

**Cuneiform Hermeneutics: The Akkadian Commentaries of Ancient Mesopotamia**  
**Seminar: Heidelberg, 13-16.5.2019**  
**Prof. Uri Gabbay, Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

**General:**

Mesopotamian Akkadian commentary texts have been much neglected in Assyriological scholarship, but in the past few years there has been a revival in their study. The cuneiform tablets on which commentaries are written stem from various sites in Assyria and Babylonia, and date from ca. the eighth century BCE up to the first century BCE. The commentaries interpret various texts, especially divinatory text, astronomical texts, medical texts, lexical texts, as well as religious, magical, and literary texts.

In this seminar we will read a few examples of such commentaries, and will focus on the sources of these commentaries as found in other genres, the scholastic social environment of commentaries, the terminology they use, the hermeneutical features that they feature, and their possible relations to later commentary texts, from other societies, especially early Jewish Midrash in Hebrew and Aramaic.

**Selected general and introductory bibliography:**

- Frahm, E. (2011) *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 5). Münster.
- Gabbay, U. (2012) "Akkadian Commentaries from Ancient Mesopotamia and Their Relation to Early Hebrew Exegesis," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 19, 267-312.
- Labat, R. (1933) *Commentaires assyro-babyloniens sur les présages*. Bordeaux.
- Cuneiform Commentaries Project (CCP): <https://ccp.yale.edu/>.

**Reading for seminar (secondary literature):**

- Cuneiform Commentaries Project (CCP), Introduction: <https://ccp.yale.edu/introduction>
- Frahm, E. (2011) *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 5). Münster, 3-85 (chapters 1-5) (can be read selectively).

**Reading for seminar (primary literature to be prepared by the participants):**

- Meeting 1: Exegesis in non-commentary genres: Interpretation in divinatory letters to the Assyrian king  
H. Hunger (1992), *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings* (SAA 8), Helsinki, nos. 8 and 175.  
S. Parpola (1993), *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA 10), Helsinki, nos. 33 and 42.

- Meeting 2: Commentary on Marduk's Address to the Demons from Neo-Assyrian Assur  
M.J. Geller (2016) *Healing Magic and Evil Demons. Healing Magic and Evil Demons*. Berlin, 394-396.  
(cf. also previous editions: M.J. Geller [2014] *Melothesia in Babylonia. Medicine, Magic, and Astrology in the Ancient Near East*, Berlin, 64-68; W.G. Lambert [1954-56] "An Address of Marduk to the Demons," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 17, 310-321; W.G. Lambert, W. G. [1959/60] "An Address of Marduk to the Demons: New Fragments," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 19, 114-119).

- Meeting 3: Commentary on liver omens (*Manzāzu*) from the Neo-Assyrian period  
Koch-Westenholz, U. (2000) *Babylonian Liver Omens. The Chapters Manzāzu, Padānu and Pān Tākalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series mainly from Aššurbanipal's Library*. Copenhagen, 132-150 (no. 19. *Manzāzu* Commentary 1) (selected lines).

- Meeting 4: Commentaries on a medical diagnostic text (Sagig I) from Late Babylonian Uruk/Nippur  
George, A. R. (1991) "Babylonian Texts from the folios of Sidney Smith. Part Two: Prognostic and Diagnostic Omens, Tablet I," *Revue d'Assyriologie* 85, 146-153 (selected lines).