pu–is si
eš–me–e–ma ta–ni–it ta–a–ša i–re–us su
li–ib–lu–uṭ–mi šar–ra–šu li–ra–am–šu ad–da–ri–iš

What she desires, this song for her pleasure,
Is indeed well suited to his (the king's) mouth,
      he performed for her Ea's (own) word(s).
When he (Ea) heard her praises,
      he was well pleased with him (the king)/it (the song),
Saying, "Let him live long, may his (own) king always love him".

Like the Agushaya poem, this refers obliquely to the excellence and
efficacy of the text in the context of a blessing on the reigning king. The
third line implies that the "word" of Ea is, in fact, the text itself. It is

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[22] Thureau-Dangin, RA 22 (1925), 174; for the poem in general, see von Soden,
SAHG, 235ff. no. 1; Stephens, ANET³, 383 (incomplete); Seux, *Hymnes*, 39ff.; Hecker,
AOAT 8, 77ff. A parallel passage in the OB Hymn to Nanay stanza xi is fragmentary, so
could not be discussed here (Zimmern, VAS 10, 215, edited by von Soden, ZA 44 [1938],
32ff.; see von Soden, SAHG, 237ff. no. 2; Seux, *Hymnes*, 42ff.; Hecker, *Epik*, 86ff.). This
may have contained the same motif.

not clear whether Ea is pleased with the king or the text; grammar favors the king, but the parallel passages the text (*zamāru*). It is noteworthy that it is not Anu, Ishtar's spouse, referred to earlier in the poem, who is pleased here, but the god of wisdom. This indicates that the poet has in mind the excellence of his text, whatever the exact meaning of the line[23].

In any case the hymn, fit for a king to recite, uses Ea's own words, that is, was inspired by him. Here, as in Erra and the Creation Epic, the poet stops short of saying outright that a god "composed" the text, but a god was manifestly associated with its preparation.

One may compare to this in passing some lines from a "Great Prayer" to Marduk[24].

i–ta–mu–ka ina un–nin–ni   (145)
ši–iṭ–ru šá ᵈ*É–a li–šap–šiḫ lib–bu–uk–ka*
te–mi–qu–šú e–liš li–kil–ka

They are addressing you in prayers,
Let the text of Ea appease your heart,
Let his/its right wording hold you back on high.

Here too the reference is presumably to the great hymn itself rather than to an incantation; hence the wording of this prayer is associated with the god of wisdom himself.

Perhaps the strangest account of authorship in Akkadian literature is found at the conclusion of the "Vision of the Assyrian Crown Prince", wherein a certain scribe claims that he overheard the prince shouting the text in the street and remembered it without making a mistake (compare above, Erra Epic, lines 43–44)[25].

ka–bit–tu ú–šá–aṣ–ri–iḫ–ma uₓ–a lib–bi i–qab–bi ina su–ú–qi
šil–ta–ḫiš ú–ṣi–ma ep–ri sūli rebīti a–na pī–šú ú–sa–ap
ri–ig–mu gal–tu iš–ta–nak–kan uₓ–a a–[a?]   (31)
mi–nu–ú an–na–a–ti ta–ši–man–ni ia–a–ši i–šá–as–si
qur–di ᵈ*Nergal* ᵈ*Ereš–ki–gal ša a–na re–ṣu–ti rubî–ma i–zi–zu*

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[23] Compare KAR 104, line 8 (*ušarraḫ nakliš*), see Foster, *Studies Finkelstein*, 84 note 38.

[24] W.G. Lambert, AfO 19 (1959/60), 58. For the poem in general, see also von Soden, SAHG, 270ff. no. 18; Seux, *Hymnes*, 172ff.; Sommerfeld, AOAT 213 (1982), 129ff.

[25] Livingstone, SAA 3, 76; compare von Soden, ZA 43 (1936), 18f., see also Speiser, ANET³, 109f.; Labat, *Religions*, 94ff. For *temiqu*, see the remarks of Seux, *Hymnes*, 72 note 19.

ina pa–an ba–ḫu–la–ti māt Aš–šur^{ki} *mar–ṣi–iš id–da–lál*   (32)
ù šu–ù ṭupšarru (LÚ . A . BA) *ša ina maḫ–re–e ṭa–a'–tu im–ḫu–ru*
ina man–zal–ti abī–šú e–zi–zu i–na uz–ni ni–kil–ti ša ^d*É–a*
    ú–šat–li–mu–šú   (33)
eg[err]e (INIM . [GAR]) *di–li–li i–na lìb–bi–šú iš–du–ud–ma*
ki–a–am ina ṣur–ri–šú iq–bi ma–a áš–šú a–de–e a–na le–mut–ti
a–a iṭ–[ḫu]–ni a–a is–niq–u–ni   (34)
[   ] *iq–bu–u ep–ši–ti–ia lu–pu–uš il–lik–ma a–na ekalli*
ú–ša–an–ni ma–a an–nu–ú lu nam–búr–bi–ia   (35)

He cried out a lament, saying "woe is me!"
He darted out into the street like an arrow and
scooped up dirt from alley and square in his mouth,
all the while setting up a frightful clamor,
"Woe! Alas! Why have you ordained this for me?"
He was shouting in front of the subjects of the land of Assur,
Praising in his misery the valor of Nergal and Ereskigal,
Who had stood forth to aid the prince.
As for him, the scribe who formerly had accepted a present,
assuming his father's post, with the astuteness that Ea
bestowed upon him, he took th(ose) words of praise to
heart, saying to himself, "Lest disloyalty bring me to
harm, I must do what [the king?] commanded".
So he/I went and reported it to the palace, saying "This shall
be my protection from evil".

It is tempting to compare this passage with that of the Erra Epic. Earlier in the vision Ishum interecedes for the prince; the text protects the author from harm because he did not really write it himself. He writes it down out of a sense of duty born of a loyalty oath to the king. The danger to the scribe was the contents of the text, which seems to portray the prince and perhaps his royal father in uncomplimentary terms.

    Another indirect reference to authorship may be found in the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer Tablet III lines 41ff[26]. There the dying man, whose name is given for the first time in the poem, has a vision of an

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[26] See W.G. Lambert, BWL, 21ff. For the poem in general, see also Biggs, ANET³, 596ff.; Labat, *Religions*, 328ff.; Bottéro, *Recherches et Documents du Centre Thomas More* 77/7, 11ff.; von Soden, MDOG 96 (1965), 41ff.

exorcist carrying a tablet, and one may wonder if the tablet, rather than
being an incantation, is in fact the text of the poem. His "people" are
skeptical at first [27], but a "sign" is provided for them, and they believe.

[ina] mu–na–at–ti iš–pu–ra ši–p[ir–ta]
it–tuš dam–qa–tu niši^{meš}iá uk–[tal–lim].

Just as (I) was coming awake, he sent the mes[sage],
He reve[aled] his favorable signs to my people.

Could the signs, otherwise undefined, be return of his eloquence (= this
text?) as part of his general recovery? This would then be another
instance of a text figuring in its own narration. Both the motif of return
of eloquence after a period of suffering and publication in the day of a
message received at night are as old as Enheduana [28], while the
phraseology of this passage parallels both Erra (munatti, ittu) and the
Creation Epic (uktallim).
      Assurbanipal's Hymn to Assur concludes as follows [29]:

palē (BALA.MEŠ) ar ku šanāte (MU.AN.NA.MEŠ) la ni–bi   (10')
a–a im–ma–ši ta–nit–ti Aššur (AN.ŠÁR) li–šaḫ–sis É–šar–ra
liš–ša–kin ina pi–i la na–par–ka–a li–pat–ti uz–nu   (12')
...

In future reigns and years without number,   (10')
May (this) praise of Anshar not be forgotten,
May it keep one mindful of Esharra!
May it always be in (every) mouth,   (12')
May it never cease to enlarge understanding!
...

The call for perpetuity and universal understanding of the text and
stress on the importance of its message are reminiscent of the similar
passages in the Creation Epic [6]. One may suggest that this passage was
in fact inspired by the Creation Epic, perhaps through its Assyrianized

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[27] Tablet III, lines 19ff. (see BWL, 344): [i–q]u–lu–ma "they were quiet... [na? ḫiš]
iš–mu–nin–ni they listened to me in silence...".

[28] nì gi₆–ù–na ma–ra–an–du₁₁–ga / gala an–NE–ke₄(?) šu ḫu–mu–ra–ab–gi₄–gi₄ "What I
said to you at night (= the poem), / May the singer repeat it to you at midday" (Hallo–van
Dijk, YNER 3 [1968], 32f., 62, and note p. 71).

[29] Livingstone, SAA 3, 6; see also von Soden, SAHG, 254ff. no. 8; Seux, Hymnes 90ff.

version in which Anshar (Assur) is substituted for Marduk. Like the passage from the Creation Epic discussed above, this hymn speaks of "disclosing" and "revealing" its subject (line 11: [*a–na kul*] *lu–me ad na–a–ti*).

A more elaborate development of these ideas is found in another hymn ascribed to Assurbanipal [30].

[   ] *x* ^{d}[*Šamaš*] *an–na–a i–za–am–mu–ru i zak–ka–ru*
    zi–kir ^{Id}*Aššur–bāni–apli*   (21)
[*kal?*] [*u₄*] *–me–šú ina tuḫ–di u me šá ri li ir–te–'a–a*
    ba 'u lat ^{d}*En–líl*
[   ] *x šá kam–mu an–na–a iḫ–ḫa–zu ú–šar–ra–ḫu*
    dayyān (DI.KU₅) *ilāni*^{mes} ^{d}*Šamaš*
[*x?* DIN]GIR$^?$*–šú li–šáqir–šú e–piš pi–i–šú eli nišē*^{mes}
    li–ṭib
ša za–ma–ra an–na–a ú–šab–ṭa–lu la ú–šar–ra–ḫu
    ^{d}*Šamaš nūr* (ZALÁG) *ilāni*^{mes}*rabûti*^{mes} (25)
ù šuma Aššur–bāni–apli šá ^{d}*Šamaš ina bi–ri iq–bu–u*
    e–piš šarrūti–šú uš–pi–lu ma
šu–me šarri šá–nam–ma i–nam bu–ú
lu–up–pu–ut pit–ni–šú eli nišē^{mes}(*var: šú*) *lim–ra–aṣ*
    e–li–lu–šú lu si–ḫi–il ^{giš}*balti*

[The prince who] performs this [song] of Shamash, who
    pronounces the name of Assurbanipal,   (21)
May he shepherd in prosperity and justice the subjects
    of Enlil [all] his days.
[The singer] who masters this text, who extols Shamash,
    judge of the gods,
May... his god (?) hold him in good esteem, may his performance
    be pleasing to people.
He who abandons this song to obscurity, who does not extol
    Shamash, light of the great gods,   (25)
Or who makes substitution for the name of Assurbanipal,
    whose assumption of kingship Shamash commanded by oracle,
And who names some other king,
May his string-playing be painful to people,
May his joyful songs be the gouge of a thorn!

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[30] Ebeling, KAR 105 rev 6 13 and 361 rev 2–8; see *Quellen* I, 25ff; restorations von Soden, SAHG, 247ff. no. 5; see also Stephens, ANET³, 386ff.; Seux, *Hymnes*, 63ff.

This example, like the proceding, seems to echo the Creation or Erra Epics. While this passage does not state that Assurbanipal wrote the hymn, it is in the first person and apostrophizes future rulers of Assyria (like the Hymn to Assur, above). Its call for preservation of the text, known from both the Erra and Creation Epics, is expanded by making the hymn a monument to Assurbanipal as well as a discourse on the nature of Assur.

The examples chosen here have enough points in common, despite their thousand–year time span, to allow one to propose the existence of a Mesopotamian poetic tradition whereby the author might refer to the genesis, divine approval of, composition, authority, and traditing of his text.

(*a*) Genesis. Some examples imply or state inspiration for the text in more or less ambiguous terms. In the case of Erra, the text was "revealed"; in the Creation Epic, the text was proclaimed during a ceremony, and was "explained" or "revealed" by the author. In Agushaya, Atrahasis, and the hymn to Ishtar, the author's participation was indistinguishable from that of the god of wisdom himself, or at least the god "caused it to be". One suspects that in both the Atrahasis and Agushaya passages the ambiguity between the third and first person speaker (god or poet?) is intentional.

(*b*) Approval. In the cases of Erra and the Creation Epic, as well as the Ishtar hymn, the texts were heard and approved by a god. In Erra and the Vision of the Crown Prince the author insists that he did not alter the text from its original form; in the Creation Epic the poet is concerned that future generations will understand the text correctly. In Atrahasis the text is made into a command of Enlil by the artful Ea.

(*c*) Composition is referred to as "composing", "discoursing", "writing down", "being made". With the exception of Erra, the precise manner of composition and the respective role of inspirer and inspired are left ambiguous. The text is called a "song" (*zamāru*), that is, "poem", or a "composition" (*kammu*).

(*d*) Authority for the text is granted in the form of divine approval, that it find a unique place in the universe. Such authority is referred to in Erra, Creation Epic, and implied in Atrahasis, as well as in the Ishtar hymn. The text can have life–giving (Ishtar and Marduk hymns), protective (Netherworld Vision), or apotrapaic powers (Erra). Its peculiar status as a "sign" of the god its subject is found in both Agushaya and Erra, and it may be a sign of the sufferer's recovery in the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer. In the Creation Epic the text is glorified as a key for humankind to understand the reorganized universe. Erra and the

Creation Epic constitute acts of mercy by a god, in the case of Erra by a. protagonist (Ishum), in the case of the Creation Epic by Marduk himself.

(*e*) Traditing and dissemination of the text are referred to in Erra, the Creation Epic, Agushaya, Atrahasis, and the Assurbanipal hymns both synchronically and diachronically: "all people" are supposed to hear it, as well as succeeding generations in time.

Mesopotamian poetic tradition seems therefore to have had a clearly defined notion of individual inspiration and authorship, as well as of a pristine text that had not been added to or taken away from. Whereas modern literary tradition stresses the individual's importance as a matrix of creative impulse, Mesopotamian artistic tradition tended rather to stress the outside source of the inspiration. Such individual inspiration made the works in question unique. Indeed, their work's inspired uniqueness was stressed by poets themselves, in that they dwelt on the time or occasion of the composition of their texts, showing, in some instances (Creation Epic, Erra), their crowning significance for certain events of cosmic importance: the texts were the climax of their own narratives. Their authority was thereby peculiarly enhanced, for the texts partook of the events they described, and became as well a source of blessing, prosperity, security, well-being, and knowledge. The effort of composition is passed over lightly; the only hint is the artist's pride at the quality of his product [31].

Seen in this light, the author's name can be given as a detail of the circumstances of composition (Erra), or omitted (Creation Epic). Indeed, its presence, as in the Assurbanipal hymns, creates a certain tension, in that the texts are supposed to be a "naming" of their divine subjects (for example Gula, Assur, Erra, Marduk, Ea). Seen as an act of naming or praise, the text requires the name of the subject praised; the absence of a praiser's name gives the text universality that it lacks when it becomes an individual petition.

The real significance of the absence of an author's name may lie yet deeper in recognition that performer, traditer, or auditor of the text play roles no less important than that of the author himself. As was stressed, the author's inspiration and composition of the text were events circumscribed in time. Nearly all examples urge the importance of dissemination and understanding the product. Without this the text is lost, and the author's achievement nullified. Just as the text is impossible

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[31] Call for preservation of the text is to be distinguished from scribal curses and blessings in connection with the conservation of manuscripts, for which see Offner, RA 44 (1950), 135ff.

without its initiating inspiration and its mediating author, so too it is impossible without its traditer and appreciative auditor. Authors in Mesopotamian civilization well knew and were wont to recall in their texts that composition was an ongoing, contributive enterprise, in which the author, or "first one", was present only at the beginning.