

33) The Courtier in the Commentary — A new reading of lines 6-7 of ROM 910x209.458, a commentary on *Šumma izbu* published by E. Leichty (TCS 4, 232-233 [MS O]), can be shown to be of importance for the understanding of the institution of *ša rēši*.¹ The tablet contains 36 lines and comments on *Šumma izbu* tablet 14, omens 5-98.² The commentary is a running text with lemmata and explanations separated by cola (E. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries* [GMTR 5, Münster 2011], 208-9). The colophon of the tablet (lines 34-36) is badly damaged. On the photo the remaining signs can be read as follows: [... im.gíd].da / [...^{ld}]60-en*-šú-nu / [... unu]g*^[ki*]1-ú “[...] tablet of / [...] A]nu-bēlšunu / [...] from Uruk”.³ The new reading of the name in line 35 confirms E. Frahm’s suggestion to identify the tablet as a late commentary from Uruk (GMTR 5, 208-209), but we can now say that it does not belong to the Iqīšaya commentaries on *Šumma izbu*, as assumed by Frahm, but rather to one of the

¹ A full treatment of ROM 910x209.458 will be found in N. De Zorzi’s forthcoming new edition of *Šumma izbu*, that is based on her unpublished dissertation “Divinazione e intertestualità: la serie divinatoria *Šumma izbu* e il suo orizzonte culturale” (Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2011). M. Jursa’s contribution to this note is based on research done under the auspices of the Project “Imperium et Officium” that is financed by the FWF, Vienna. We are indebted to C. Reichel, the curator of the tablet collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), who kindly supplied us with photos of the tablet.

² The tablet was first published by E. Leichty (TCS 4, 152-58). A manuscript from Uruk adds considerable new evidence: see E. Frahm, NABU 1998/10. A new edition based on collation of all the tablets previously published and on some new manuscripts can be found in N. De Zorzi’s dissertation.

³ E. Frahm, GMTR 5, 209⁹⁸⁵, suggests two possible readings of line 36: [...] ^[unug^{ki}]1-ú or [...] tir. an].^[na^{ki}]1-ú. The last sign is clearly Ú, of the antepenultimate sign, only a vertical (crossed by the tail of a horizontal) is visible. The remaining traces of the penultimate sign are consistent with the reading KI; however, it would be a KI written with two slightly slanting wedges preceding the first vertical, rather than with one oblique wedge before and one above the vertical, as elsewhere in the tablet. It might just be possible to read ^[UNUG]1, in which case the determinative would be missing; such a scribal error would however be paralleled by the roughly contemporary colophon of TCL 6 25: 4’ (BAK no. 92). Note that in this case the name of the city is written TIR.AN.NA. On balance the reading KI seems preferable.

text collections ('libraries') associated with an Anu-bēlšunu (Ph. Clancier, *Les bibliothèques en Babylonie dans la deuxième moitié du I^{er} millénaire av. J.-C.* [AOAT 363, Münster 2009], 62 and 76). The commentary therefore dates to the late third or the second century BC.

Lines 6-7 read as follows:

6 [xxxx] [x] : dumu é gal : šá re-eš ina lib-bi šá še-eḫ-ru-ma

7 [a-na é.gal šá-s]u*-ú a-na a-bi la i-tu-ru : ...

This understanding of the passage differs from Leichty's and from the reading given in CAD M/1, 258 s.v. *mār ekalli* (where however no restoration is proposed and no translation offered). It is certain that we have here an explanation that equates the term *mār ekalli* "courtier" with *ša rēši*, likewise "courtier." Since the following sentence is a dependent clause, *ina libbi ša* must be the LB conjunction "because".⁴ Taking *šá* as suffix (Leichty, CAD: *ina libbiša*) creates syntactical difficulties and is furthermore excluded since the standard LB orthography of this commentary would require -šú (*šal-la-ti-šá* in line 2 is a quotation from the base text which uses an older orthography). The restoration in line 7 is a conjecture: of -s]u, only the final vertical wedge is visible. However, the general sense of the passage must be as suggested. We are told that the *ša rēši* is a *mār ekalli* because as a child he "... " and did not return to his father. Logically, for this explanation of the term "son of the palace" to make sense, the palace (or, less likely, the king) must have been mentioned in the gap. After *šeḫruma*, a stative of a verb *tertia infirmae* is expected, hence *šasû* fits the requirements perfectly. The size of the gap is sufficient for the restoration – it can be estimated on the basis of line 9 which must be read as follows: [[á-tú/tu : ka-sa]-[a]*-tu šá-niš ma-ṭa-a-tu : lá : ka-su-ú : lá : ma-ṭu-ú "[lá-tu (means) 'it is b]ound,' or else 'it is missing': lá (means) 'to bind' (and) lá (means) 'to be missing'."]⁵ We therefore propose to translate lines 6-7 as follows:

"'Courtier' (lit.: 'son of the palace') (means) *ša rēši* ('courtier') because as a child [he was summo]ned [to the palace] (and) did not return to (his) father."

Even if one disregards the restoration, the overall sense of the passage is certain: a courtier (*ša rēši*, *mār ekalli*) was 'created' by removing a child from its family context and precluding its return, obviously with the intention of thereby forcing it to attach its primary loyalty to the king and the palace establishment. This is thus a very pleasing explicit, if partial, Babylonian version of the structural interpretation of the *ša rēši*/eunuch institution that has been put forward by Deller, Grayson and others, most emphatically, but not exclusively, for the Neo-Assyrian period, and that can already be found in Xenophon

⁴ J. Hackl, *Der subordinierte Satz in spätbabylonischen Briefen* (AOAT 341, Münster 2007), 62-3.

⁵ The passage probably comments on a unpreserved omen dealing with the shoulders of an *izbu* (tablet 14: omens 7-36).

and Herodotus (for the Achaemenid Empire).⁶ While our passage does not help with respect to the question of whether the Babylonian *ša rēšis* were eunuchs or not, it does add a new facet to the Late Babylonian documentation on courtiers.

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⁶ See, e.g., F.M. Fales, *L'impero assiro* (Bari 2001), 64, and C. Ambos, *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars... Studies...* Parpola (StOr 106, 2009), 4 and the literature cited there.