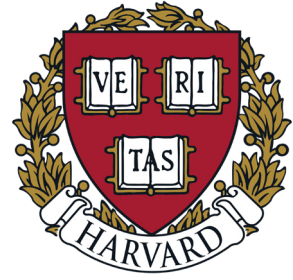


Methodologies in Egyptology and Mesopotamian Studies (MEMS)



When the Dead Devour the Living: On Akkadian Death Omens, Necromancy, and Babylonian “Eschatology”

Eric Aupperle (G2, Assyriology)

Corpses, wandering ghosts, and the dead inhabitants of the netherworld appear frequently in Akkadian omen literature, both as portents in omen protases and as actors in omen apodoses. This paper examines the role of dead beings in Akkadian divinatory texts in connection with the Babylonian literary topos of the Dead devouring the Living. The physical appearance, social and religious function, and motivations of the Dead in Old and Standard Babylonian divinatory texts are examined in tandem with the characterization of the Dead in other technical corpora: in the canonical anti-magical series (*Maqlû*, *Šurpû*, *Utukkû*), in temple ritual texts (*mīš pī*), in medical-magical compendia (*sa.gig*, *ugu*), and in wisdom compositions. The Old and Middle Babylonian scholarly sources are found to present a self-consistent picture of the roles of the Dead in the netherworld and in the steppe, and of the means through which the Dead may stray or be summoned into the inhabited world. The tropes associated with the rise of the Dead in Babylonian scholarly texts come close to representing a cohesive eschatological tradition. In Babylonian predictive and religious literature, there is real dread of a lurking, distant possibility that the Dead (if left unsupervised by the gods) will someday emerge from their great city in the ground and devour their living relatives above, starving the gods of offerings and depopulating the world forever.

Time: Friday, February 12 @ 3:00 PM EST

Location: Email for Zoom Meeting Invitation

Upcoming Presentations:
TBA