

The city Wall of Babylon – a belt-cord? – In NABU 1991/19 :3, A.R. George proposed a new reading for F. al-Rawi, Iraq 47, p. 10 II 41. In this inscription of Nabopolassar,¹⁾ final work on the restoration of Imgur-Enlil, the great wall of Babylon, is described in the following terms : ³⁾*ina irat kigalli* ⁴⁾*išidšu lū ušaršid* ⁴⁾*e-bi-iḫ dan-num ebirtī šīt Šamši lū ušashir*. Lines 39-40 have numerous parallels in inscriptions of Nabopolassar and Nebukadnezzar II²⁾, and their meaning « I firmly grounded its base on the «thorax» of the Netherworld » is well established. Line 41, however, has no direct parallels, and al-Rawi emended the text to read **e-pé-šum¹ dan-num*, « mighty work ». George, basing his reading on the copy which shows an unambiguous **iḫ* instead of **šum*, connects *e-bi-iḫ* to *ebīḫu*, « thick rope, belt-cord » and further interprets this as figurative for « cincture ». Such an endingless form, however, is grammatically difficult even in a late text like this, and the semantics are also not fully convincing. A different solution can be suggested by comparing our passage to Lam. II 2-3³⁾. Here we read : ²⁾*ul iš-ši ŠU.II-ki* ^{KUR}*EN.TI* ⁴⁾*KUR-ú dan-nu³ É.UL.MAŠ qa-áš-du šu-bat* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ, « neither Mt. Ebiḫ,⁵⁾ the «strong mountain»,⁶⁾ nor pure E'ulmaš, the dwelling of the great gods, could lift your hands, » i.e. could remove Lamaštu's powerful grip.⁷⁾ In view of the common imagery in which city walls are compared to, or described as mountains, typically occurring at exactly this place in building inscriptions,⁸⁾ it seems very probable to me that Iraq 47,10 II 41 also refers to Mt. Ebiḫ as a circumlocution of « mountain » in general. The passage could then be translated as follows : « (A mountain as big as) strong Ebiḫ I made go all the way around the east bank. »

The Sumerians seem to have derived a loanword from Akkadian *ebīḫu*, which is reflected in the reading **ebīḫ* for the logogram ÉŠ.MAḪ.⁹⁾ This word was used in a pun on the geographical name Ebiḫ in « Inanna and Ebiḫ » lines 41 and 100. This may not, however, be a true etymological connection since the name could well be of Pre-Semitic origin.¹⁰⁾ Still, it cannot be positively ruled out that a learned scribe of Nebukadnezzar knew, or recreated, this ancient popular etymology. If this was the case, it would give at least some associative justification for A.R. George's suggestion, which otherwise seems a bit far-fetched and questionable on grammatical grounds.

¹⁾Not Nebuchadnezzar II, as stated by George.

²⁾See CAD K 349b and al-Rawi, Iraq 47, 7.

³⁾My complete reconstruction of this passage makes use of unpublished material which neither al-Rawi nor George had access to.

⁴⁾Var. [...-i]ḫ, from BM 41211+ (unp.).

⁵⁾Textual sources, and further bibliography for Mt. Ebiḫ, the ancient name for Jebel Hamrin, were conveniently collected by P. Steinkeller, in : McG. Gibson (ed.), Uch Tepe 1 (Chicago 1981), 163ff.

⁶⁾The classical example for a « strong mountain » (in this case not explicitly Mt. Ebiḫ) counteracting magical powers is to be found in *Maqlû* v 156ff.

⁷⁾The idiom *qāt x našû* (in which x is not identical with the subject of the verb) is not, to my knowledge, attested in any other comparable context.

⁸⁾See, for example, CAD Š/1, 36 s.v. *šadâniš* ; *ibid.* 56f. s.v. *šadû* A 1 1 ; and YOS 1 38 I 39, cited CAD K 349b.

⁹⁾R. Borger, ABZ p. 234. The value is based on the variant EN.TI in « Inanna and Ebiḫ » line 41 (mscr. Barry Eichler, used here courtesy M. Civil). See furthermore A. Sjöberg, JCS 21, 275³ and M. Civil, JAOS 92, 271.

¹⁰⁾Cf. on this problem I.J. Gelb, AJSL 55, 68, and *id.*, MAD 3, 56 ; J.J.M. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon* (Baltimore 1972), p. 12, again considers a Semitic etymology, but does not make a connection with the root *³bḫ « to gird » (for other Oakk derivatives of this root see MAD 3, 12).

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