

On the Existence and Meaning of a Term *šimūtu* in Early Neo-Babylonian –

In 1990, A. Cavigneaux and B. K. Ismail published a group of inscriptions that were uncovered more than fifteen years ago in the course of salvage operations in the Ḥaditha region (see « Die Statthalter von Suḫu und Mari im 8. Jh. v. Chr. anhand neuer Texte aus den irakischen Grabungen im Staugebiet des Qadissiya-Damms, » *BaM* 21, 1990, pp. 321-456 + plates). The bulk of the inscriptions narrate the exploits of one Ninurta-kudurrī-uṣur, governor of Sūḫu and Mari. They can be dated with confidence to the middle of the eighth century BC, based in part upon the mention of Sîn-šallimanni, governor of Raṣappa, who served as eponym in Assyria in 747 BC (*ibid.*, p. 344 no. 2 i 33 ; for the eponym, see A. Millard, *SAAS* 2, p. 43). One of the better-preserved texts recounts the arrival at Ḥindānu of an Arabian caravan of at least two hundred camels led by merchants from Taymāʾ and Sabaʾ, which the ruler of Sūḫu subsequently ambushed after it had departed from Ḥindānu, plundering its loads of iron, blue-purple wool, and other goods (see Cavigneaux and Ismail, *BaM* 21, 1990, p. 346 no. 2 iv 27-38). The episode contains an expression – *ši-mu-su-nu āš-mé-e-ma* – which is otherwise unattested. The purpose of this communication is to illuminate the meaning of *ši-mu-su-nu*, the first of these terms. For ease of reference the entire passage is reproduced below, with the phrase in question highlighted in bold :

iv 27'.	... LÚ <i>Te-ma-aʾ-a-a</i> LÚ <i>Šá-ba-aʾ-a-a</i>
iv 28'.	<i>šá a-šar-šú-nu ru-qu</i> LÚ.A.KIN-šú-nu <i>a-na muḫ-ḫi-ia ul DU-ku</i>
iv 29'.	<i>ù a-na muḫ-ḫi-ia ul it-ti-qu-ú-nu a-na</i> <i>muḫ-ḫi maʾ-mu</i>
iv 30'.	PÚ <i>Mar-tu u PÚ Ḥa-la-tu₄ a-lak-ta-šú-nu</i> <i>TE u it-ti-iq-ma</i>
iv 31'.	<i>u a-na URU Ḥi-in-da-a-nu ir-ru-bu ina</i> <i>URU Kar.^dA.^dIM i-na</i>
iv 32'.	AN.BAR ₃ <i>ši-mu-su-nu āš-mé-e-ma</i> <i>ni-ri aš-mid ina GI₆ ÍD</i>
iv 33'.	<i>e-bir-ma ina šá-ni-i u₄-me a-di la</i>

	AN.BAR ₃ <i>a-na</i> URU <i>Az-la-a-a-nu</i>
iv 34'.	<i>ak-šu-ud-ma 3 u₄-mi ina URU</i> <i>Az-la-a-a-nu ú-šib-ma ina 3-šú u₄-me</i>
iv 35'.	<i>ik-šu-du-nim-ma 1 ME-šú-nu</i> <i>bal-tu-su-nu ŠU^{II} ik-šu-ud 2 ME</i> <i>gam-ma-lu-šú-nu</i>
iv 36'.	<i>a-di GÚ.UN-šú-nu SÍG ta-kil-tu₄</i> SÍG.KASKAL AN.BAR NA ₄ <.BABBAR>.DILI.MEŠ <i>mim-ma mi-reš-ti DÙ.A.BI</i>
iv 37'.	<i>ik-šu-ud ŠU^{II}-a-a NAM.RI-su-nu</i> <i>ka-bit-ti áš-lu-lam-ma</i>
iv 38'.	<i>ú-še-rib a-na qé-reb KUR</i> <i>Su-ḫi MU.7.KÁM</i>
iv 39'.	I ^d MAŠ-NÍG.DU-PAP LÚ.GAR.KUR <i>Su-ḫi u KUR Ma-ri da-ba-ba</i>
iv 40'.	<i>an-na-a da-bi-ib</i>
iv 41'.	<i>ba-a-ri</i>

The people of Taymā' and Saba', whose homeland is far away, their messenger did not come to me nor did they cross over to me. Their caravan approached but bypassed the water of Martu Well and Ḫalatu Well, and they entered Ḫindānu. In Kār-Apladad, at midday, **I heard about their ...**, and I harnessed my yoke. I crossed the river (th)at night, and before midday of the next day, I reached the town of Azlayānu. I stayed three days in Azlayānu, and they arrived on the third day. One hundred of them I captured alive. I captured two hundred of their camels, together with their cargoes : blue-purple wool, « caravan » wool, iron, ...-stones – consignments (= *mēreštu*, sg.) of every description. I took heavy booty from them and brought it back into the land of Sūḫu. This report was made in the seventh year of Ninurta-kudurri-ušur, governor of the land of Sūḫu and the land of Mari. Collated.

Cavigneaux and Ismail, the original editors, translated *ši-mu-su-nu áš-mé-e(-ma)* as « vernahm ich die Nachricht » (*BaM* 21, 1990, p. 351). Others who have translated or quoted this passage afterwards have followed the lead of Cavigneaux and Ismail and rendered the phrase in question as « j'en reçus la

nouvelle » (Ch. Robin, ed., *L'Arabie antique de Karib'il à Mahomet*, 1992, p. 50) ; « I got the news » (M. Liverani, *Yemen : Studi archeologici, storici e filologici sull'Arabia meridionale* 1, 1992, p. 112) ; or « I heard a report about them » (G. Frame, *RIMB* 2, p. 300). All have understood the term *ši-mu-su-nu* to be a construct form of an abstract noun **šimūtu* (based upon the verb *šemû*, « to hear ») + the 3d m. pl. pronominal suffix *-šunu*. It is possible, however, to understand *ši-mu-su-nu* as deriving instead from the verb *šâmulša'âmu*, « to buy, » which itself probably derives from Sumerian *sa₁₀* or *sâm* (see P. Steinkeller, *Sale Documents of the Ur-III-Period*, FAOS 17, 1989, 156-57). If so, the term in question would be *šimūtu*, meaning « purchasing, » « trading, » or the like ; and the expression *ši-mu-su-nu áš-mé-e(-ma)* would be translated « I heard about their purchasing. » This translation is perhaps preferable to « I heard a report about them, » since it provides an additional motive for Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur's plundering of the caravan : it had by-passed his territory, avoiding his tolls and rejecting his merchandise.

The reader will note that the abstract noun *šimūtu* is closely related in meaning to Old Assyrian *ši'amātum*, especially in the phrase *ana ši'amātīm*, which, when qualifying terms for metals such as *kaspum* (« silver »), *werium* (« copper »), or *annukum* (« tin »), is best translated « for making purchases » (see K. Veenhof, *Aspects of Old Assyrian Trade and its Terminology*, SD 10, 1972, 387-88 ; also M. T. Larsen, *Old Assyrian Caravan Procedures*, 1967, 44 and 153). Old Assyrian *ši'amātum* apparently goes back to Pre-Sargonic Sumerian */(níg-)sâm-ak/*, « merchandise, purchasing-capital, » also « purchases, » a term which is manifested in Old Akkadian as *SÂM-ma-at* PN (see Steinkeller, *FAOS* 17, 1989, 162 ; and compare MA *ši'amātu* and OB *šimātum*, both of which apparently denote « property acquired by purchase » — see CAD Š/II p. 370 sub *ši'amātu* 2, and Veenhof, *Aspects*, p. 359 n. 481 and p. 365 n. 490).

Because the caravan episode in the inscription of Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur deals with Sabceans, the reader will perhaps also find it interesting to note that the Old South Arabian term *s²mt*, which in form closely resembles both *šimūtu* (the abstract noun) and *ši'amātum* (the fem. pl. tantum noun), has a similar meaning in the passage *kl s²mt w³qy' ys²mn ws¹tq'n*, « all the purchases or exchanges which they may make or carry out » (RÉS 3910 : 2, see J. C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic*, 1982, p. 509 ; A. F. L. Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary / Dictionnaire sabéen / al-Mu'jam as-sabā'ī*, 1982, p. 130 ; and compare S. D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian*, *Studia Pohl* 14, 1989, 164).

In Babylonian texts, the term *šimūtu* is also found now in the idiom *šimūta alāku*, « to go and make purchases, » which occurs in a letter from mid-eighth century Nippur, soon to be published. The letter is one of 113 such texts stemming from an archive which dates between c. 755 and 732 BC (see S. W. Cole, *The Early Neo-Babylonian Governor's Archive from Nippur*, OIP 114 [in press], No. 49 : 11-15). The caravan trade figures prominently in these letters (see Cole, *Nippur in Late Assyrian Times, c. 755-612 BC*, SAAS 4 [in press], chap. 4). In fact, a number of the principals bear names which are identical with, or closely related to, names found in Šafāitic, Thamūdic, Liḫyānic, and Sabean inscriptions from the Syrian and Arabian deserts – that is, from the very regions through which the caravan from Saba' and Taymā' would have passed to reach Ḫindānu (most probably via Chaldea, and perhaps even Nippur). Moreover, the letters from Nippur reveal that Ḫindānu was an important market in a extensive commercial network in which camel caravaneers at this time regularly hauled their consignments (*mēreštu*, sg.) of iron and blue-purple wool. It is not surprising, therefore, that the term *šimūtu* (and the term *mēreštu*) should occur both in Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur's account of his plundering of an Arabian caravan along the middle Euphrates and in an archive of contemporary letters from southern Babylonia, inasmuch the entire region was linked in a vast commercial network. It is also not surprising that the Sabeans should have possessed a cognate of the term under consideration here. They may have even borrowed it from the merchants of the Euphrates. (Acknowledgments to C. Bae, J. A. Brinkman, and P. Steinkeller.)

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