Literary Observations on "In Praise of the Scribal Art"

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"In Praise of the Scribal Art" (IPSA) is a brief (17 lines), bilingual, poetic composition addressed in second person,[1] most likely to a pupil in a scribal school, extolling and recommending the craft he is learning. It was edited in *JCS* 24 (1972), 126–29 by Åke W. Sjöberg, who gave it its current designation. Benno Landsberger had referred to it as "Examination Text D." Since the text contains no examination questions or problems that would challenge a schoolboy, Landsberger's title is certainly inappropriate.[2] Since the text clearly sets out the benefits granted by knowledge of the scribal art and depicts the pains at which it may be acquired, Sjöberg's characterization is eminently more suitable.[3]

In fact, the composition in its entirety may be compared to several other, later ancient Near Eastern works conventionally classified as "wisdom literature," although no claims should be made of any direct relationship between the specific texts. This category is, to be sure, an invention of modern scholarship and not a native classification, either in ancient Israel or any contiguous culture, and some would like to abandon it.[4] It has also been used to designate texts of various genres and relates more to content and general attitudes of the texts involved than to their literary form, their

1. Note the imperatives, second person verbs, and pronominal suffixes in ll. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11.

2. This is not to deny, of course, similarities in theme as well as shared expressions between IPSA and other "Edubba" texts bent on promoting the scribal art. See in particular Å. W. Sjöberg, "Der Examenstext A," *ZA* 64 (1975), 137–76, especially p. 146, l. 56: nam-dub-sar giš šub-ba-sig$_5$-ga tuk-^{d}lama igi-zalág-ga nì-šà-ḫab-é-gal-la-ke$_4$: *ṭupšarrūtu isiq damāqi rašê lamassi igu mamirtu ḫišiḫti ekalli*, "The scribal art is a good lot (the scribe) has a good guardian deity (countenance), bright eyes, and the needs of the palace," which can be compared with IPSA l. 10 n[am-dub-s]ar-ra giš šub-ba-zíl-la nì-tuku nam-ḫé-[a] *ṭupšarrútu isiq damāqi mešrê u n[uḫši]*, "The scribal art is a good lot, richness and abundance." In the introductory comments to his study of Examenstext A, Sjöberg mentions an essential resemblance this text has with "A Dialogue Between a Father and His Disobedient Son" which he published in *JCS* 25 (1973), 105ff., but he mentions similarities with IPSA only in the commentary to the text.

3. See as well Å. W. Sjöberg, "The Old Babylonian Eduba," in S. J. Lieberman, ed., *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen*, *AS* 20 (Chicago and London, 1975), 159–79, esp. 166–68, for the various scribal skills stipulated in the last three lines of the text. To the best of my knowledge, this text has not been included in any popular, more accessible form such as the classic compendia of ancient Near Eastern texts of J. B. Pritchard and W. W. Hallo. It is certainly for this reason that it is unknown to biblical scholars. For related texts dealing with Sumerian schools and scribal education see S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago, 1963), 229–48.

4. For the characteristics of wisdom and the inadequacies of "wisdom literature" as a designation for a coherent corpus of literature in Mesopotamian see G. Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia," *JAOS* 101 (1981), 15–47.

use, or their *Sitz im Leben*. Nonetheless, the designation has usefulness in describing, *inter alia*, texts representing the literary productivity of educational and didactic frameworks such as schools and the family. The reservations concerning this nomenclature notwithstanding, IPSA definitely fits the conventional rubric, may be called a work of wisdom literature, and may be compared with certain other texts usually given the same classification.[5]

Although vastly separated by time and distance, the benefits of the scribal art depicted in IPSA resemble, for instance, Wisdom's rewards promised in biblical passages such as Prov. 3:14–16. We should bear in mind, of course, that the scribal art of the Mesopotamian text was narrower, more professional in focus than the wisdom proffered by Proverbs, but both were learned in schools and both held out to the elite of society. There are certain specific similarities. Scribal art will enrich the student (l. 4) and provide him with wealth and abundance (l. 5), The scribal art is a good lot of riches and abundance (l. 10). Similarly, Wisdom of Proverbs promises:

> Her value in trade is better than silver; Her yield is greater than gold; She is more precious than rubies; all of your goods cannot equal her; In her right hand is length of days; in her left, riches and substance. (Prov. 3:14–16)

or

> Riches and substance[6] belong to me, negotiable wealth and success; my fruit is better than gold, fine gold, and my produce better than choice silver. I endow those who love me with possessions;[7] I will fill their treasuries. (Prov. 8:18–19, 21)

The delights of the scribal art mentioned in the second line of IPSA can be compared with the description of personified Wisdom as providing entertainment and joy to God Himself and to humankind in general in Prov. 8:30–31.[8] The description of the scribal art as the mother of orators (so in the Sumerian) and father of masters in the first line of IPSA reminds us of the parental voice of the master teacher throughout the Book of Proverbs, but we should note in particular Prov. 6:22: "when you wake up it (wisdom) will make you speak (*t^{e}śîḥekā*).

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5. It is quite surprising that certain volumes concerned with biblical wisdom literature which simultaneously display pronounced interest in its ancient Near Eastern context mention neither IPSA or the Sumerian school texts to which it is related. See, e.g., W. McKane, *Proverbs*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, 1970), esp. 51–208, and the various essays in J. G. Gammie & L. G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, 1990). This is even more remarkable given the fact that by all standards some sages of ancient Israel are hardly to be distinguished from the Mesopotamian scribes, and what is taken for wisdom literature was certainly propagated in scribal schools and as part of scribal training in both societies. An explanation for this oversight may be the priority biblical scholars have given Egyptian wisdom literature as providing parallels to the biblical material, or the emphasis on the family or the clan rather than the school as the *Sitz im Leben* of biblical wisdom literature. Both notions are clearly misguided.

6. Hebrew כבוד usually means "honor" but here it refers to wealth as, e.g., in Gen. 31:1; Hag. 2:7.

7. Hebrew הון עתק is the equivalent of (לסוחר) כסף עובר and Akkadian *kaspu ittiq*. Hebrew יש is equivalent to Akkadian *būšu*, property, derived from *bašû*. On these terms see my article "Two Terms or Wealth in Proverbs VIII in Light of Akkadian," *VT* 50 (2000), 252–57.

8. Compare the Hebrew pair שחק and שעשע with the Akkadian *ṣâḫu* and *lalû*.

IPSA may also be compared with some passages in the Egyptian satirical work of the Nineteenth Dynasty, "The Instructions of Duauf," which extols the life of the scribe even while ridiculing other professions.[9] *Mutatis mutandis*, IPSA may be held up against Ben-Sira 38:24–39:11 (especially 38:24, 39:1–11) which, although it speaks more respectfully of other jobs than does the Egyptian work, urges learning the scribal craft, called here *ḥokmat hassôpēr*, a Hebrew synonym of nam-dub-sar-ra: *ṭupšarrūtu.*[10] The calling and activity of the Jewish scribe of the third century B.C.E. apocryphal work is far different from that of his Mesopotamian and Egyptian predecessors, and the various texts referred to derive from a vast geographical, chronological, and sociological range. But all of them are nonetheless products of educated literati, engaged in the profession of preserving and studying their respective scribal traditions on one hand, and charged running government and civil institutions on the other hand, and they all boast the same high opinion of themselves. Both Ben-Sira and IPSA speak of the great efforts and loss of sleep that must be invested in learning the craft. Ben Sira 39:5 describes the scribe rising early to seek the Lord, while IPSA, l. 8 recommends that the scribe stay awake, lose sleep, and work ceaselessly at his craft (igi.DU um-ma-ra-ak-en: *tadallipšimma*), and both speak of their crafts revealing secrets. According to Ben-Sira, the scribe "studies the hidden meaning of proverbs, and is busied with the enigmas found in parables" (Ben Sira 39:3) and meditates upon God's mysteries (v. 7). IPSA ll. 7–8 depicts the scribal art as the "secret of Ammanki" (Enki, see below), promising that the scribal craft will reveal its secrets to those who tire over it.

These general and detailed similarities indicate that IPSA is an early example of a long-lived, common genre of ancient Near Eastern literature in which scribes promote themselves to the detriment of other, lower ranking, less essential members of society.[11] I would like to suggest, however, that classifying IPSA narrowly and exclusively as a work of scribal self-aggrandizement and snobbery does not reveal the full intent of the text. Sjöberg has followed the common, reasonable practice of understanding the text according to its main content. Since the text deals overwhelmingly with the benefits of learning the art of the scribe, and the term for scribal art, *ṭupšarrūtu*, appears at the beginning of ten out of the seventeen lines of the composition, the title given is most appropriate. Also, it is well recognized that Mesopotamian texts often reveal their ultimate purpose only in what comes last.

9. See now M. Lichtheim, "Dua-Khety or the Satire of the Trades," in W. W. Hallo & K. L. Younger, Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture, vol. 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden, 1997), 122–25. Note also McKane, *Proverbs*, 86–91. Similar compositions from the twentieth dynasty include Papyrus Lansing P. British Museum 9994 and P. Chester Beatty IV = P. British Museum 10684, for which see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley, 1976), 2.165–78.

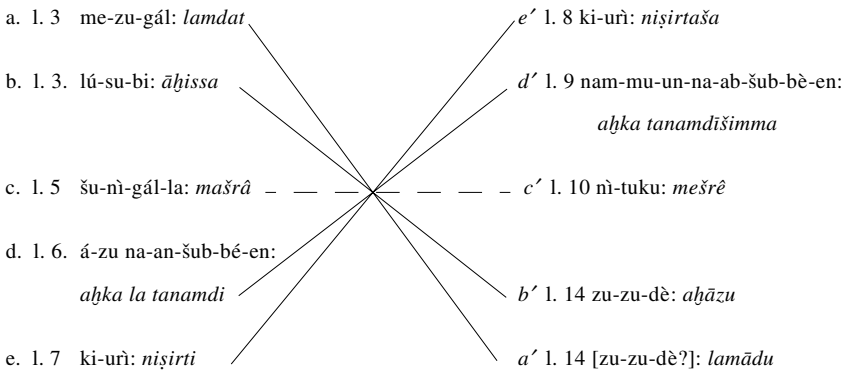
10. For the Ben-Sira passage in general and a comparison with the Egyptian text in particular, see M. Z. Segal, *Sefer Ben-Sira Ha-shalem* (Jerusalem, 1959), 251–60 [in Heb.]; P. W. Skehan & A. A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, *AB* (New York, 1987), 445–53; J. G. Gammie, "The Sage in Sirach," in Gammie & Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel*, 355–72 esp. 366–68.

11. A democratized and highly Judaicized, late offshoot of the genre of praising the wisdom of the scribe is the sixth chapter of *Pirkei Avot*, which is a collection of adages concerning the benefits of acquiring knowledge of the Torah, and the efforts which must be spent in the process. For *Pirkei Avot* as a successor to biblical wisdom literature, see I. B. Gottlieb, "Pirqe Abot and Biblical Wisdom," *VT* 40 (1990), 152–64. It can be expected that praises of scribes and their art are found in other cultures as well.

Since the text concludes by mentioning not the scribal art but the scribe himself, there might be justification in calling it "In Praise of the Scribe." However, an additional, subtle message of the text may be discerned if we heed some stereotyped literary features of the text which were beyond the purview of Sjöberg's predominantly philological and lexical study.[12]

The bilingual text contains seventeen lines. Of these, the first seven begin with the Sumerian words nam-dub-sar-ra translated *ṭupšarrūtu* (ll. 1–3, 7) or *ana ṭupšarrūtu* (ll. 4, 5, 6). The same words appear in lines 10 and 12, whereas line 17 begins in nearly the same manner with dub-sar: *ṭupšarrū*. Forms of dub-sar: *ṭupšarrū* thus occur ten times, embracing and marking the entire composition with a *Leitwort* which appears a typologically significant number of times. The fact that the *Leitwort* occurs seven and an additional three for a total of ten times marks it as more than a mere, frequently repeated word. We will see, in fact, that the distribution of the repeated word has significance as well.

Examining the language of the text carefully reveals some additional words that occur more than once and in a significant manner. More precisely we find the following:



This chart shows a list of five terms spanning the first seven lines of the composition which are repeated one by one but in reverse order in the next seven lines, 8–14.[13] The turning point in the chain is the seventh line, the one where the first seven occurrences of nam-dub-sar-ra: *ṭupšarrūtu* come to an end. More significantly, however, is that between the words ki-urì: *niṣirti* and ki-urì: *niṣirtaša* we find

12. I have discussed such literary devices in some previous publications including "Literary Structures in Samsuiluna A," *JCS* 36 (1984), 191–205; "Some Literary Observations on the Šitti-Marduk Kudurru (BBSt 6)," *ZA* 82 (1992), 39–59; *Inu Anum ṣīrum, Literary Structures in the Non-Juridical Sections of Codex Hammurabi* (Philadelphia, 1994), esp. 7–10; *Divine Service and Its Rewards. Ideology and Poetics in the Hinke Kudurru*, Beer Sheva. Studies By the Department of Bible and Ancient Near East 10 (Beer Sheva, 1997); "Reading A Votive Inscription. Simbar-Shipak and the Ellilification of Marduk," *RA* 91 (1997), 39–47. The features relevant to the present inscription are the structural use of repeating a word seven times, the significance of the seventh position in a repetitive literary structure, and the use of chiasm to emphasize the high point and climax of a text.

13. There may be a sixth pair for we find in the proper place in the sequence *iʾaddarša*, "be anxious about it," in l. 3 recapitulated by the semantically similar *tanamziq*, "it causes you grief," in l. 11. This is admittedly a rare juxtaposition, but cf. the sequence *šunzuqāku*, *šudlupāku*, *adrāku* in *LKA* 58:12, cited in *CAD* N/2, 138, s.v. *nazāqu* 4b).

[d]Ammanki, a standard Emesal title of Ea/Enki, god of wisdom but not known in particular as a patron deity of scribes.[14] Although this name occurs only once in the composition and is the only proper name and divine epithet in the work, it is given added significance by its position. On the one hand, it occurs at the end of the seventh line, the number emphasized by the line containing the seventh appearance of the Leitwort. On the other hand, it is pivotal, occurring at the turning point of a chain of words and terms chiastically arranged.

The triple emphasis on the deity Ammanki/Enki, reinforced by a word play on his name,[15] is certainly intentional. It adds a theological dimension to the composition that is overlooked if attention is given only to the more obvious elements such as the vocabulary and the linear development of the piece. Drawing attention to Enki/Ammanki by stylistic and structural devices means that this composition is not only a praise of the scribal art or the scribe in general but calls specific attention to the god in charge. It may be considered not only a hymn to scribal art and scribes, but to the god of the scribal art.

As a matter of fact, the hymn may have a subtext or ulterior motive. Although Enki is a god of wisdom and numerous crafts, he is never explicitly associated with the art of the scribe.[16] To be sure, the only Mesopotamian deities ever explicitly associated with *ṭupšarrūtu* or given the title *ṭupšarrū* are Nisaba and later Nabû. The specific "secrets of Ea (Enki)," *niṣirti Ea*, are divination, *bārûtu*, and lamentation, *kalûtu*, but never *ṭupšarrūtu*.[17] These areas are distinct disciplines and there is no reason to assume that the first two are simply subcategories of the third, so attributing

14. For the passage see *CAD* N/2, 276a, s.v. *niṣirtu* bilingual section, which translates "the scribe's craft is a good thing, the secret lore of Enki, if you work ceaselessly with it, it will reveal its secrets to you." For Ammanki cf. *CT* 24, 42f.; CT 25, 47, l. 109 [*[d]An-ma-a-an-ki [d]É-a šamê u erṣetim* [a late Midrashic interpretation of the written form of the name]; H. D. Galter, *Der Gott Ea/Enki in der akkadischen Überlieferung. Eine Bestandsaufnahme des vorhandenen Materials*, Dissertationen der Karl-Franzens-Universitat Graz 58 (1983), 20–23. Am-ma-an-ki is in this god list the second of Ea's titles, preceding even En-engur and Nudimmud. B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, Maryland, 1997), 2.503 lists [d]Am-an-ki in SP 11.9, a broken context, as emesal for [d]En-ki. Galter, *Der Gott Ea/Enki*; Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven, 1976), 110–16; and S. N. Kramer & J. Maier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* (Oxford, 1989) do not discuss the hymn and make no particular mention of an association of Ea/Enki with scribal art. Note, however, J. Black & A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia. An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin, 1992), 185, s.v. "wedge," who observe, "On seals and sealings of the Old Babylonian Period, this wedge [representing the actual stylus used to produce cuneiform script on leather hard clay] is held by a number of apparently different male deities, including the water god Ea (Enki); a god who stands on a bull, so probably Adad; and a god who stands on a snake dragon, probably Nabu.

15. P. Michalowski observes (private communication) that: "the point of this line is a play on words. The scribe made up the strange é-a nì-tuku, anticipating the ES form of the god's name. The ki then reappears in the strange ki-ùri, which is in "Proper" Sumerian, the equivalent of *ašar niṣirti* . . . It is a playful tour-de-force of philology, in which the same words and the same syllable segments are repeated with different meanings, assonances are used and semantic contrasts, very much like the kind of things one finds in late lexical texts." Michalowski also has pointed out additional cases of possible word plays in the text that we may hope he will one day publish.

16. The only passage cited by Galtner (Ea/Enki, p. 99) in support of Ea/Enki being associated with the intellectual endeavor of scribal art is IPSA.

17. See *CAD* N/2, 277, s.v. *niṣirtu* 1e); R. Borger, "Geheimwissen" *RLA* 3.188–91. Note that divination and lamentations are religious enterprises, whereas the activities described in IPSA ("To write a stele, to draw a field, to settle accounts, [. . . . . .]. . . . . the palace. . . . .May the scribe be its (the scribal arts) servant, he calls for the corvee basket" ll. 15–17), are totally secular.

the third to Ea is in fact an expansion of his role. IPSA may be intent on subverting the regular goddess of scribes, Nisaba, to the extent that she is still regarded as patron of the scribal craft at this period, or of Nabû, who appears as the deity of scribes and scribal art at a later period, and replacing them by Enki.[18] The text may be attempting to enhance Ea's position in this aspect of wisdom as well.[19] We should bear in mind, nonetheless, according to NIN-MUL-AN-GIM, the so-called "Blessing of Nisaba by Enki," that the goddess's well-attested authority over schools and scribes is in fact blessed by Enki, which would indicate at least an indirect patronage of the scribal craft at a relatively early period.[20] Also, according to a much later text, a colophon of Assurbanipal (Streck, *Asb.* 254 i 13), *ṭupšarrūtu* is associated not with Ea himself but with his faithful servant Adapa.[21] So here again Ea would be only an indirect patron. IPSA would therefore raise Ea from rank of indirect patron of the scribal art to direct patron. The promotion seems to have been quite short-lived. Whatever the case may be, IPSA is the only attestation specifically linking Enki with the art of the scribe.

Literary analysis of this text has shown that the scribal art permitted its adherents not only to write a stele or measure a field, but to write a fine-tuned, precisely worded poem conveying a subtle, theological message. The composition not only praises scribal art above all others, but elevates the scribal art's divine patron, Enki.

APPENDIX

For the reader's convenience I present here Sjöberg's transliteration and translation of IPSA. The only changes made include normalization of the Akkadian, indication of caesuras in the individual verses as signs of poetic parallelism, paragraph divisions denoting thematic organization, and emphasis in bold type or underlining of the features discussed in the body of this article.

1.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** ama-gù-dé-ke$_4$-e-ne	a-a um-me-a-ke$_4$-eš
	ṭupšarrūtu *ummu lā*$^{\supset}$*iṭat*	*abi ummāni*
2.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** nam in-da-ab-tuk-a	la-la-bi nu-un-gi$_4$-gi$_4$
	ṭupšarrūtu *ṣajāḫatma*	*lalâša ul iššebbi*

18. According to T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (New York, 1992), 71, during the Old Babylonian period and later "Nisaba, patroness of learning, has all but disappeared. The chief figure of wisdom is Enki/Ea, while Nisaba's role as goddess of writing and patron of scribal schools was taken over by Nabu." On Nisaba's role as paradigmatic wise woman and her specific functions, see ibid., 39–41.

19. If this is the case it would be reminiscent of what we find in the Simbar-shipak inscription, where I have suggested that the centrality of Marduk in that composition is intended to promote his identity with Ellil; V. A. Hurowitz, "Reading a Votive Inscription" (above, n. 8). At a later period, Nabû, descendent of Ea/Enki, becomes the main Mesopotamian god of scribes.

20. See W. W. Hallo, "The Cultic Setting of Sumerian Poetry," in A. Finet, ed., *Actes de la XVIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Université Libre de Bruxelles 30 juin- 4 juillet 1969* (Ham-sur-Heure, 1970), 116–34; and now "The Blessing of Nisaba by Enki," in *The Context of Scripture*, 1.531–32.

21. Cf. B. R. Foster, "Wisdom and the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Orientalia* 43 (1974), 344–54.

3.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** **me-zu-gál**	**lú-su-bi** nu-un-diri-ga
	ṭupšarrūtu *la* ***lamdat***	***āḫissa*** *ul iʾaddarša*
4.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** ir-pag ù-bí-ak	á-tuku ḫa-ra-ab-daḫ-e
	ana ***ṭupšar[r]ūtu*** *kipidma*	*nēmela liṣṣibka*
5.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** bar-dag ù-bí-ak	**šu-nì-gál-la** a-ra-ab-tuku
	ana ***ṭupšarrūtu*** *tūpulma*	***mašra*** *lišaršīka*
6.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** na-ab-íl-en	**á-zu na-ab-šub-bé-[en]**
	ana ***ṭupšarrūtu*** *la egâta*	***aḫka la tanamdi***
7.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** é-a nì-tuku	**ki-urì-^{d}am-ma-an-ki-k[e$_4$]**
	ṭupšarrūtu *bīt būni*	***niṣirti*** ^{d}***ammankima***
8.	[igi]-DU um-ma-ra-ak-en	**ki-urì** na-an-da-ab-lá-e[n]
	tadallipšima	***niṣirtaša*** *ukallamka*
9.	**g[ù]-dé nam-mu-un-na-ab-šub-bé-en**	ság-zu di-[di-e-dè]
	aḫka tanamdīšima	*masiktaka iqqabb[i]*
10.	**n[am-dub-s]ar-ra** giš šub-ba-zíl-la	**nì-tuku** nam-ḫé-[a]
	ṭupšarrūtu *isiq damāqi*	***mešrê*** *u n[uḫši]*
11.	u$_4$-tur-ra-zu-ta nam-ma-si	ab-gu-la-t[a x x (x)]
	ina ṣeḫērīka tanamziq	*[ina rabêka . . .]*
12.	**nam-dub-sar-ra** dur-da-gan-KA-[x x] x nun me [x x x]	
	ṭupšarrūtu *markas kulla[t x x] x i me [x x]*	
13.	gù-dé nam-mu-un-da-ab-gá-gá-an	sig$_5$-ga-b[i x x x]
	taššurūšimma	*du[muq]ša* [. . . . . .]
14.	nì-zu diri-ga eme-gi$_7$ zu-zu-dè	eme-[x] zu eme-sal **[zu-zu-dè?]**
	iḫzu šūturu šumēru ***aḫāzu***	KAB-*lit* ***lam[ādu*** *x x x x]*
15.	na$_4$-rú-a ab-sar-e-d[è a-šà]-ga gíd-e-[dè]	nì-ka$_9$ sá-du$_{11}$-[ge-dè] [x x x]
	narâ šaṭāri eqla [šadād]u	*nikassa kašādu! [x x x]*
16.	[x x (x)] é-g[al x] x x	
	si še x[. . . . .] x É.GAL *šū ka*-[. . . . .]	
17.	**dub-sar** a-ri-bi ḫé-a gi-dusu ab-x-[x x]	
	ṭupšar *lū arad išassi ina ṭupšikku* [x x]	

1. The scribal art is the mother of orators,[22] the father of masters;

2. The scribal art is delightful, in never satiates you;[23]

3. The scribal art is not (easily) learned (but) he who has learned it need no longer be anxious about it;

4. Strive to (master) the scribal art, and it will enrich you;[24]

5. Be industrious in the scribal art, and it will provide you with wealth and abundance;[25]

6. Do not be careless concerning the scribal art, do not neglect it;

7. The scribal art is a "house of richness,"[26] the secret of Amanki.[27]

8. Work ceaselessly[28] with the scribal art and it will reveal its secret to you;

9. If you neglect it, they will make malicious remarks about you;

10. The scribal art is a good lot, richness and abundance;

11. Since you were a child it causes you grief, since you have grown up [it . . .],

12. The scribal art is the "bond" of all . . . [. . . . .] . . .

13. Work hard for it [and it will. . . . you] its beautiful prosperity,

14. To have superior knowledge in Sumerian, to learn. . . . . , [to learn] Emesal,

15. To write a stele, to draw a field, to settle accounts, [. . . . . .]

16. . . . . the palace. . . . .

17. May the scribe be its (the scribal arts) servant, he calls for the corvee basket, [. . . .]

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22. *CAD* L, 113, s.v. *lâṭu* A, translates on the basis of the Sumerian "the scribal art is the mother of eloquent ones." Note the pun between *ummu* and *umānu*.

23. Literally, "one is never sated with its charms." Cf. *CAD* Š/2, 252, "the scribal art is a beguiling woman, one never can have enough of her charms." The personification of the scribal art as perceived by the dictionary is undoubtedly analogous to the personification of wisdom as a female figure in Prov. 1:20–33; 8:22–31; and 9:1–12.

24. *CAD* N/2, 157, s.v. *nēmelu*, translates "be assiduous with the scribal art and it will give you profit."

25. Note the alliteration in *mašrâ lišaršīka*.

26. Sjöberg's translation is based on an emendation reading é nì-tuku-a. Description of the scribal art as a house of good things, or a house of richness may be related perhaps to the house built by Wisdom in Prov. 9:1.

27. The noun *niṣirtu* undoubtedly bears the connotations here of both secret and treasures as it probably does in the next line as well. This may be a case of Janus parallelism, the meaning "treasure" appropriate for the preceding words, while "secret" suits better the words that follow. *CAD* N/2, 276, translates: "the scribe's craft is a good thing, the secret lore of Enki, if you work ceaselessly with it, it will reveal its secrets to you." The text refers to the sophisticated use of double entendres, hidden meanings, or even mystical connotations of many texts facilitated by the complex cuneiform writing system and injected into the texts by astute and clever scribes.

28. The verb *dalāpu* has connotations of loss of sleep. Cf. loss of sleep in learning Torah in *Avot* 6: 4 and 6.