Cuneiform Hermeneutics: The Akkadian Commentaries of Ancient Mesopotamia
Seminar: Heidelberg, 13-16.5.2019
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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:

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

Meeting 3: Commentary on liver omens (Manzāzu) from the Neo-Assyrian period

Meeting 4: Commentaries on a medical diagnostic text (Sagig I) from Late Babylonian Uruk/Nippur