

79) Of Pigs and Workers: A Note on Lugal-e and a Late Babylonian Commentary on *Šumma ālu* 49 — The Late Babylonian commentary BM 92683<sup>1)</sup> (DT 37; CT 41 30-31; Labat 1933, 66-69<sup>2)</sup>) on *Šumma ālu* Tablet 49 provides a quotation from the Ninurta epic Lugal-e.<sup>3)</sup> The entry in question reads (obv. 3b-4):

diš šaḥ.meš ina sila.dagal.la il-ta-na-su-ú zi-ut [im] / šum<sub>4</sub>-ma zi-ut giš.mar u gi.íl : ša-la-lu  
ki šaḥ : at-tú ana e-pe-ši-ka k[i-ma šaḥ lu-u š]al-lat

“if pigs run around lively<sup>4)</sup> in the main street, rising of [wind], or: calling up<sup>5)</sup> of (corvée labourers wielding) spade and basket (for carrying bricks and earth)’ – (it means) to sleep where<sup>6)</sup> the pig (sleeps) (as in:) ‘For doing your work, you shall sleep li[ke a pig]’”.

The omen cited and commented on represents the fourth omen of *Šumma ālu* Tablet 49.<sup>7)</sup> A parallel omen appears in *Šumma izbu* Tablet 22 (omen 159 in De Zorzi 2014, 88I, 898):

*šumma šaḥû ina sūqi irtanaqudû* (variant: *iltanassumû*) *tib šāri šumma tibût marri u tupšikki*

“if pigs persistently gambol about (variant: run around lively) in the street, rising of wind, or: calling up of (corvée labourers wielding) spade and basket (for carrying bricks and earth).”

Another parallel is found in *Šumma ālu* Tablet 46, but in this case, the omen concerns dogs:

*šumma kalbānu ina sūqi iltanassumû tibût marri u tupšikki*

“if dogs run around lively in the street, calling up of (corvée labourers wielding) spade and basket (for carrying bricks and earth).”<sup>8)</sup>

The final broken section of the commentary is taken from Lugal-e 484:

*at-ta ina e-pe-ši-ka ki-ma šá-ḥe-e lu-u šal-lat*

“you shall sleep like a pig when you do your work.”<sup>9)</sup>

The quotation is not explicitly introduced as such.<sup>10)</sup> The commentary has the variant *ana epēšika* instead of *ina epēšika*, which is not known from the extant manuscripts of Lugal-e (van Dijk 1983, vol. 1, 132), but it is closer to the Sumerian version of this line, *za-e dím-me/e-dè šaḥ-gin, nú-ba*.<sup>11)</sup> The subject is the stone <sup>na</sup>na (Lugal-e 480), which Ninurta curses for not having sided with him in his battle against Asag: according to Lugal-e 485-486, it is not used for noble purposes and it is destined to radical structural alterations (reduction to pieces [pulverization?] and dissolution in water). The stone <sup>na</sup>na still eludes sure identification.<sup>12)</sup> According to Mittermayer 2009, 276-278, the association of <sup>na</sup>na with millstones in lexical texts and the comparison with a pig in Lugal-e 484 – in her translation “Liege da wie ein Schwein (= untätig), um zu arbeiten!” – suggest an original passive function of the stone, which was used “als ‘Unterlage’ zur Bearbeitung eines anderen Materials (in einer reibenden, waagrechteten Bewegung).” Heimpel 1968, 256, on the other hand, took the simile in Lugal-e 484 as

evidence of an active function:

“der Stein soll sich in der Substanz, die er zerkleinert, drehen wie ein Schwein sich im Schlamm suhlt.”

In both cases, the image is that of the pig in the mud, lying motionless or rolling about. According to Schuster-Brandis 2008, 435, the description of the stone in Lugal-e 484-486 indicates a “soft stone”, maybe a “Baustoff aus ungebranntem Lehm.”

Why does the Hellenistic commentator use this quote from Lugal-e to explain the omen he is interested in? The protasis and the apodosis of the omen are clearly linked by an association between the confused activity of pigs (or dogs, in the parallel) and the bustle of corvée labourers of low status.<sup>13)</sup> However, we need to clarify whether the commentator effectively based himself on the metonymy underlying the omen (spade and basket standing for those who wield these instruments), or whether he understood the apodosis literally (“raising of spade and basket”). Taken independently of what follows, the first part of the explanation, *ša-la-lu ki šaḥ* “sleep where the pig sleeps” implies an animated referent, which can only be the workers: in this light, the commentator referred explicitly to the metonymy underlying the omen, basing himself on “mud” as the *tertium comparationis* between the pig and the wielders of spade and basket. The association between the pig and mud is frequent in Mesopotamian literature,<sup>14)</sup> and the Hellenistic commentator would have been familiar with the expression *ēpiš dulli ṭīdi* “mud labourer/workman of the clay” designating a category of dependent labourers in the late period.<sup>15)</sup> These associations could well be connected also to the ambiguity of the sign IM in the first section of the apodosis, which, in the phrase *tibūt IM*, means *šāru* “wind” but could also be read *ṭīdu* “mud,” as in \*“raising of mud.” The quotation from Lugal-e underscores the point made by the commentator by taking up the theme of lying in the mud like a pig and adding a reference to “work.”<sup>16)</sup> *Argumenti causa*, one might suggest as an alternative that *ša-la-lu ki šaḥ* “to sleep where the pig sleeps” is entirely conditioned by the following Lugal-e quote, so that “to sleep” refers to spade and hoe, i.e., to tools that are as it were referred to as animate, just as is the case in Lugal-e. However, some arguments can be advanced against this reading: first, if *ša-la-lu ki šaḥ* “to sleep where the pig sleeps” were entirely dependent on the Lugal-e quote and had no independent explanatory force in the commentator’s mind, why then did he add this note in the first place and did not just quote the Lugal-e line, and why did he introduce a variant – *ki šaḥ* (*šalālu ašar* or *itti šaḥē*) instead of Lugal-e’s *kīma šaḥē*? Second, the stone of Lugal-e is a poor associative match for spade and basket; third, why should the instruments be said explicitly to “sleep” if the idea is to express their being employed in their normal ‘habitat,’ i.e., mud,<sup>17)</sup> and fourth and finally, it is more in line with the general structure of commentaries to assume that a quote from a literary text adds to an explanation that precedes it rather than to read a commentary from ‘right to left,’ assuming that an explanation adduced is in need of an independent elucidation. On balance, therefore, I would maintain the argument that the commentator’s explanation is consonant with the metonymic reading of the omen, referring to the workers’ living conditions.

**1** According to its colophon, the tablet belonged to Nabû-balāssu-iqbi, son of Marduk-zēru-ibni, and was copied by Nabû-balāssu-iqbi’s, son Nabû-šumu-lišir, from an im-gíd-da tablet from Borsippa. They are all members of the Egibatila family (ca. 100 BC): see Frahm 2011, 308.

**2** Two online editions of this tablet are now available, one by S. Freedman ([https://www.academia.edu/15481888/Shumma\\_Alu\\_Tablet\\_49\\_pig\\_omens](https://www.academia.edu/15481888/Shumma_Alu_Tablet_49_pig_omens)) and one by E. Jiménez (Cuneiform Commentaries Project (= CCP) 3.5.49). I have discussed parts of this commentary in De Zorzi 2014, 888-898.

**3** The gist of the present note was presented in the context of a paper read in Paris at the Sorbonne on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, at the meeting “Magicon Zoon / The Animal in Magic” (Labex

Resmed). When preparing the final version of this article, I saw that the identification of the Lugal-e quote had also been made independently by H. Jiménez (CCP 3.5.49, June 2016). Given the difficulty of the passage and the differences in interpretation and explanation between my reading of the evidence and that presented in the current version on the CCP site, a discussion seems warranted nevertheless.

**4** I derive *il-ta-na-su-ú* from *lasāmu* as *iltanassuwū*, a Late Babylonian rendering of *iltanassumū* (where intervocalic <m> stands for /w/), which appears in the canonical version of the *Šumma ālu* omen commented on (kaš<sub>4</sub>.kaš<sub>4</sub>, see below). It cannot be excluded, however, that the spelling given here reflects a version of the omen influenced by *iltanassū* (< *šasū*, written *gù.gù.meš* and said of “pigs in the streets”) which appears in the protasis of an omen following shortly after ours in *Šumma ālu* (omen 8 in Freedman’s reconstruction) and predicting, similar to ours, the rising of wind (in this case *tib meḥê* “rising of a storm”).

**5** In the online editions (see above: Freedman and CCP 3.5.49) the apodosis is translated “uprising of spade and hod (laborers).” However, I think that CAD is right in attributing the meaning “levy” to *tibūtu* here (CAD T, 391a; see also *ibid.*, 479a 5’c’). Note for instance the specification “for piling up of earth for building a wall” in the apodosis of an extispicy omen with the same introduction (see CAD T, 479a 5’c’). In *Šumma ālu* our omen is followed by two omens in which the same protasis is given the further specifications “and their tails are turned upwards” and “and their tails are held between their haunches” (note the intrusion of canine body language into the imagery of the omens here); the apodoses refer to *tibūt ummāni* and, respectively, a victory and a defeat of the army. Clearly, a normal levy must be meant.

**6** *ki* must stand for *ašar* or *itti*; the preposition *kī* (CCP 3.5.49) is written *ki* only extremely rarely in Late Babylonian.

**7** *diš šaḥ.meš ina min* (= *siladagal.la*) *kaš<sub>4</sub>.kaš<sub>4</sub>-mu zi-ib im šum<sub>4</sub>-ma zi-ut giš.mar u gi.il* (K 3725+ (CT 38 46) i 4 and K 3055 (CT 38 45) + K 12089: 4).

**8** Omen 10 in S. Freedman’s online edition of the Tablet: [https://www.academia.edu/24738753/Shumma\\_Alu\\_Tablets\\_46-48\\_dog\\_omens](https://www.academia.edu/24738753/Shumma_Alu_Tablets_46-48_dog_omens).

**9** Van Dijk 1983, vol. 2, 113 translates this line “couche-toi-là comme un cochon afin qu’on te travaille.” Seminar 2001, 169 translates “tu, mentre ti si lavora, possa giacere come un maiale.” CAD N/1, 204a reads *ni-lat* instead of *šal-lat* and translates “you (stone) should lie there like a pig when you are worked on” (see also CAD Š/1, 102a “may you (diorite) lie there like a pig when they work you”). ETCSL (= Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature) 1.6.2: “lie down there, you, to be worked on like a pig;” CCP 3.5.49: “You, (O Stone,) while (they) work on you, lie like a pig!” With Mittermayer (2009) and Heimpel (1968), I believe that a *genitivus subjectivus* after *ina* + infinitive is more probable; also the Sumerian –ed-e syntagma is more easily explained in an analogous way, by assuming an active construction.

**10** On the citation style of the commentaries see Frahm 2011, 107-110.

**11** Note that in fact the Akkadian version of this line comes from the bilingual ms. K 2682+ (j<sub>1</sub> in van Dijk 1983, vol. 1, 132), which for the Sumerian offers the variant *za-e dīm šaḥ-gin<sub>7</sub> ḫé-m[i-(o?)-n]ú: dīm* as “doing” (active participle) is a somewhat better match for *ina epēšika* than *dīm-me/e-dè*.

**12** See Schuster-Brandis 2008, 435 and Mittermayer 2009, 276.

**13** I have discussed these issues in the paper read in Paris (see above) and I will return to it elsewhere.

**14** E.g., Streck 2012, 789-790; CAD R 432-433 s.v. *rušumtu*.

**15** Most recently, Monerie 2015.

**16** It could even be suggested that we have here an implicit value judgement referring to a presumed idleness of forced labourers. Lazyness of forced labour is a theme that crops up in the administrative record, e.g., in PTS 3043 (a Late Babylonian letter from Uruk, publication by Yuval Levavi forthcoming), where workers are chided for “laziness and incompetence” (*riqūtu u muškēnūtu*); in UCP 9/2, 24 from the same archive, administrators are compensated for workers who have absconded, are lazy (*riqu*: not simply “idle” – lack of work is not the issue), or dead (references courtesy M. Jursa).

**17** This would seem to be the idea expressed by the saying “a hoe put in the ground (*allum ša ina ṭīdim na[dū]*) is (like) a mongoose in its city” (Lambert 1960, 272: 11-12).

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