

Preface and Dedication

In 1927, the great Ernst Weidner published an article titled “Eine Beschreibung des Sternenhimmels aus Assur,” in *Archiv für Orientforschung* (vol. 4, pp. 73–85). This article presented a most interesting tablet from Assur in Neo-Assyrian script describing how to draw a number of the Mesopotamian constellations including “The Great Twins” and “The Lesser Twins” (Gemini), “The Crab” (Cancer), “The Lion” (Leo), and “The Wagon” and “The Wagon of Heaven” (the Big and Little Dippers). For most of the 20th century, this remained a unique member of the cuneiform corpus. Then, in the 1990s, working independently, Paul-Alain Beaulieu identified three more exemplars of the same type of text in the tablet collections of Yale University, and Wayne Horowitz identified another exemplar at The British Museum, thus giving us a group of five tablets of the type published by Weidner. In July 2005, at the “Calendars and Years” workshop of the Seventh Biennial History of Astronomy Workshop held at Notre Dame University, the topic of Weidner’s tablet came up during a discussion between Horowitz and the late John Britton, who knew of Beaulieu’s work on the Yale exemplars. The result was to be a joint publication of the group by Beaulieu, Britton, and Horowitz, for which Britton was to provide the astronomical expertise and the two other authors would be responsible for tablets on which they were already working: Beaulieu, the tablets at Yale; and Horowitz, a re-edition of Weidner’s tablet with the British Museum duplicate. This was not to be, due to the untimely passing of John Britton. Fortunately, John Steele agreed to take the place of John Britton as the project’s astronomical expert, and preparation for publication continued apace. In recent years, Eckart Frahm of Yale University has joined the group and made important contributions regarding the tablet fragments at Yale; in particular, producing a handcopy and edition of MLC 1884 and undertaking a detailed study of the non-astronomical part of this tablet (he is solely responsible for Appendix C). This brings our team of scholars to the four named on this book’s title page, but in reality we are five. The fifth is our missing friend, John Britton, to whom this volume is dedicated and without whom this volume would never have come to be. May his memory be blessed.

