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ADVERTISING SECRECY, CREATING POWER IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: HOW SCHOLARS USED SECRECY IN SCRIBAL EDUCATION TO BOLSTER AND PERPETUATE THEIR SOCIAL PRESTIGE AND POWER

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Abstract: Advertising Secrecy, Creating Power in Ancient Mesopotamia: How Scholars Used Secrecy in Scribal Education to Bolster and Perpetuate Their Social Prestige and Power

This study investigates how ancient scholars from mid-first millennium Babylonia and Assyria advertised their possession of secret knowledge to scribal students in order to bolster and perpetuate scholarly social prestige and power in society. After a brief theoretical orientation to issues surrounding the study of secrecy and a sketch of the two-tier scribal educational model developed by Petra Gesche, the study presents evidence for advertising scholarly secrets from the circumstances surrounding the storage and handling of tablets bearing the Geheimwissen colophon and from two literary texts copied by first-tier scribes, “In Praise of the Scribal Art” and “The Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.”

Keywords: Scholars – Scribes – Secrecy – Social Power

Resumen: Publicitando secretos y creando poder en la antigua Mesopotamia: de qué modo los eruditos hicieron uso de los secretos en la educación de los escribas para reforzar y perpetuar su prestigio social y poder

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