Preface

Like all large text editions, the present work has a long and complex history. The plan for a comprehensive modern edition and translation of Mesopotamian eye disease texts began in 2005, when Geller was invited to spend a year in Paris as Visiting Professor at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, supported by a research grant from the Wellcome Trust. The decision to study eye disease texts was made jointly by Geller with Dr. Annie Attia and Dr. Gilles Buisson, editors of the Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes and practicing physicians. Eye disease was chosen because of the existence of an extensive corpus of texts in cuneiform script, and the study could take advantage of Dr. Attia's personal expertise as an ophthalmologist. The three collaborators met every Friday to read through eye disease texts in the library of the Collège de France, throughout 2005–2006. There was not much previous work to take advantage of, since the only modern study of Mesopotamian eye disease had been a Würzburg dissertation from Jeanette Fincke (2000), which was useful for its extensive discussion of relevant terminology and numerous excerpts, but her work did not edit eye-disease texts. By the end of 2006, a preliminary edition of the main eye-disease texts from Nineveh had taken shape, with a translation in both English and French, but much work remained to be done.

Eye disease became one of the key texts to be studied in the programme of the ERC Advanced Grant BabMed (2013–2018), in which Geller was the PI and Panayotov a postdoctoral researcher. With the earlier preliminary edition from Paris as a starting point, Panayotov assembled all exemplars of eye disease texts into an IGI corpus, with the crucial decision being made to have Nineveh manuscripts as the basic exemplars – i.e. duplicates – and parallel witnesses from other sites treated as secondary. This is an important methodological innovation for working with serialized Nineveh texts. Geller and Panayotov each collated IGI tablets, and they jointly read every line of every text together, agreeing on a translation and key points for an explanatory philological commentary on the texts. Panayotov collated every relevant text in the British Museum and the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin and Geller collated tablets in Istanbul as well. In the few instances when a text could not be collated, photos were used instead. Panayotov was responsible for the text layout and for the transliteration and transcription of the eclectic text, and the basic draft of the translation and commentary was his work, with additions and corrections made by Geller. Panayotov took photos, assembled the plates, and composed a complete glossary of IGI as well as a list of Sumerian logograms, with reproductions of the cuneiform signs for each logogram, which was novel. He also composed the indicies. While the philological commentary was being written, Panayotov incorporated many references to further work on IGI carried out by Annie Attia, which appeared as a French translation and interpretation of IGI, in the Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes in 2015. Finally, each co-author wrote his own introduction to the volume, reflecting their individual interests in the material. Geller proofread and corrected the whole volume on several occasions.

Neither author would have been able to produce this edition of IGI working alone, and this text edition confirms the distinct advantages of collaborating in a large project, while incorporating the assistance and support of other colleagues over many years. The German capital proved to be an ideal working environment for the BabMed Project, with many opportunities for consultation and collaboration with colleagues in the Topoi Excellence Cluster, from the Freie Universität, Humboldt Universität, and Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte. The broader context of ancient medicine often featured in these discussions, on Greek medicine and science with Philip van der Eijk, Markus Asper, and Gerd Grasshoff, on Chinese medicine with Paul Unschuld, on Mesopotamian intellectual culture with Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, and on common sense science with Klaus Geus. Glenn Most's Anneliese Maier research colloquium addressing methodological issues of editing ancient texts proved useful. The various discussions and Topoi seminars all had an impact on the vision of Mesopotamian eye disease within ancient science proposed in this volume. Furthermore, members of the BabMed research team, together with students and visiting scholars such as Henry Stadhouders, Amar Annus, András Bacskay, and Frans Wiggermann, participated in the weekly Keilschriftmedizin Seminar, which advanced the work on cuneiform medicine and related texts. Frans Wiggermann shared his personal research archive and Zettelkasten on Mesopotamian medicine. In addition, many scholars associated with BabMed, in particular Irving Finkel, Marten Stol, Nils Heeßel, Daniel Schwemer, Martin Worthington, Annie Attia, and Gilles Buisson, participated in BabMed workshops and lent their considerable expertise to a fuller understanding of Babylonian medicine.

It is gratifying to know that the present volume is not the end of the road for work on eye disease texts within Babylonian medicine. A new project, NinMed, managed by Jon Taylor of the British Museum and funded by the Wellcome Trust, will continue the pioneering work of BabMed. The three-year project will create online editions and translations of the extensive medical treatises of the Nineveh Royal Library. Panayotov, who designed the original project proposal, will be a primary contributor to NinMed, with Geller and Irving Finkel as project collaborators. The transition from BabMed to NinMed has already proved to be productive for the present edition. The Electronic Babylonian Literature (eBL) tools, under the guidance of E. Jiménez, has proved to be particularly useful in catching small inconsistences in the transliteration of IGI, which is being digitalised by Panayotov for the NinMed project. The shift in venue from the Freie Universität Berlin to the British Museum will bring the editions of Babylonian medicine closer to the cuneiform tablets. Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation with colleagues in Berlin and elsewhere will continue to play an important role in deciphering, interpreting and contextualising ancient Babylonian medicine, and in particular its close associations with other systems of medicine in the ancient world.