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978-0-521-71661-1 - The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture

Francesca Rochberg

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TO THE ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATI OF THE MIDDLE OF the first millennium B.C., the patterns of stars covering the sky were a celestial script. The “heavenly writing” (*šīṭir šamê* or *šīṭirti šamāmī*) was a poetic metaphor occasionally used in Babylonian royal inscriptions to refer to temples made beautiful “like the stars” (*kīma šīṭir šamê*, literally, “like the heavenly writing”).¹ In these Babylonian inscriptions, the metaphor is not used explicitly for astrology or celestial divination, but the notion of the stars as a heavenly script implies their capacity to be read and interpreted. Representing the work of the divine, the stars, “written” in the sky as they were conceived to be, could convey a sense of the eternal. When Neo-Assyrian King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.) claimed of his capital city Nineveh that its “plan was drawn since time immemorial with the heavenly writing,” he meant that, when the gods drew the stars upon the heavens, they also drew up the plans for that city.² A seventh-century scholarly text from Aššur explains the starry sky as the “lower heavens” (*šamû šaplūti*), made of jasper, on whose surface the god Marduk drew

¹ In the following inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar: Stephen Langdon, *Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* VAB 4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1912), p. 178 i 39, also *ibid.* 74 ii 2, YOS 1 44 i 21; cf. *BSt.* No. 5 ii 28, also Neo-Babylonian. In the form *šīṭir burūmê* literally, “writing of the firmament,” see *CAD*, s.v. *burūmû* usage b, occurring predominantly in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions but also in a hymn to Aššur, for which see A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1989), p. 4, No. 1:21. See also E. Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia: American Philological Society, 1995), p. 9, and W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), p. 15, note 25, and p. 226.

² D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), p. 94:64.

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“the constellations of the gods” (*lumāši ša ilāni*).³ The image of the heavens as a stone surface upon which a god could draw or write, as a scribe would a clay tablet, complements the metaphoric trope of the heavenly writing. In their discussion of the term *lumāšu* “constellation,” used in the sense of a form of writing with astral pictographs or “astroglyphs,” as they have been called, M. Roaf and A. Zgoll note that Sumerian *mul* “star” (or *mul-an*, “heavenly star”) “can refer both to a star in the sky and to a cuneiform sign on a tablet.”⁴ They further remark on the relationship between the arrangement of stars in certain constellations and that of the wedges in cuneiform signs.⁵ The metaphor of the heavenly writing therefore related the constellations to cuneiform signs from which one could read and derive meaning, and thus expressed the idea that written messages were encoded in celestial phenomena.⁶ A remarkable coincidence of conception appears with explicit reference to astrology in *The Enneads* of Plotinus, in which he says “we may think of the stars as letters perpetually being inscribed on the heavens or inscribed once for all.”⁷

Although the metaphor is not so often attested, it is entirely consistent with the abundant evidence of the Babylonian celestial divination texts. These presuppose the belief that, if one could read the celestial signs in the sky, written by the gods, and interpret their meanings, events concerning the welfare of the king, the state, and its people as a whole could be divined.⁸ The major part of the written corpus of Mesopotamian scribal

³ KAR 307 33; see W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, pp. 3 and 13–15, also plate I, for text copy. Other references to the “drawing” of stars (*kakkabāni ešēru*) may be found s.v. *ešēru* in CAD E, meaning 1 b and c.

⁴ Michael Roaf and Annette Zgoll, “Assyrian Astroglyphs: Lord Aberdeen’s Black Stone and the Prisms of Esarhaddon,” *ZA* 91 (2001), p. 289 and note 68.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The notion of the god (often Šamaš) as “writing” the signs on the exta of sheep is well known; see, e.g., *ina libbi immeri tašattar šire tašakkan dīnu* “you (Šamaš) write upon the flesh inside the sheep (i.e., the entrails), you establish (there) an oracular decision,” *OECT* 6 pl. 30 K.2824:12.

⁷ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 2nd ed., trans. Stephen McKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 2.3, p. 96.

⁸ The importance of the metaphor of writing for the Babylonian literati is discussed in Piotr Michalowski, “Presence at the Creation,” in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, Harvard Semitic Studies 37 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 395 with note 54. A parallel between hermeneutical techniques of Jewish Kabbalah and the cuneiform scribes’ methods of interpretation of their own esoteric written traditions, in particular those relating to celestial divination and wisdom literature, has been hinted at by Michalowski, *ibid.*, p. 395, and documented by

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scholarship consisted of collections of a variety of “omens,” omens that were by no means limited to those of the heavens. In such omen collections, prognostications, stated as cases in the form *if x occurs, then y will occur*, correlated physical phenomena with events of political, economic, or social significance. These omens functioned as a vehicle for much systematization and observation of diverse aspects of the natural world. As such, the divination corpora represent the product of the collective, systematic, and cumulative effort to study, among other things, many aspects of what we regard as nature, or natural phenomena, by Mesopotamian scribal scholarship.

To speak of Mesopotamian scribal scholarship in such a general way perhaps requires a note of explanation. Assyriologists are familiar with the connotation of the phrase “stream of tradition” in reference to Sumerian and Akkadian texts. The term was used by A. L. Oppenheim to represent the literary corpus preserved by cuneiform copyists over the course of nearly two millennia and over a wide geographical area within the Mesopotamian cultural sphere of influence.⁹ This continuous tradition can be differentiated from the quantities of nonliterary texts, that is, documents recording transactions and events of many aspects of Mesopotamian civilization. Oppenheim spoke of a “cultural continuum” and “the scribal tradition,” both of which notions are implied by “Mesopotamian scribal scholarship.” However, although Oppenheim’s “stream of tradition” was defined less in terms of an ideological stance and more in terms of the functional result of the training of scribes, my reference to Mesopotamian scribal scholarship carries more ideological weight as a term that unifies both the practices and the presuppositions of scribes associated with literary, meaning “scholarly,” divination, while also rendering into English the Akkadian *ṭupšarrūtu* “scholarship” (literally, “the art of the scribe”).

Although the motives for systematizing all the phenomena of interest had as much to do with the correlations found between the phenomena and the events presaged by them as with a desire to understand the phenomena alone, the systematization and understanding of the phenomena

S. Lieberman, “A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called *Aggadic* ‘Measures’ of Biblical Hermeneutics?,” *HUCA* 58 (1987), pp. 157–225. Cf. S. Parpola in “Mesopotamian Astrology and Astronomy as Domains of the Mesopotamian ‘Wisdom,’” in Hannes D. Galter, ed., *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens*, Grazer Morgenländische Studien 3 (Graz: Grazkult, 1993), p. 58, and again in his “The Assyrian Tree of Life,” *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 161–298.

⁹ A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, rev. edition by E. Reiner, 1977), p. 13.

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themselves, to whatever degree was possible, were products of scholarly divination. The physical phenomena collected in the omen texts and the principles of their organization reflect the interests and methods of Mesopotamian scribal scholarship. Characteristic of such methods are empirical study and the creation of schematic systems to interpret the meaning of the enormous variety of signs in the compilation and redaction of the omen collections.

The systematic recording of ominous celestial and terrestrial occurrences subject to observation, imagination, or experience was an intellectual expression of an assumption that the gods were not only inseparable from all possible natural phenomena by virtue of their cosmology, but were also responsible for the associations between phenomena in nature and events in human society. The gods were viewed as the ultimate causes of the ominous occurrences as well as the authorities behind the texts in which the omens were compiled. The importance of the heavens as a great field against which the gods made known certain mundane events is unmistakable in the culture of Assyria and Babylonia in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. This is amply attested to by the omens of the official compilation of celestial omens, *Enūma Anu Enlil*, placed in the library of Nineveh and in the royal correspondence between Sargonid Kings Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) and Aššurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) and their learned advisors who used the handbook *Enūma Anu Enlil*.¹⁰ The scholars' correspondence reveals an extensive observational activity combined with astrological interpretation and provides some insight into the practical response to the forebodings of celestial omens.

The perception of the world as a communication medium between humankind and god operated on two basic levels: one in which the diviner simply interpreted what was observed or observable without "interference" by the diviner; the second in which the deity responded to various manipulations by the diviner, for example, drops of oil in the water bowl or the inspection of the exta of a sacrificed sheep. The sources for Mesopotamian divination can typically be classified as one of these two basic divination techniques. The former serves to unify a number of quite disparate omen compilations (to be described in greater detail in Chapter 2) under a single category termed "unprovoked" divination. That the so-called unprovoked omens could have been viewed as a coherent whole is suggested by the

¹⁰ See Parpola, *LAS* Parts I and II, H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings*, SAA 8 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992) and Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993).

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fact that some diviners were experts in a number of different fields of unprovoked divination. In a letter from the celestial divination expert Marduk-šāpik-zēri to King Aššurbanipal, the scribe reviewed for the king the extent of his learning:

I fully master my father's profession, the discipline of lamentation; I have studied and chanted the Series. I am competent in [...], "mouth-washing" and purification of the palace [...]. I have examined healthy and sick flesh. I have read the (astrological omen series) *Enūma Anu Enlil* [...] and made astronomical observations. I have read the (anomaly series) *Šumma izbu*, the (physiognomical works) [*Kataduqqū*, *Alamdi*] *mmū* and *Nigdimdimmū* [...] and the (terrestrial omen series) *Šumma ālu*.¹¹

For Marduk-šāpik-zēri, at least, celestial divination belonged within a broader field of knowledge that included terrestrial, physiognomic, and anomalous birth omens, as well as medicine.

If the outward form and underlying rationale is the same for all these omen types, it seems unjustified to separate celestial divination from the rest of the unprovoked omens in a study of Mesopotamian science. The fact that celestial divination dealt with astronomical phenomena, a legitimate object of scientific investigation from a modern point of view, has perhaps given this form of divination something of an edge in the history of science, measured by the relative attention given these texts as opposed to, say, the omens from malformed fetuses (*izbu*). The features of celestial divination that warrant its classification as "science," however, are found in all forms of scholarly omens. It is as important to an understanding of Mesopotamian celestial divination to see its connection to other, noncelestial, omen texts as it is its connection to astronomical texts that are not ostensibly divinatory.

Among the features of Mesopotamian scholarly texts discussed in this book will not be found the once-standard "Listenwissenschaft," defined in W. von Soden's classic "Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft."¹² The idea that ancient Mesopotamian science is to be found in word lists – or omen lists – that order and classify the world does not go far enough either in its assumption that science is systematized knowledge or that Mesopotamian thought about "the world" is

¹¹ S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, p. 122, No. 160:36–42.

¹² Originally published in *Die Welt als Geschichte* 2 (1936), pp. 411–64 and pp. 509–57, then reprinted with addenda in B. Landsberger and W. von Soden, *Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt. Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965).

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limited to a desire to classify and systematize. A related problem with this approach is the search for an explanation for the “classificatory” nature of “ancient Near Eastern science” in literacy itself, the written (list-) form of this alleged science, but this aspect has been addressed by M. T. Larsen and more recently by N. Veldhuis and D. Brown.¹³

Extant from the same period in which the divination series were developed and standardized, or from the Old Babylonian up to the Neo-Assyrian period, are also astronomical texts, that is, texts in which celestial phenomena are treated in a strictly technical or descriptive way and, for the most part, are not combined with prognostication from heavenly phenomena. Early Babylonian astronomy is represented chiefly by the compendium MUL.APIN and several isolated texts covering subjects such as the seasonal appearances of fixed stars, planetary observations, or daylight schemes.¹⁴ The astronomical compendium MUL.APIN focuses directly on cataloging and systematizing a wide variety of celestial phenomena. Subjects found in MUL.APIN include names and relative positions in the sky of fixed stars, dates of their heliacal risings, simultaneous risings and settings of certain stars and constellations, so-called *ziqpu* stars that cross the zenith of the observer, stars in the path of the moon, astronomical seasons, luni-solar intercalation rules with fixed stars, stellar calendar, appearances and disappearances of the five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), periods of visibility and invisibility of the planets,¹⁵ length of daylight scheme, and lunar visibility scheme. Copies of this astronomical compendium date to the period of Aššurbanipal’s library and

¹³ See Mogens Trolle Larsen, “The Mesopotamian Lukewarm Mind: Reflections on Science, Divination and Literacy,” in F. Rochberg-Halton, ed., *Language, Literature and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), pp. 203–25, Niek Veldhuis, “Elementary Education at Nippur: The Lists of Trees and Wooden Objects,” Ph.D. dissertation (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1997), pp. 137–46, and D. Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy–Astrology, Cuneiform Monographs 18* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000), p. 76, note 203.

¹⁴ H. Hunger and David Pingree, *MUL.APIN: An Astronomical Compendium in Cuneiform* (Horn, Austria: Ferdinand Berger & Söhne, Archiv für Orientforschung, 1989), Supplement 24.

¹⁵ The determination of such periods was not yet very precise. In fact, Brown, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy–Astrology*, pp. 113–116, and 146–151, argues for the “ideal” function of the planetary period values, i.e., not to predict planetary appearances, but merely to gauge whether an appearance was early or late, and therefore to be made amenable to divinatory analysis as a favorable or unfavorable sign. This idea is confirmed by the evidence in the Neo-Assyrian letters from scholars.

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later, but parts of this work no doubt antedate the earliest dated copy by some centuries.¹⁶ From the calendric correspondences given in the text (MUL.APIN II i 9–18) between stellar heliacal and acronychal risings and the dates of equinoxes and solstices as well as the positions of sun and moon relative to certain stars at equinox and solstice, D. Pingree and H. Hunger have argued for a date of circa 1000 B.C. for the final formulation of the text.¹⁷ Its primary interest is calendric, some of which is related to the risings, settings, and culminations of fixed stars. The fixed-star catalog of MUL.APIN contains sixty rising and setting stars, six circumpolar stars, and five planets. The stars are arranged in groups according to the “paths” on which they are seen to rise and set. Three broad paths are designated by the names of the three great gods, Anu, Ea, and Enlil, and describe only roughly demarcated bands of varying declination, Ea being to the south, Enlil to the north, and Anu in the middle, or close to the equator. As it is explained in a commentary to *Enūma Anu Enlil*, the Mesopotamian definition of the paths is not with respect to the celestial equator, a concept they did not have, but rather with respect to the eastern horizon.¹⁸ Despite its primary interest in the phenomena themselves, and hence our classification of the text as astronomical, the final section of MUL.APIN is devoted to celestial omens (MUL.APIN II iii 22–39).

With the exception of the brief planetary sections of MUL.APIN (I i 38; I ii 13–15; II i 40–41; and II i 38–67), the nondivinatory astronomical sources from this early period concern themselves primarily with fixed stars, the calendar, and the length of daylight. The simplest of the fixed-star schemes is represented by the so-called Astrolabe, or “Three Stars Each,” in which a schematic calendar associating the appearance of fixed stars of the three “paths” of Anu, Enlil, and Ea with certain months is found.¹⁹ Other astronomical texts of this early period also deal with the fixed stars, such as the catalogs of stars on or near the zenith (*ziqpu*),²⁰

¹⁶ For the Late Babylonian period MUL.APIN, see W. Horowitz, “Two MUL.APIN Fragments,” *AfO* 36/37 (1989–1990), pp. 116–117 and Hunger–Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, p. 57, idem, *MUL.APIN*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Hunger–Pingree, *MUL.APIN*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁸ The term for horizon is *tūr/tarbašu* “the cattle pen,” see *Enūma Anu Enlil* 50–51 III 24b, *BPO* 2, pp. 42–3.

¹⁹ B. L. van der Waerden, “Babylonian Astronomy II. The Thirty-Six Stars,” *JNES* 8 (1949), pp. 6–26; C. B. F. Walker and H. Hunger, “Zwölfmaldrei,” *MDOG* 109 (1977), pp. 27–34.

²⁰ J. Schaumberger, “Die Ziqpu-Gestirne nach neuen Keilschrifttexten,” *ZA* 50 (1952), pp. 214–229, Hunger–Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, pp. 84–90.

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alignments between *ziqpu* and other stars,²¹ and other intervals between stars such as in the difficult DAL.BA.AN.NA text.²²

These are the major astronomical texts to which the celestial omens of *Enūma Anu Enlil* bear close relation. Aspects of early planetary and lunar astronomy are also embedded within the omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* itself.²³ Later, in the period immediately preceding the hellenization of Babylonia, or roughly between 600 and 300 B.C., changes occur both in Babylonian astronomy and celestial divination, but continuities with the older tradition persist. In astronomy a significant change from the earlier material is reflected in the appearance of many observational records, made on a nightly basis, and assembled in an archive in the city of Babylon. The nightly watch of the sky seems to have been standard Babylonian practice since the reign of King Nabonassar (747–734 B.C.). Although no eighth-century examples are preserved, observational texts were prepared at Babylon from the middle of that century, as is indicated in later compilations of lunar eclipse reports. These so-called astronomical diaries collected lunar, planetary, meteorological, economic, and occasionally political events night by night, usually (at least in the later diaries) for six (or seven) months of a Babylonian year, recording daily positions of the moon and planets visible above the local horizon, as in the following excerpted lines from a diary dated in the year 331 B.C.:

Night of the 20th, last part of the night, the moon was [nn cubi]ts below β Geminorum, the moon being $\frac{2}{3}$ cubit back to the west. The 21st, equinox; I did not watch. Ni[ght of the 22nd, last part of the night,] [the moon was] 6 cubits [below] ϵ Leonis, the moon having passed $\frac{1}{2}$ cubit behind α Leonis. Night of the 24th, clouds were in the sky.²⁴

In addition to observational data of astronomical interest, the diaries recorded observations of other events as well, some of a political nature.

²¹ See D. Pingree and Christopher Walker, "A Babylonian Star Catalogue: BM 78161," in E. Leichty, M. deJ. Ellis and P. Gerardi, eds., *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 9 (Philadelphia: Babylonian Section, University Museum, 1988), pp. 313–22, and discussed in Hunger–Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, pp. 90–7; cf. J. Koch, "Der Sternkatalog BM 78161," *WO* 23 (1992), pp. 39–67.

²² C. B. F. Walker, "The Dalbanna Text: A Mesopotamian Star-List," *WO* 26 (1995), pp. 27–42, J. Koch, "Der Dalbanna-Sternenkatalog," *WO* 26 (1995), pp. 39–67, and discussed in Hunger–Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, pp. 100–11.

²³ Hunger–Pingree, *Astral Sciences*, pp. 32–50.

²⁴ Sachs–Hunger, *Diaries*, Vol. I, 1988, No. –330, p. 177.

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The previously quoted diary of 331 B.C., for example, contains the report of Darius III's defeat by Alexander the Great at Gaugamela:

that month (Month VI), on the 11th, panic occurred in the camp before the king [...] lay² opposite the king. On the 24th, in the morning, the king of the world [...] the standard² [...] they fought with each other, and a heavy² defeat of the troops of [...] the troops of the king deserted him and [went²] to their cities [...] they fled to the land of the GUTI [...] Month VII. [...] That month, from the 1st to [...] came to Babylon saying "Esangila [...]" and the Babylonians for the property of Esangila [...] On the 11th, in Sippar an order of Al[exander [...] " [...] I shall not enter your houses". On the 13th, [...] to² the outer gate of Esangila and [...] On the 14th, these² Ionians a bull [...] short, fatty tissue [...] Alexander, king of the world, [came² in] to Babylon [...] hor]ses and equipment of [...] and the Babylonians and the people of [...] a message to [...].²⁵

Evidence of historical value such as that contained in this broken passage make the diaries a rich source for the Late Babylonian period. Above all, the diaries represent an invaluable source of contemporary dated observations, no doubt the source of the Babylonian observations utilized by Ptolemy in the *Almagest*. Those of Mercury in *Almagest* IX 7, for example, are dated "according to the Chaldeans," that is, in the Seleucid Era, and they make use of the cubit, as seen in the previously quoted excerpt, as well as the ecliptical norming stars known from their use in the diaries.²⁶

To this same period, from circa 600 to 300 B.C., belong equally significant developments in the application of celestial divination. Sachs called attention to precisely this period, cautioning against an "a priori assumption of a static condition in Babylonian thought on astrology" during these centuries.²⁷ From the omens of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, traditionally concerned with the king and the state, a personal form of prognostication from the heavens evolved, which took two forms. Formally related to the traditional celestial omens were nativity omens, which gave forecasts for individuals born at the time of the occurrence of various astronomical phenomena.²⁸ Not in omen form were horoscope texts, although the resemblance to Greek texts of that designation is quite superficial. Few

²⁵ Sachs–Hunger, *Diaries*, Vol. I. 1988, No. —330, p. 179.

²⁶ G. J. Toomer, *Ptolemy's Almagest* (New York/Berlin/Heidelberg/Tokyo: Springer-Verlag, 1984), p. 13 and 450–2.

²⁷ A. Sachs, "Babylonian Horoscopes," *JCS* 6 (1952), p. 53.

²⁸ See for example, *TCL* 6 14 in *ibid.*, pp. 65–75; also *idem*, *LBAT* 1593 rev. 3'–10' (κ1 zodiacal sign *alid* "born in the region of such-and-such zodiacal sign").

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personal predictions are ever given in the Babylonian horoscopes, although a few do include such statements. These are given as omen apodoses familiar from nativity omens. Although celestial divination in omen form was transmitted to the West, beginning already in the second millennium B.C. through Syria and Anatolia to the Aegean world, during the Persian and Hellenistic periods another phase of such intellectual transmission is evident in Egypt²⁹ and in Greece, where its traces can be seen in the so-called general or universal astrology. This latest form of astrology to develop in Babylonia, that is, the horoscope, would be decisive for the further development of western genthialogy through Greek, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian channels. Personal birth omens and horoscopes, referred to collectively as “astrology” in Sachs’s previous statement, became dependent on astronomy in a new way. In the horoscopes in particular, an interdependent relationship between astrology and predictive astronomy is demonstrable by the identification of connections among a variety of astronomical text genres and the content of horoscopes. Celestial divination, which carries through from the middle of the second practically to the end of the first millennium B.C., and the Babylonian astronomy of the post-500 B.C. period provide the intellectual context for the Babylonian horoscopes, which bear relation to both of these distinct traditions. Because of these relationships, the horoscopes afford a unique view into Late Babylonian astronomical science.

The present book considers celestial divination and horoscope texts most centrally, but in relation to these are the astronomical texts, both early and late, observational and mathematical, as well as the sizable corpus of correspondence from Neo-Assyrian scribe-scholars to Kings Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal. All the texts produced by such scribes as a result of diverse forms of inquiry into heavenly phenomena, from those that subject the phenomena to rigorous mathematical description to those that forecast human events on the basis of the phenomena, fell under the purview of what was called *tupšarrūtu Enūma Anu Enlil* “the art of the scribe of (the celestial omen series) *Enūma Anu Enlil*.” As products of “the art of the scribe” in Mesopotamia, Babylonian divinatory, astrological, and astronomical texts reflect the ideas and concerns of an educated elite. Nothing whatever about the ideas of common Babylonian citizens about the heavens or the gods are contained within these sources. If they are, we have no basis on which to recognize them as such. When we consider the

²⁹ Richard A. Parker, *A Vienna Demotic Papyrus on Eclipses- and Lunar-Omens* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1959).