

How did the Babylonians give someone an 'A'?

I am doing some research into Vincenzo Galilei's championing of equal temperament, and in the process I have learned quite a lot about how the second, third, fourth, fifth and so on, strings were tuned, including Michael Levy's excellent article on cyclical tuning, and Professor Dumbrill's piece on ancient lyres, but I have yet to find any historical account that includes how the first string was tuned. When I have asked, I have been referred to studies of pitch pipes and tuning forks, but these never describe how those reference pitches were tuned/selected. I am assuming that, like all the other strings, the reference string was also tuned by ear, but what was its reference? It has been suggested that musicians relied on one of their number having perfect pitch, but then that would not explain why the pitches of, say, organs varied so widely from cathedral to cathedral, given that organ pipes are absolutely subject to mathematical ratios. They, at least, should have been able to match a reference pitch, perfect or not.

It turns out that Vincenzo's thought processes mark a turning point not just in music theory and practice, but in the recognition and development of reference criteria in all fields of human knowledge, so it is of crucial importance to me to understand what they were and, most specifically, what their origins were. Nowadays, when somebody says "Give me an A", we all know what they are going to get. How did the Babylonians give someone an A?

If anyone has any thoughts on this, I would be most grateful to hear them,

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