

## Summa Izbu

*“If a fetus has eight legs and two tails, the prince of the kingdom will seize power”*

-No. 277 from *Omens from Births*,  
Neo-Assyrian cuneiform text,  
7<sup>th</sup> century BC

Since the days of stone tablets scribes have filled the library of the King.  
Their slim triangular shapes, wedges of a strange Semitic language,

tell of the deformation of skeletons shaped in their likenesses.  
Proclamations of magicians and astrologers divine provincial profit

from serious deviations in the natural chaos of the body.  
Monochorionic mutations, apoplectiform accidents –

all teratological omens of ominous significance.  
A strange kind of science, that of the forebodings of wrath.

Always protasis-apodosis; if this, then that. *“If an anomaly . . .”*

Talking double heads and double bodies, the child born who,  
from the belly up, was in all parts double.

The baritone who cannot hold his head straight yet sings  
with double the force. Perceived error of the natural world

illustrates what separates monstrous from wondrous,  
terrestrial from celestial. What unusual births,

those epigraphic groups of characters,  
resembling the seven small bones of the human ankle,

which always were more than just mummery.