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Critical Editions of Ancient Texts

Babylonian Ceremonial Script in Its Scholarly Context

Volume 1

Carole Roche-Hawley



LOCKWOOD PRESS

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ṭup-šar-ru-tu$_4$ *bīt bu-ni*
ni-ṣir-ti am-ma-an-ki-[*ma*]
ta-da-al-lip-šim-ma
ni-ṣir-ta-šá ú-kal-lam-[*ka*]

The scribal art is a "house of richness,"
the secret of Amanki.
Work ceaselessly with the scribal art
and it will reveal its secret to you.

The Scribal Art (from Sjöberg 1972, 127–28).

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Preface

My first contact with paleographic lists was in 2000 in Syria while I was working on the newly excavated texts (1999) from Ras Shamra. In charge of the establishment of the catalog of the Akkadian texts for the mission, I discovered such lists and the ceremonial script. Since then, I have worked on these texts regularly in Damascus. I developed my research in Aleppo thanks to the support and authorizations of Daniel Arnaud and Jean-Claude Margueron who allowed me to work on the texts found in Tell Meskene–Emar. I would like to thank them here and Michel al-Maqdissi and the DGAM, and staff of the Aleppo Museum for their help.

After my initial studies on the paleographic lists from Ugarit and Emar (Roche-Hawley 2012b) I chose to develop this research into the first millennium for a comprehensive view on the topic. Most of the texts are neo-Assyrian and part of the British Museum collections. I am very thankful to Jonathan Taylor and the entire staff of the study room for their help. This was the research I proposed for my *Habilitation à diriger des recherches* defended with Brigitte Lion as referee and the following jury: Dominique Beyer, Dennis Pardee, Jonathan Taylor, and Niek Veldhuis. I thank all of the members of this jury for their remarks and encouragement for the publication of this work. I thank Andrew Burlingame for the initial translation into English. I also wish to express here my gratitude to Robert Hawley for his endless support and mutliple adaptations of the English version of my manuscript.

I was unable to collate the tablets excavated in Sippar, Ur, Uruk, and Assur preserved in museums in Turkey or Iraq. The texts from Sippar are particularly relevant and important for this study since they would be the oldest examples of paleographic lists, but I was not able to access these texts, which is unfortunate since publications mention these texts with neither copies nor pictures.

These paleographic lists, attested for the second and first millennia, record archaizing forms of the cuneiform signs used in monumental inscriptions and glyptic, as well as in certain scholarly texts. Copied over more than one thousand years, they demonstrate an intellectual and scholastic approach that combines the transmission of preserved knowledge with logical and creative reflection.

Taking up this largely unpublished corpus (or only transcribed in the MSL) and editing the sixty or so texts it contains, spread over a millennium and attested in Babylonia and Assyria, as well as on the periphery, I became fascinated by a subject that is relatively neglected and that took me much further than I had first thought. All Assyriologists have known since the nineteenth century AD that there were two types of script in ancient Mesopotamia: the script we call "cursive," which was used for everyday documents, but also most library texts,

etc., and a script for which a label is not fixed, which is presented as an archaizing writing, reserved primarily for what Oppenheim called ceremonial use, royal texts, votive texts, and so on. While this digraphy is well known in Assyriology, neither historians of scripts nor Assyriologists consider it in their presentations of cuneiform writing. All descriptions of cuneiform speak of a linear evolution. The same cannot be said for Egypt, where the emphasis is on the coexistence of different scripts for different uses at the same time. In the case of cuneiform, despite the classic pattern found in all textbooks, some signs from different periods are in fact very similar, and clearly distinguishable from those used in practice. So there really is such a thing as hieratic writing, lapidary writing, paleo-Babylonian lapidary writing, archaizing writing, and calligraphic writing. This script was used for over two millennia and, after 150 years of Assyriology, there is no specific study devoted to it, nor any syllabary.

This volume, in addition to a study of paleographic lists and the creation of a syllabary, provides the first step in a wider study of this script. This script was used in thousands of documents (seals, bricks, lapidary inscriptions, etc.) and it is obviously not possible to present a complete study of this material. For me, it is all about opening up a field of study and asking questions about the purpose of this writing—for example, its prestige value among scribes (and even Assurbanipal was sensitive to this when he declared he was able to "read inscriptions from before the flood"); to denote solemnity; and probably magical and religious purposes.

Tamaris-sur-mer, August 18th 2023

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72. Rm 2,204 obverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
73. Rm 2,204 reverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
74. UET 7, 151. Copy O. Gurney.
75. UET 7, 152. Copy O. Gurney.
76. UET 7, 153. Copy O. Gurney.
77. UET 7, 154. Copy O. Gurney.
78. UET 7, 155. Copy O. Gurney.
79. UET 7, 156. Copy O. Gurney.
80. UET 7, 157 obverse. Copy O. Gurney.
81. UET 7, 157 reverse. Copy O. Gurney.
82. UET 7, 158. Copy O. Gurney.

83. UET 7, 159. Copy O. Gurney.
84. UET 7, 160. Copy O. Gurney.
85. UET 7, 161. Copy O. Gurney.
86. BM 55147 obverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
87. BM 55147 reverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
88. BM 72170. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
89. BM 60185+ obverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
90. BM 60185+ reverse. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
91. BM 37957. Photograph by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
92. CTMMA 2, 45 fragment 1
93. CTMMA 2, 45 fragment 2
94. CTMMA 2, 45 fragment 3
95. CUSAS 12, 2.2 (photograph CDLI)
96. K 8520 + ND 4311 obverse. Copy of ND 4311 by Wiseman CTN 4, 229; photograph of K 8520 by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
97. K 8520 + ND 4311 reverse. Copy ND 4311 by Wiseman CTN 4, 229; photographof K 8520 by the author with the kind authorization of the Trustees of the British Museum.
98. Msk 74107ao. Photograph by the author.
99. Msk 74117o. Copy D. Arnaud, *Emar IV*, vol. 1.
100. Msk 74152e. Copy D. Arnaud, *Emar IV*, vol. 1.
101. Msk 7415c. Photograph by the author.
102. Msk 74146r. Photograph by the author.
103. Msk 7483b. Copy D. Arnaud, *Emar IV*, vol. 1.

Abbreviations

AAA	*Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AuOrSup	Aula Orientalis Supplementa
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CTN	Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology
Emar IV	Beyer, Dominique. *Emar IV: Les sceaux. Mission archéologique de Meskéné-Emar. Recherches au pays d'Aštata.* OBOSA 20. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001.
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Records
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
JANER	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEOL	*Jaarbericht Ex Orient Lux*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
MARI	*Mari Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires*
MDP	Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique en Iran
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient Gesellschaft*
MRS	Mission Archéologique de Ras Shamra
Msk	tablet siglum of texts from Meskene
MSL	Materials for a Sumerian Lexicon/Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon
NABU	*Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBOSA	OBO Series Archaeologica
OIMP	Oriental Institute Museum Publications
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul

POLO	Proche-Orient et Littérature Ougaritique
RA	*Revue Assyriologique*
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Period
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–2018.
RS	tablet siglum of texts from Ras Shamra
RSO	Ras Shamra-Ougarit
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SMEA	*Studi micenei ed egeo-anatolici*
SpTU	Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk
SSS	Semitic Study Series
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
StMes	*Studia Mesopotamica*
UAVA	Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie
UE	Ur Excavations
UET	Ur Excavations. Texts
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
Ugaritica 3	Schaeffer, Claude F.-A. *Sceaux et cylindres hittites, épée gravée du cartouche de Mineptah, tablettes chypro-minoennes et autres découvertes nouvelles de Ras Shamra*. Mission de Ras Shamra 8. Paris: Geuthner, 1956.
Ugaritica 5	Nougayrol, Jean, Emmanuel Laroche, Charles Virolleaud, and Claude F. A. Schaeffer. *Nouveaux textes acccadiens, hourrites et ugaritiques des archives et bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit*. Mission de Ras Shamra 16. Paris: Geuthner, 1968.
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
YOS	Yale Oriental Studies
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archaologie*
ZK	*Zeitschrift für Keilschriftforschung*

Introduction

"(It is) engraved in beautiful, archaic characters that recall—even to the point of being mistaken for—the forms used more than 1,500 years earlier by the scribes of Hammurabi" …

"(It) can nearly sustain comparison with the texts of Hammurabi and Gudea, and … (it) has … greatly facilitated the decipherment of truly archaic texts"

[Comments in regard to the script of an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II]

Amiaud and Méchineau 1887, xiii–xiv[1]

Assyriologists tend to present the history of Mesopotamian cuneiform in terms of linear evolution. For Egypt, however, specialists generally do not insist excessively nor exclusively on such linear evolution (even if one can, and does, present the development of a given sign from hieroglyphic to hieratic and on to demotic forms). Instead, Egyptologists generally insist on the coexistence of different scripts, which were often in use at the same time, depending on the register of the inscription. This same phenomenon has been observed and recognized for Mesopotamia as well, of course, although this has not been emphasized to the same degree.

An archaizing cuneiform script was in use from the beginning of the second millennium BCE. This script has often been described as lapidary, but such a characterization is reductive, since, even already under Hammurapi in the eighteenth century BCE, this archaizing script was also being used for nonlapidary inscriptions—in scribal colophons, for example. Indeed, it was also this deliberately archaizing script that ancient scholars employed in order to display their erudition and to demonstrate their knowledge. Archaizing script has thus long been an integral part of Babylonian scholarly tradition.

Babylonian archaizing script, as used from the beginning of the second through the end of the first millennium BCE, in fact, echos the shapes and structures of cuneiform signs as they were at the end of the third millennium BCE.

1. "(Elle est) gravée en beaux caractères archaïques qui rappellent presque à s'y méprendre les formes usités plus de 1500 ans auparavant par les scribes de Hammurabi … (elle) peut presque soutenir la comparaison avec les textes de Hammurabi et de Gudea, et qui a tant aidé au déchiffrement des véritables textes archaïques."

This kind of writing thus directly alluded, at least for the scribes, to ancient and venerable Sumerian lore.

Defining the Terminology

Archaizing Babylonian script, the subject of this book, has often been described as a lapidary script, as noted above. John Huehnergard, for example, in his *A Grammar of Akkadian*, draws a distinction between "Old Babylonian lapidary" and "Old Babylonian cursive" forms (Huehnergard 2011, 563–74). Though traditional, such terminological choices are also slightly reductive. The use of archaizing cuneiform in a monumental lapidary inscription may of course have been expected as a feature of that literary genre, but when scribes of the Old Babylonian period, or even later, at thirteenth-century Emar on the Middle Euphrates, wrote their colophons on clay tablets using this same archaizing script, it was probably not generic considerations that led them to do so, but instead a desire to display their knowledge of ancient cuneiform.

A. Leo Oppenheim (1964, 230) famously defined three uses of writing in the ancient Near East as follows:

> the recording of data for future use; the communication of data on a synchronic level; and what I would like to term ceremonial use—a term that seems vague only for us of the late Western world where such a use has become rare.

He further explained that with this latter category he was referring to inscriptions not intended to be read by human eyes. In his view, in ancient Mesopotamia as well as in Egypt, this type of ceremonial use had an almost magical function. Even if such were the case, one might also add that the Babylonian script studied here can be defined as ceremonial in its function and archaizing in its morphology; indeed, in this script, deliberate archaisms predominate.

In Babylonia, this archaizing script is used above all for monumental and votive inscriptions. In his article "L'écriture publique du pouvoir à Babylone sous Nabuchodonosor II," Francis Joannès emphasized, in regard to ancient "readings" of inscribed bricks, that "even if it is 'public' writing, it is … neither legible nor visible writing" since the "inscriptions are not ordinarily visible, being quite frequently placed on the underside of the bricks."[2] In addition to such a practical obstacle, these brick inscriptions were also most often written in deliberately archaizing characters that not all of the contemporary scholars would probably have been able to read. For Joannès, this is a case "of an indirect form of the writing of power and of the manifestation of royal action: in most cases invisible, (and) intended, as in the case of foundation documents, for symbolic divine reading, it provides very little information regarding the actions of the sovereign."[3]

2. Joannès 2011, 115: "s'il s'agit d'une écriture "publique", ce n'est … pas une écriture lisible ni visible … (les) inscriptions ne sont normalement pas visibles, puisque très souvent placées sur la partie inférieure des briques."

3. Joannès 2011, 115: "une forme indirecte d'écriture du pouvoir et de manifestation de

In ancient Babylonia, it was thus this deliberately archaizing script that was used almost exclusively in such votive "prestige" inscriptions: unreadable messages hidden from mortal eyes and addressed instead to the gods. One might well ask in this light: Was this archaizing script the preferred graphic means for addressing the gods?

Following Oppenheim, it thus seems appropriate to characterize this deliberately archaizing script as a Babylonian ceremonial script (see, e.g., Cohen 2012). In employing the term "ceremonial" we mean to refer to the fundamental uses of this script: monumental, prestigious, and display. This type of script has been given many and various names and labels in past publications: "hieratic" is the oldest, then "lapidary" (as already mentioned), "monumental," and less frequently, "calligraphic." All of these terms are of course equivocal. *Hieratic*, ironically enough, is perhaps the least problematic among them, since, etymologically at least, it refers specifically to inscriptions of a religious character—and we shall see that such religious-display inscriptions are almost always written in this deliberately archaizing script in ancient Babylonia—and by extension would designate all that have a character of austere majesty, immutability, or gravity, seemingly imposed by rite or tradition. But while our predecessors may have used it freely in the nineteenth century to refer to the script that we will call here "ceremonial," most today would probably feel constrained by the use of such a term, as it has come to be defined chiefly in connection with the field of Egyptology. The terms lapidary or monumental, on the other hand, do not cover the entire corpus that attests to this practice, for, as we shall see, this script is one employed by scholars as well.

From an etymological standpoint, the term "calligraphy" refers primarily to the idea of a beautiful script, and this is often the definition given in reference works, such as Florian Coulmas's *Writing Systems* (1996, 59–66). Yet, comparison of several calligraphic scripts quickly reveals the bewildering diversity of the conceptions that are or have been attested, but none of the calligraphic scripts known in China, in the Arabic tradition, or elsewhere, seems comparable in usage to the script studied here.[4]

l'action royale : la plupart du temps non visible, destinée comme les documents de fondation à une lecture divine symbolique, elle ne fournit que peu de renseignements sur les actions du souverain."

4. From a comparative point of view, the two most important calligraphic systems—owing both to the range of their production and to the place they hold in society—are certainly those of Arabic and Chinese. To place both of these under the single term calligraphy when they arise from such different conceptions may already be debatable: whereas the first can serve as a means for the believer to approach God on a path with the goal of interpreting letters that have taken on a nearly sacred character by the complex connection between the revealed oral text and its writing, the second can originate in an individual meditation and quest for harmony and a nearly philosophical interpretation of the surrounding world. Both can be understood as artistic, but in neither instance is it a matter of "beautiful writing" founded on an exclusively esthetic definition. For a general overview of the history of calligraphy, see Poggi 2014. For Arabic calligraphy and the relation between writing and the divine, see Lory 2004 and for a

To use the expressions "display script" or "exhibitory script"[5] would probably also be accurate and appropriate in most instances, but archaizing Babylonian script was not always, and not necessarily, intended for such "display."

For this reason, I prefer the term "ceremonial script," in reference to Oppenheim's definition of the different uses of writings in the ancient Near East. We should specify once more that in essence, Babylonian ceremonial script is archaizing.

The "Paleographic Lists"

It has become common to speak of *paleographic lists* to refer to digraphic sign lists presenting signs in an archaizing form, which appear together with a "transcription" into a different "modern" form. It is undeniable that such texts can be considered paleographic: they provide instruction (or the archiving of knowledge) regarding paleography. In this case, following Niek Veldhuis, we could speak of "explanatory" lists. Thus understood, and as we shall see, these lists, which present archaizing forms (accompanying the signs used in Babylonian ceremonial script) together with an explanatory transcription in contemporary cursive cuneiform, seem to make their first appearance in the periphery of Babylonia at several places simultaneously at the end of the Late Bronze Age (probably the thirteenth century). They likely arose from a need to note the "reading" of an archaizing sign in a more familiar cuneiform—in local cursive. Should this process be compared to the contemporary production of explanatory lists—by columns or glosses—that are characteristic of the peripheral corpora? Indeed, it is during this same period that one finds in Egypt, in Hittite Anatolia, as well as in Syria (on the Mediterranean coast but also on the Euphrates) or Palestine, lists in which, alongside Sumerograms, readings in Akkadian are sometimes also noted, sometimes even followed by simple glosses or by entire further columns of readings in the local language(s) or vernaculars (and noted according to local custom).

This principle of appropriating archaizing cuneiform as it was practiced in the thirteenth century in Babylonia, rendering it accessible by transcriptions, would then be parallel to the practice of explaining lists of imported knowledge by conceiving and inserting "bridges" to the local language(s).

While it may seem clear that the bi-scriptal lists can be defined as paleographic, what about lists that do not present such a transcription into local contemporary cursive? The case of the Neo-Assyrian tablet K 8520 + ND 4311 is pertinent: it is undoubtedly a paleographic list in several ways since it presents a transcription of a given pictogram into Babylonian ceremonial script; the "transcription" could thus be into another script other than local contemporary cursive. At thirteenth century Emar, however, when a scribe copied the S^a sign list referencing

summary of the discussion regarding the appropriateness of using the term calligraphy for the Arabic script, see Cemil Schick 2016. For Chinese calligraphy, see Alleton 2008, 177–78.

5. Such was the expression selected by Corbier for the Roman context (Corbier 2006, 9).

Babylonian ceremonial script forms but without a transcription into local cursive (Msk 74132c), is this not nevertheless a "paleographic" list as well? And when a contemporary scribe from Ugarit copied a list of divine names, the so-called Weidner God List (if, as I suspect, RS 20.121 was indeed copied locally), in which the signs are often, though not exclusively, archaizing, are we not in that case too dealing with a "paleographic" list?[6]

Babylonian scribes labored to copy ancient texts carefully in archaizing script (following ancient models) throughout the second and first millennia BCE. A literary or lexical text copied in archaizing script certainly served as a tool for teaching, and for preserving and archiving archaic script traditions in Old and even Neo-Babylonian schools.

In such circumstances, the limitation of our corpus will prove to be delicate. In this study, I feel obliged to take into consideration the contextual *purpose* of the list being studied. If a given sign list has as its obvious purpose the recording and transmission of archaizing signs, then I consider it to be a "paleographic" list, whether it is bi-scriptal or not.

Moreover, I have chosen to restrict the corpus of "paleographic" lists to syllabaries, sixty-two texts total, and more specifically to the S^a and S^b paleographic lists from the end of the Middle Bronze Age up to the end of cuneiform culture, as it was still practiced at Uruk in the Late Babylonian, Seleucid, and Parthian eras (fifth–third centuries).[7]

Lists That "Entered" the School Curriculum?

I had initially entitled this study "Babylonian ceremonial script and its introduction into the school curriculum in the periphery." Such a title, however, would have been misleading, as it would have left the reader wondering what lists such as those being here studied actually represent. All of them, with the exception of exercises from Babylonia and Elam, are type I (rarely III) tablets—following the typology once proposed by Miguel Civil[8]—and as such are thus plausibly reference copies from libraries rather than evidence of actual teaching activity, even if both types belong to the same genre, that of "school texts." Writing about lexical

6. Niek Veldhuis suggested that I consider lists like the Kagal VAT 9528 (CDLI: P381754) as presenting the mixing of scripts: archaizing in the first subcolumn (Sumerian) but cursive in the second (Akkadian). These lists deserve to be mentioned of course, but I do not think that they are *paleographic* in their purpose.

7. This therefore includes the texts from Sippar (which we have unfortunately not been able to integrate in this study, as we have no copy or photograph of it) published by Scheil in his *Une saison de fouilles à Sippar* in 1902. This text could date to the late Old Babylonian period. The S^a lists discovered at Sippar-Amnanum, published in Tanret 2002, attest to the existence of the S^a list for this period, but the published exemplars do not show *any* archaism. To note the doubts expressed by Civil regarding the dating of the possibly archaizing S^a list mentioned by Scheil: "The first one, S^a, goes back to late OB times, if the stratigraphic information given by Scheil, Sippar 33f. can be trusted" (Civil 1979, 165). The oldest S^a list would then be a list written in archaizing signs.

8. Civil 1969, 27 (MSL XII); 1979, 5 (MSL XIV); and Tinney 1999, 160.

lists in general, Piotr Michalowski underlined the fact that "most of us today recognize that these lists are not encyclopedias, as has sometimes been asserted, nor are they templates for ordering the perceived universe, but are, more prosaically, basic learning tools organized in a manner that is geared to pedagogical rather than to philosophical ends" (2012, 46). For the paleographic lists, however, and as we will see, this definition is not always entirely appropriate.

The functional role played by these lists has often been questioned, and in light of the absence of school exercises and extracts based on these paleographic lists (from Assur, Emar, or Ugarit), is it really appropriate to speak of their "use" in the curriculum? For this reason, I preferred the title "Babylonian Ceremonial Script in Its Scholarly Context." In fact, we know essentially nothing of the purpose that these texts served in the second millennium, nor even in first millennium Mesopotamia: were they intended to preserve and archive knowledge that was in the process of disappearing or had become poorly mastered? Did they exist in order to allow scholars to compose (or to read) royal or votive inscriptions in Babylonian ceremonial script?

The Different Uses of Babylonian Ceremonial Script

As we shall see, this script is above all a prestige script, whether it be connected to state (monumental and royal), religious (votive inscriptions), social (in glyptic), or scholarly milieux (in the school texts and colophons).

One might also wonder what the perceptions of the peoples neighboring Babylonia had regarding the use and the appearance of this prestigious Babylonian script. How did they perceive it? Did they appropriate into their own local cuneiform traditions or did they reject it in some cases?

Another question we will attempt to explore is the relationship that exists between these lists, which belong to the world of scholarly erudition and scholastic training, and actual inscriptions that show how such knowledge was put to practical application by engravers. As we shall see, this script was often used in *learned* circles to display erudition or to suggest participation in a scholarly tradition (notably in the writing of colophons … or the copying of manuscripts in an old-fashioned style). These applications could, in fact, have arisen from the very same body of knowledge as the scholarly paleography archived and recorded by scribes in the lists. But what about *nonscholastic* or *nonscholarly* applications? Were the same repertoires used? As will become apparent, certain shared, contemporary features among school traditions and lapidary traditions suggest that these distinct contexts and practices (and their practitioners) remained more or less in close contact.

Of course, in the framework of this study, we will not be able to respond definitively to all of these questions, which presuppose the examination and paleographic comparison of tens of thousands of documents from all periods. Our preliminary goal is instead to offer some initial hinted answers to these questions and thus to open up further avenues of research and to formulate new research

questions, in the hope of encouraging a more comprehensive study of the history of ancient Babylonian ceremonial script practices.

Finally, we ought to insist on the overtly religious associations, connotations, and implications of the Babylonian ceremonial script and the paleographic knowledge it represents. As we shall see, it was especially in the *milieux* of diviners and incantation professionals that this lore was transmitted. Babylonian ceremonial script could even occasionally have practical apotropaic applications, and it very often appeared to have been perceived as the "proper way" to communicate with the gods.

I. Distinguishing Archaic from Archaizing in the History of the Field

> *M. Botta, not discouraged by the want of success which had attended his first essay, continued his excavations in the mound of Kouyunjik; and to him is due the honour of having found the first Assyrian monument.... Numerous inscriptions were cut between the bas-reliefs, and evidently contained the explanation of the events thus recorded in sculpture. They were in the cuneiform, or arrow-headed, character. The nature of these inscriptions afforded at last evidence that the building was of a period preceding the conquest of Alexander.... But too little was then known of its character to enable M. Botta to draw any inference from the peculiar arrangement of the wedges, which distinguishes the varieties used in different countries. However, it was evident that the monument appertained to a very ancient and very civilised people.*
> Layard 1849, 10–12

I.1. Distinguishing Genuine from Imitation in Materials Written in Archaic Script

At the beginnings of Assyriology in the nineteenth century of the modern era, when Assyria and, still further, all of ancient Mesopotamia, was being rediscovered and the first modern syllabaries being drawn up, researchers initially experienced considerable difficulty in classifying and typologizing the different sign forms encountered in the texts, be it according to their context, as a function of their textual genre, or according to the period to which they belonged.

In 1848, Paul-Émile Botta devoted a work to the publication of his results regarding cuneiform writing (Botta 1848). One of the objectives that he had set for himself in this publication consisted of demonstrating "that in the Assyrian script, certain characters can interchange freely with others."[1] Botta thus presented signs that he considered graphically distinct, although apparently synonymous or of otherwise identical meaning: variants that appeared actually to represent the same signs in different scripts in inscriptions from Persepolis, and

1. "Dans l'écriture assyrienne certains caractères peuvent se mettre indifféremment à la place de certains autres" (Botta 1848, 4).

in archaizing inscriptions from Babylon and Khorsabad.[2] His work was intended, among other things, to demonstrate that the inscriptions from Van, Babylon, Khorsabad, and Persepolis exhibited the same writing system and probably the same language, as can be seen from this summary table of Jean Ménant (1860, 125–26) regarding the sign LUGAL (fig. 1).

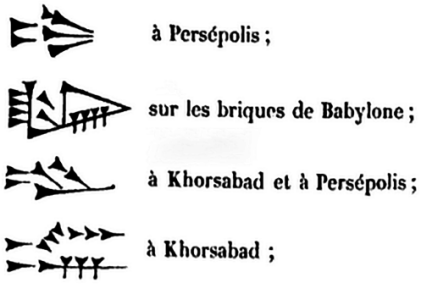

Figure 1. Examples of synonymous but graphically distinct signs for Botta. Ménant 1860, 125–26.

For Austen Henry Layard in 1849, two types of script could be distinguished: one that is cuneiform and probably hieroglyphic, the other cursive or hieratic, used for private documents. He understood Aramaic writing as a script used in Mesopotamia in the same way as cuneiform writing,[3] considering it to fill a limited role (1849, 164). Regarding cuneiform, he saw the "simplicity" of the Assyrian inscriptions (which we will describe here as having a square style), in contrast to the complexity of Babylonian signs, as an indicator of their primacy,[4] going so far as to describe the Assyrian script as "primitive." Though this description would certainly have displeased the Assyrian kings and their artisans, it is nevertheless true that in their search for simplification (as a part of which they gave their monumental cuneiform a square and regular, even simple, appearance), they managed to create an impression quite different from that of the cuneiform in contemporary Babylonia with its elaborate appearance. For Layard, this was a sure sign of anteriority, but we could just as easily see such simplification as a case of modernization. The author, supposing that the Assyrian inscriptions were older than the Babylonian ones, logically deduced that the script was initially

2. For example: DA, 9; LUGAL, 22; Ù, 35–36; NA, 41–42; DINGIR, 59–61.

3. Originally from Syria. This conception was actually not quite so mistaken for the Neo-Babylonian period to which he was referring; see Beaulieu 2006, 199–200.

4. Regarding the Assyro-Babylonian script in the trilingual inscriptions (Old Persian, Elamite, Assyro-Babylonian), he states: "It has been said to be the most complex in its forms of the three; but such is not the case, as we have in the varieties both extremes: the primitive, or early Assyrian, containing the most simple and elementary combinations, beginning with the wedge standing alone, whilst the Babylonian is distinguished by the most intricate and complex" (Layard 1849, 170).

simpler and had later grown more complex. In his work *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, published five years later, he again mentioned the complex script occasionally found on bricks from Babylon (and at that time unique to that site),[5] though without developing its relationship with the Assyrian script.

In 1850, Edward Hincks continued in this same direction, but he proposed a number of equivalences according to the places of origin of the signs and the types of texts, thereby defining what we will here call different "styles" (fig. 2).

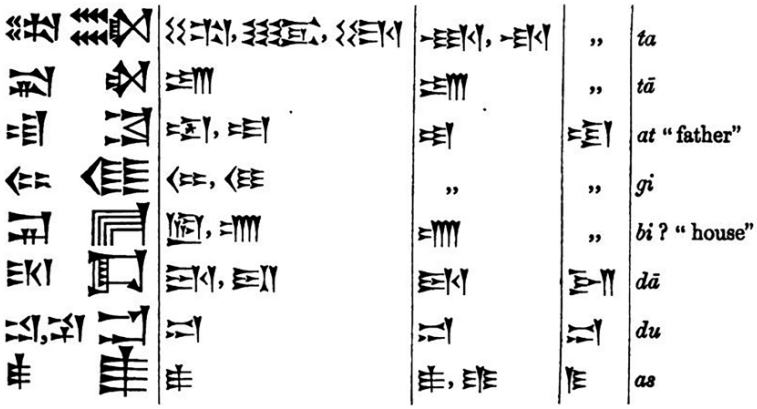

Figure 2. Sign equivalences according to Hincks (1850, 6–7): first column, Babylonian lapidary signs; second column, Assyrian signs; third column, signs from Van; 4th column, "Median" signs.

The first real synthesis on cuneiform writing in Mesopotamia, and in particular on its decipherment, was produced by Ménant in 1860 in his work entitled *Les écritures cunéiformes*. He is certainly not the first to have written on the subject: authors like Botta or Johannes Brandis (1856) and of course Henry Rawlinson had already published syllabaries or essays on cuneiform writing. But no one had as yet presented an overview as synthetic as what Ménant offered in 1860. As a witness to the earliest days of Assyriology, he, too, exhibited what we would now consider to be a certain inadequacy with vocabulary, when compared with more contemporary usage in the discipline. Nevertheless, even at this early time, he insisted on the fact that while the language of the Assyrians could have evolved during 1,500 years of existence the same cannot be said for the script in which it was written:[6]

5. "It is well known that a large number of them have inscriptions in a complex cuneiform character peculiar to Babylon" (Layard 1853, 531).

6. Ménant calls the cuneiform script used in Assyrian and Elamite inscriptions "Anaryan" in contrast to the "Aryan" script (by which he means Old Persian cuneiform). For his definitions, see Ménant 1860, 4–5. He continued to use these same terms in Ménant 1869; see esp. §II, 8–13.

> This element (cuneiform writing), foreign to Assyria, and received there from a people who did not speak any Semitic language at all, had undergone numerous modifications. Some are purely graphic and result from momentary whims. Whether the signs are more or less inclined, more or less regular, better or more poorly executed, paleographic differences are there to be discovered.[7]

He then mapped out the history of the signs' development: originally pictographic[8] with a script that he called "hieratic," it next became cuneiform, initially with complex, "archaic" forms, which differ between Assyria and Babylonia, and finally led to "modern" forms. According to Ménant, G. F. Grotefend was the first to suggest that cuneiform writing could take on multiple forms that were, nevertheless, contemporary:

> The casts brought back by M. Lottin de Laval … provided the true form of the signs and offered precious and simple points of comparison. But the brick inscriptions and that beautiful inscription of Babylon, discovered by Sir Hartford, differed from these notably; was this a new variety, a new alphabet, or a new language? Once more, Grotefend was the one to solve the difficulty. Examining a fragment of a cylinder brought back by Ker Porter and comparing it to the great inscription published by the East Indies Company in 1803, he became certain that, in spite of the difference exhibited by certain characters, the two inscriptions ought to be identical.
>
> … It was thus certain that these two texts were identical, but that they had different styles, even though the content of the one as well as the other remained unknown.[9]

Thus, scholars have been well aware, since the beginnings of Assyriology, of the existence of contemporaneous but superficially different script styles whose use appeared to depend on the region in question but also on the genre of the text; there was a nascent awareness that scribes could make use of these different scripts in order to lend different superficial appearances to a text.

7. "Cet élément (l'écriture cunéiforme), étranger à l'Assyrie, et qu'elle a reçu d'un peuple qui ne parlait point une langue sémitique, a subi de nombreuses modifications. Quelques-unes sont purement graphiques et tiennent au caprice du moment. Que les signes soient plus ou moins penchés, plus ou moins réguliers, plus ou moins bien faits, il y a là des différences paléographiques à découvrir …" (Ménant 1860, 5–6).

8. For Ménant, the "primitive sign" is "hieroglyphic or figurative" (Ménant 1860, 6).

9. "Les moulages rapportés par M. Lottin de Laval … donnaient la véritable forme des signes et offraient des points de comparaison précieux et faciles. Mais les inscriptions des briques et cette belle inscription de Babylone, découverte par Sir Hartford, en différaient notablement ; y avait-il une variété nouvelle, un alphabet ou un idiome nouveau ? Ce fut encore Grotefend qui résolut la difficulté. En examinant un fragment de cylindre rapporté par Ker Porter, et en le comparant à la grande inscription publiée par la compagnie des Indes en 1803, il acquit la certitude que, malgré la différence que présentaient certains caractères, ces deux inscriptions devaient être identiques.… On eut ainsi la certitude qu'on se trouvait en présence de deux textes identiques, mais de styles différents, bien qu'on ignorât le contenu de l'un et de l'autre" (Ménant 1860, 106). This inscription of the East India Company had already been cited by Layard, although he reached different conclusions.