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Elementary education at Nippur. The lists of trees and wooden objects

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Preface

This dissertation is the result of a four-year project at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures of the University of Groningen. With this project the department partook in the research program 'Pre-Modern Encyclopedia' of the Centre for Classical Oriental Medieval and Renaissance Studies of the same university. The initiative for the project was taken by Dr H.L.J. Vanstiphout, who acted as my main advisor. He thus brought me back into Assyriology, and introduced me to an area of the field of which I was completely ignorant. I would never have dreamt of studying texts as boring as lexical lists. I soon learned that boring texts only exist by virtue of boring readers. I am very grateful to Dr Vanstiphout for pushing me in this direction, and for his unfailing enthusiasm and critical support of my work.

Prof. Piotr Michalowski, my second advisor, followed the progress of my work at some distance, but with no less interest. His hints and remarks have been more important than can be acknowledged in a single paragraph. At some of the crucial junctures in the research process he pushed me so gently in one direction that I almost convinced myself that I had invented it all on my own.

Prof. dr H.J.W. Drijvers acted as my promotor. Over the years he has actively supported my research. He carefully read a version of the manuscript, adding a number of important remarks.

I was able to visit several foreign tablet collections thanks to financial support from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen. To both organizations I would like to express my sincere thanks. Prof. Åke Sjöberg, then curator of the Babylonian Collection of the University Museum (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia) allowed me free access to the tablet collections under his care. On two occasions (February 1994 and August-December 1995) I benefitted from the hospitality and helpfulness of Prof. Sjöberg and his staff. Dr Steve Tinney prepared an extract from the computerized catalogue of the Philadelphia collection for me and shared with me his vast knowledge of Sumerian and cuneiform. His Index to the Secondary Literature proved to be of immense value. The late Dr Hermann Behrens gave me copies of the computer files in which he had entered numerous lexical and literary compositions. These files have been of enormous value in the process of writing this study. Prof. Erle Leichty helped me out with a number of practical matters, and was always ready to answer my questions. The informed reader cannot fail to see how important my visits to Philadelphia have been for the final results of my research. The sheer joy of working for a period of time in the pleasurable chaos of the tablet room is difficult to express in a few words. They were some of the most agreeable and inspiring months of the past few years.

Prof. J.A. Brinkman allowed me to use and publish the relevant texts from the collections of the Oriental Institute in Chicago. Prof. Miguel Civil discussed an early version of Chapter 2 with me, and shared with me his broad insights into the lexical traditions of Mesopotamia. Moreover, he allowed me to use his HyperText edition of *Diri*. Without this edition some parts of this study simply could not have been written.

My thanks are further due to Prof. W.W. Hallo for giving me permission to publish the relevant tablets in the Yale Babylonian Collection. I gratefully accepted his hospitality and stayed for one week in his house, which was a wonderful experience. Dr Ulla Kasten and Dr Paul-Alain Beaulieu helped me to use the resources and facilities of the Yale Babylonian Collection.

Prof. E.K. Gazda, curator of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (Ann Arbor), gave me per-

mission to publish an important lexical prism (KM 89542). Prof. Piotr Michalowski kindly relinquished his own publication rights.

Frau Dr E. Klengel-Brandt, curator at the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Berlin), gave me permission to collate a number of lexical tablets and to publish VAT 6588.

Prof. dr J. Oelsner, curator of the Frau Hilprecht Sammlung in Jena, allowed me to use the relevant tablets in this collection. Moreover, he gave me his handwritten catalogue of lexical tablets in the Hilprecht Sammlung, for which I would like to express my sincere thanks. Dr Andreas Fuchs was ready to assist in a number of practical affairs, and made my stay in Jena a pleasurable one in many different ways.

A three-month Henri Frankfort Fellowship at the Warburg Institute of the University of London allowed me to study Old Babylonian lexical texts at the British Museum in London and to collate a few tablets at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. I wish to thank Dr Christopher Walker, Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, and the Trustees of the British Museum for their permission to publish material from their collections. Dr Eleanor Robson assisted me in the Ashmolean, and shared with me her insights, her enthusiasm, and her good humour.

Prof. dr H. de Roos, director of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO, Leiden) and Prof. dr K. Veenhof of the Department of Assyriology of the University of Leiden gave me permission to study the lexical tablets in the Liagre-Böhl collection.

Prof. dr C. Wilcke generously sent me his handcopies of the Isin lexical texts, which are to appear in the series *Texts from the Iraq Museum*. These texts proved to be very important, and I am most grateful to Prof. Wilcke for his permission to publish transliterations of some of them.

Dr Wilfred van Soldt shared with me his vast knowledge of the Middle Babylonian lexical tradition from Emar and Ugarit, and allowed me to use some of his articles before they appeared.

Prof. dr M. Stol sent me a slow but steady stream of useful references to important articles and obscure publications. On various occasions he freely gave of his encyclopedic knowledge of the Assyriological literature, which proved to be of immense value.

Geerd Haayer was kind enough to give me a copy of his unpublished edition of the hymn 'Šulgi B', and discussed with me some of the difficult passages in this text.

Dr Bendt Alster allowed me to use the catalogue of tablets in his forthcoming edition of Old Babylonian proverb collections.

Dr Jeremy Black read the manuscript and made a number of helpful remarks. His comments included both corrections of various kinds and questions on matters of principle and method. I hope there will be an opportunity to discuss such matters in more depth in the near future.

Prof. Jerry Cooper read a version of the manuscript and added numerous helpful remarks. Far more than these remarks, it was his enthusiasm and his unflinching interest in what I was doing that put me greatly in his debt.

Dr Hans Harbers of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Groningen introduced me to the field of the sociology of education. I am fully aware that I have touched on this fascinating subject only superficially. I can only hope that the results of my analyses are interesting enough to sociologists and historians of education to start a more informed discussion.

I wish to thank Dr Julia Harvey for her painstaking correction of my English. She is, and most probably will remain, the only person who read §5.7 in its entirety. The correction was made possible financially by a grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

A number of people offered me their friendship, their hospitality, and their enthusiasm. I would like to mention here in particular Dr Herman Bongenaar, Dr David Brown, Ann Guinan, Dr

Beate Pongratz-Leisten, and Dr Walther Sallaberger. Their contributions to this study are difficult to pinpoint, but nonetheless clear to me.

The interdisciplinary environment in which this study was written brought together Ph.D. students with a wide range of interests. It was a pleasure to be a member of this unlikely collection of people working in Canon law, Syriac historiography, Christian-Arabic apocalypse, late-medieval Dutch comedy, Carolingian book illustration, and many other subjects. I have learned a lot about all these subjects, and about the Humanities in general. Moreover, it was a place to make new friends, and to share the usual ups and downs related to long-term research projects. *Dat was gheselschap goet ende fijn.*

Prof. dr Hans van der Ven of the Department of Empirical Theology of the Catholic University Nijmegen taught me the importance of methodological and conceptual clarity, and showed me the possibilities and limitations of quantification. I hardly dare to hope that this study meets his standards. I am grateful for his teachings and for his sincere interest in my personal wellbeing, even when the pursuit of this wellbeing meant a farewell to Theology.

For Sietsia Padmos, my partner, living with an Assyriologist from time to time meant living alone, sometimes for several months. Supporting me whenever she could, she never allowed me to take the values and customs of academic life for granted. Without ignoring or repudiating my dedication to clay and history, she has always brought me back to the simple necessities of the day. I am, in short, grateful for both her support and her objections, and for keeping me in touch with the poetry of daily life.