Protecting the King from Enemies, at Home and on Campaign: Babylonian Rituals on Th 1905–4–9, 67 = BM 98561

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Th 1905–4–9, 67 (BM 98561) is a small, almost completely preserved tablet from Nineveh inscribed in Babylonian script. Study of the palaeography and find-spot suggest a pre-7th century date of the tablet. The tablet contains two rituals: one for protecting the king in his palace, and a second for protection on a journey or military campaign. The first ritual uses an incantation in garbled Sumerian addressed to the reed. The Akkadian incantations associated with the second ritual are two short poems. The first evokes the image of the traveller who is exposed to the dangers of the wild; the second describes the king on campaign as an overpowering warrior who is supported by the gods.

1. The tablet Th 1905–4–9, 67 (BM 98561)

The small tablet catalogued in the collections of the British Museum as Th 1905–4–9, 67 (BM 98561) was found during Reginald Campbell Thompson’s excavations at Nineveh in 1904–5.1 The tablet bears no library colophon, and, consequently, its precise ancient collection context remains unknown. According to Thompson’s records the tablet was excavated in the area of a building on the eastern side of the mound, variously referred to as the ‘New Palace’ or ‘Sennacherib’s bit nakkapti’,2 but now regarded as the remains of the gatehouse of the East Gate of Kuyunjik. Tablets that are likely to have originally belonged to a library of the nearby Ishtar temple come from this area, among them several that date significantly earlier than the bulk of seventh-century tablets from Kuyunjik; most of them probably date to the Middle Assyrian period.3

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1 I owe the knowledge of Th 1905–4–9, 67 to C. B. F. Walker, who kindly gave me his notebooks with transliterations of incantation texts on Babylonian tablets in the Kuyunjik collection. I would also like to thank the colleagues and students of the Würzburg ‘Cuneiforum’ reading group for their comments and suggestions on the reading and interpretation of the text. The tablet is published here by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

2 The British Museum Collection Database records “Kouyunjik, New Palace” as the find-spot. Thompson/Hutchinson (1929, 65f.) describe the excavation of this ‘New Palace’ or ‘bit nakkapti’ in 1904. For the identification of this structure with the gatehouse of the East Gate, see Reade (2000, 399).

3 See Reade (1986, 217f.; 2000: 422f.).
Th 1905–4–9, 67 is written in an elegant Babylonian script which is characterised by sign forms that set it apart from what is common standard in seventh-century Babylonian manuscripts of literary texts from Nineveh’s libraries:

**Li** shows four (not two) horizontal wedges. The first two verticals of **Ru** stand side by side (not on top of each other). With a few exceptions, **Te** is written with two verticals. **Kur** is composed of two horizontals and a *Winkelhaken*, a form found both in the Middle Babylonian period and in later Babylonian texts. **Ah** and **Hur** are both written without vertical wedges, forms which are best known from the Old Babylonian cursive script. **Lu** and **Lugal** both have a vertical wedge that is not usually found in the Neo-Babylonian script (but note the form without the vertical in rev. 26f.). The signs **Di** and **Ki** are framed, rather than preceded by their two *Winkelhaken*. The form of **MaH** with its inscribed ‘BAR’ and without the two subscribed *Winkelhaken* looks surprisingly archaic for a tablet whose script otherwise looks post-Old Babylonian (e.g., DA, ID, AG, AZ).

In the incantation passages the scribe shows a tendency to write syllabically, and in some instances he indicated mimation even outside *CVm*-sign spellings (13: *še-ri-im*; 16: *qa qa ru um*; 21: *i-la-am*; 22: *[mu?] ú-ta-am*). There are also more defective spellings of doubled consonants than usually expected in a first millennium Babylonian manuscript (cf. the commentary on lines 11f., *infra*). The spellings in the ritual instructions, however, exhibit the logographical style that is characteristic of such technical passages in the later second and first millennia.

Given our limited knowledge of the palaeography of Babylonian scholarly tablets dating to the late second or the early first millennium, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding provenance and date from the features of only one isolated (and fairly short) text. But it would seem that the present tablet was written in Babylonia (or, at least, by a Babylonian scribe), certainly earlier than the seventh century. It appears that the scribe copied from an older source; the textual tradition of the incantations may well reach back to the Old Babylonian period.

The scribe assembled on the small tablet the text of three incantations, all of which, to my knowledge, are so far attested only on the present tablet.
2. Transliteration and translation

(hand-copy: figs. 1 and 2)

obv. 1 én-é-nu-ru ḡiš-gi RU PA IM
   2 ḡiš-gi RU PA ḡiš-gi "GIR" MA RU PA AH
   3 pa₄-ḫal-la pab-traî ba lú₁ d²alinanna? RU GA?¹ TI i-na te li-ti

   4 ka-inim-ma lú-kúr lú-érîm lugal-ra
      nu-te-ĝe₂₆-da-kam
   5 KID.KID.BI sebest(7) ฎtakkussi(SAG.KUD) qan šalāli(GI.ŠUL.ḪI)
      telegqe(ti)²e
   6 7.TA.ÂM piqaš(A.GAR.GAR) šabiti(MAŠ.DÂ) ana libbi(ŠÂ) tan-
      addi(SUB)³ bāba(KÂ) ina tidi(IM) te-pe-ḫu-ḫi
   7 ana libbi(ŠÂ) šipta(ĔN) sebî(7)-šû tamannu(ŠID)²⁴ nu i-ta-at
      âli(URU)ki عزل(Ĕ.GAL) erāš(ĜI.ḪI)
   8 u ฎskussi(GU.ZA) ša šarrī(LUGAL) tu-tam-ma-a âî(URU)ki
      šarrī(LUGAL)
   8a u um-ma-an-šû i-šal-lim

   9 én-é-nu-ru aš-ši ab-nam ka-la-ma am-ḫur
   10 aš-ša-ab-ta i-na-maš-te-e ša še-rim
   11 ana nēš(UR.MÂH) lu ed-la-šû ana barbari(UR.BAR.RA) lu
      pé-ḫu-šû
   12 kib-su ki-bi-is amīlûti(LÜ)³⁴ ḫî-dam?⁵ lu pa- prostituera
   13 aš-šum şe-ri-im a-wi-lim u mu-û-ši-i ṟâ-ma-mi
   14 šu-û-tum a-na ma-ša-ra-ti-ki
   15 šadû(İM.KUR.RA) a-na ma-šar¹-ti-ka
   16 qa-qa-ru :-.um ša-mu-u a-na ma-ša-ra-ti-ku-nu
   17 la te-ga-a a-di i-na-pa-ḫa u ik-tâš-dam?⁵³ šâmši(_UTU)⁶

   rev. 18 én-é-nu-ru li-lik dni-urta ina pa-ni-ia
   19 dmes-lam-ta-ē-a ina arki(EGIR)-ia
   20 ḡebšu(IMIN.BI) šu-šu-rû pa-da-nam ina şe-ri-ia
   21 ša na-a-ri a-a i-la-am ša na-ba-li erasure
   21a pu-rî-su a-a ip-te
   22 mu-un-dâḫ-šû e-s[îḫ² mu³]⁻¹ḫᵗ⁻¹-am
   23 mu-ut-táli-kam er-[še-tu(?)] l[i]-iš-bat
   24 i-na a-mat li-i-te-i[a² ţa² iq²-b]u³⁻nim šar(MAN) kiššati(ŠÂR) u
   24 dêl(EN) ili(DINGIR.MES)
   25 u d²i-ru-ru r[u³⁻bat² ḫar²-ra³]-na-a-ti
Protecting the King from Enemies, at Home and on Campaign

ka-inim-ma lú-kúr-imesšè e[di₇-n₅-na₇-dim₅-bé-da-kam
ur-ma₇₉₄ lú-im₇₇-sa₇₄₄-g[az dab₇₄]-ba-da-kam
kīd.kīd.bi erbet(4) passi(ZA.NA) š[a₇ tīd(III) teppu₇(DU)-ma] šipta(‘EN) sebi(7)-šú tamannu(ŠID)n₅₉₄
ana šār(III) erbetti(LIMMU.BA) ta-na-d[4-d₉ rikṣa(KES)₉₄₉₇] tə[rakkas(KES)-ma ḫarrāna(KASKAL) tē-ti-iq

éni₇-en₇-nu₇-ru mā₇ x [x (x)] x na ḫul-bi

obv. 1 Enuru-incantation: “Reed thicket …
2 reed thicket …, reed thicket …,
3 the distraught one … by a victorious spell.”

4 It is the wording (of an incantation) so that enemy (and) foe do not come near the king.
5 Its ritual: You take seven šala₇₉₇-reed stems;
6 you put seven pellets of gazelle dung inside each (of them). You seal (their) opening(s) with clay.
7 You recite the incantation seven times into (them). You bury (them) around the king’s city, palace, bed
8 and throne, then the city of the king and his army will be safe.

9 Enuru-incantation: “I pick up a stone, I defy all (attackers),
10 I have been caught up among the animals of the wilderness.
11 As for the lion: let (the trail) be closed for it; as for the wolf: let (the trail) be blocked for it;
12 the trail is a human track; let it be smudged by dirt.
13 Because of morning (and) man, and (because of) the night (and)
14 the wild beasts:
15 south wind, do not neglect your watch¹,
16 east wind, do not neglect your watch,
17 earth (and) sky, do not neglect your watches,
18 until the Sun-god is rising and has arrived!”

rev. 18 Enuru-incantation: “May Ninurta march before me,
19 (may) Meslamtaea (march) behind me;
20 the Seven-gods are clearing the way for me.
21 May the (enemy) on the river not step ashore, may the (enemy)
22 on dry land not run along.
23 The warrior is [girded with d]eath,
23 may the ne[therworld s]eize the roaming (foe) –
24 by the decree of [my] victory [which bestowed] on me the king of
the universe and Lord-of-the-gods
25 as well as Tiruru, the [queen of cam]paigns.”

26 It is the wording (of an incantation) for [go]ing [through the
steppe] against the enemy,
27 (and) it is for [overcoming] lion (and) rob[ber].
28 Its ritual: [You make] four figurines o[f clay]. You recite the in-
cantation seven times.
29 You thr[ow] (them) into the four cardinal directions. You set up
[a ritual arrangement], then you go on campaign.4

30 Enuru-incantation: The goat […] … that evil.

3. Overall structure and contents

The first unit on the tablet (lines 1–8) is a simple ritual for protecting
the king against enemies. The exorcist recites a short Sumerian incan-
tation, which is addressed to the reed (thicket), over seven reed tubes,
places seven gazelle dung pellets into each tube and buries them – prob-
ably seven each – around the king’s bed, throne, palace and residential
city. The reeds, empowered by the incantation, would keep enemies away
from the king and from the king’s residence and army. While the meaning
of filling the reed tubes with dung is difficult to explain,5 the use of the
reed as a symbolic means of defence is certainly related to the fact that
reeds were an important building material in Babylonia, used for houses,
fences and other barricades.

The two following incantations (lines 9–17 and 18–25) are accompa-
nied by only one rubric and one set of ritual instructions (lines 26f., 28f.).
The terse instructions prescribe the recitation of just one unspecified in-
cantation, and it is most plausible to assume that either of the two incan-
tations could be used as part of the ritual. The text gives no indication on
how to decide which incantation to choose, but it is worth noting that the
images evoked by the two short poetic texts are rather different.

4 Or: you make your journey. The Akkadian wording can refer to normal overland travel-
ling or to a military campaign.

5 The use of a reed tube as a receptacle is also attested in the anti-witchcraft ritual SpTU 5,
241; see Schwemer (2010, 67).
Asši abnam kalāma amḫur is spoken by a lone traveller who has to pitch camp far from human habitations and is exposed to the dangers of spending the night alone among the predators of the wild. Unarmed, he defends himself by throwing stones at the animals that threaten to come near. He hopes that the path he is using will be hidden and inaccessible to lion and wolf, the two proverbial predators of the Mesopotamian wilderness. His only support during the night are the never-sleeping divine cosmic forces that surround him: the winds, the sky and the earth. He asks them to watch over him in his sleep until the rising Sun-god will bring light and (relative) safety in the morning.

The poetic speaker of the second text, Lillik Ninurta ina pāniya, is in an entirely different situation: he is leading an army through the plains and obliterates, with divine support, all enemies that challenge him on his way. He is surrounded by deadly warriors, both human and divine; his adversaries are immobilized at his sight.

The rubric describing the purpose of the two incantations is fragmentary, but evidently consists of two parts, each concluded by the enclitic copula -am at the end of lines 26 and 27. The preserved portions of the rubric show that the first part refers to a military enemy (lú-kúr), while the second part mentions the lion (ur-maḫ) and the highwayman (lú-sa-gaż). One can hardly overlook the fact that, thematically, the second rubric is closer to the imagery of Asši abnam kalāma amḫur, while the first rubric can easily be associated with the situation evoked by Lillik Ninurta ina pāniya. Taking the argument a step further, one may wonder whether the exorcist’s choice between the two incantations would have been influenced by the similarities he perceived between the (prospective) situation of his client and that of the poetic speaker in the two incantations. A client embarking on a business trip may have been better served by the first incantation, while a king taking his army on campaign would have been more inspired by the second.

Both incantations share the theme of travelling overland and prevailing over dangers. The ritual, which elsewhere is associated with yet another incantation and rubric for safe travel (see note on lines 28f.), consists of reciting the incantation over four clay figurines (passu) which are then thrown in the four cardinal directions. The meaning of this symbolic act is obscure. Perhaps the figurines represent enemies subdued by the incan-

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6 Cf. especially the rubric KA.INIM.MA nēšu(UR.MAḪ) barbaru(UR.BAR.RA) u ṣab-[a-tu anā amēlim (...) lä tehe] “(It is) the wording (of an incantation) so that lion, wolf and robb[er do not approach a man (...)] (K 2389+ obv. 7).
tation; by throwing them into the four cardinal directions, potential adversaries threatening the client would be weakened in all regions.

The small tablet concludes with a fragmentary catchline referring to another, yet unidentified enuru-incantation. It is uncertain whether the catchline indicates the placement of the incantations in a larger series or in a more ephemeral, small collection of incantations and rituals; but the latter seems more likely.

4. Philological notes on individual lines

1f.: Much of this short incantation remains unclear. It seems to contain both Sumerian and Akkadian passages: pa₄-hał₁-l₁a in line 3 is unlikely to be a Sumerogram (the logogram for puṣqû is usually just PA₄-HAL), and i-na te-li-ti at the end of line 3 is certainly an Akkadian phrase (though without parallel in this form). At the same time, no correspondences between the Sumerian and Akkadian passages can be recognized, and thus the incantation is probably not bilingual. The first part of the incantation consists of one phrase that is varied three times. All three sentences begin with ĝiš-gi “reed (thicket), canebrake”, which suggests that the reed thicket is the addressee or main subject matter of the spell. The following three sign sequences (RU PA IM, RU PA HI, RU PA AH) do not lend themselves easily to a meaningful interpretation in Sumerian or Akkadian [Elamite?, A.C.]. The phrases may be pure word magic, possibly initially resulting from a corruption of a Sumerian text. Bearing this in mind, it is worth noting that an incipit similar to obv. 1 of the present text is listed in the incantation catalogue K 2389 + 10664 (photos of K 2389 and K 10664 were published by Caplice (1964, pl. xv; for a hand-copy of the joined piece, see Geller 2000, 255). The incipit in question reads: én ĝiš-gi ú-šub ma-aḫ “Incantation: ‘Canebrake, mighty reed’ ” (obv. 13). The interpretation of ú-šub ma-aḫ as syllabically written Sumerian follows Caplice (1964, 112f.: K 10664: 4’), while Maul (1994, 198: K 2389+ obv. 13) offered a more cautious transliteration. Caplice took ú-šub as a syllabic spelling of ú-šub “brick-mold”, but ú-šub - adattu “(succulent part of a) reed” is more plausible within the present context. It does not seem inconceivable that the present text is a corrupt form of the same incantation (/uṣubmah/ > /ṣuppah/), especially since, among others, incantations against enemies and for safe travel are listed in this section of the catalogue (cf. K 2389+ obv. 7–9, 16 and 19). Unfortunately, the rubric accompanying the incipit in K 2389+ obv. 13 is almost entirely lost. After KA.INI.M.‘NI+A, only the first sign of the rubric is partly preserved; collation confirms this sign to be ‘KI¹, which shows that the rubric in K 2389+ obv. 13 is not parallel to the one in line 4 of the present text.

3: pa₄-hał₁-l₁a “distress” (or “distrathaught”, then usually preceded by 1ú) is standard vocabulary of Sumerian incantations. The phrase pab-ba 1ú is clear on the tablet, but difficult to interpret. This seems to be followed by d’inanna₁, though a reading digir-‘re’ is not excluded. The subsequent signs are probably to be read RU GA TI (note that on this tablet BI has an indented upper horizontal, while GA, like the present sign, has an indented lower horizontal). At the end of the line, we tentatively read ina te-li-ti “by a victorious spell”. This phrase would be unique, but not entirely out of place in a ritual for the protection of the king and his army.

9f.: The forms ašši and amḫur are interpreted as performative preterites. The traveller, who has to pitch camp in the wilderness, defends himself against prediors by throwing
stones at them. The recitation of the incantation has the same defensive function. The preterite aṣṣabta, however, refers to the (immediate) past. The spelling i-na-maš-te-e is analysed as innammaštē with proclitic in(a), but, of course, the writing may be a simple haplography for i-na-na-maš-te-e.

11 f.: The three precatives of the stative lu ed-la-šú, lu pé-ḫa-šú and lu pa-aš-ša are parallel, and all three certainly have the same subject. The only nominative form in lines 11 f. is kibsu (“footprint”, “track”, “trail”), the subject of the nominal clause (or appositional phrase) that forms the first colon of line 12: kibsu kibis amaliḫti “the trail (is) a trail of a human being”. Thus, it seems plausible to assume that kibsu is also the subject of the three stative forms, which, consequently, have to be interpreted as ventives (rather than feminine plural forms). The pronominal suffixes on edaššu and peḫāššu are most plausibly interpreted as datives and, if so, certainly refer back to the two nouns introduced with ana at the beginning of the two clauses (ana nēši, ana barbari). Note that the form of the sign DAM in this line is different from that used in line 17, but in both lines it is difficult to see which other sign could be intended.

13: One is tempted to translate the phrase aššum šērim awilitum u mūšinum umāmi as “because morning belongs to man but the night to the wild beasts”, and I would venture that this translation reflects the actual meaning of the line. But, of course, this meaning could be explicitly expressed in Akkadian without any difficulty (*aššum šērum ša awilitum u mūšum ša umāmi). There is no ready explanation of the second plene spelling in mu-ūr-si-i. Perhaps it is a mistake for mu-ūr-si-im (cf. še-ri-im and qa qa-ru-um in lines 13 and 16).

14: The parallelism with the following line and and the internal logic of the sentence suggest that despite the spelling ma-ša-ra-ti-ki a singular should be understood.

17: The translation ignores the phonetic complement in ṣuṭuṭi. But it is not excluded that Šamsī “my sun-god” is intended. The form Šamsu (rather than Šamaš) is often used when texts focus on the sun-god as the sun visible in the sky; for a similar distribution of the forms Addu and Adad in literary texts, see Schwemer (2001, 56).

18–20: The image of the king surrounded by warrior gods on his way into battle is already attested in Old Babylonian literature: ilāk Addum ina ūmānīšu / Erra dapinnumma ina imnišu “Addum strides on his left, while savage Erra is on his right” (Epic of Zimri-Lim, lines 141 f., cited by Durand 1988, 393). In Erra and Išum the warlike helpers of Erra are described in similar terms when Erra arouses his troupes addressing Išum with the following words: kakkiya ezziṭu šālika iḍāya u aṭṭā ašša māriya ašli arikiya “Make my terrible weapons march at my side, but you be my vanguard (and) my rearguard” (198 f.). The context shows that “my terrible weapons” here refers to the seven demons. For Nergal and the Seven-gods more generally, see Wiggermann (1999; 2010).

21: The meristic expression ša nāri “the one of the river” – ša nābali “the one of the dry land” is known from Maqlû 1 64 (cf. also Šurpu VIII 6). The line asks for all potential enemies in the speaker’s way to be incapacitated. Enemies swimming in or travelling on the river will not come up to the shore, enemies on land will be unable to move and thus prevented from engaging in hostilities.

22: For the figurative use of ezēḥu (ezēḫu) “to gird”, cf. VS 10, 214 vi 6f.: šāltum ki liḇši nesluḥat tuqumtam “Šāltum is girded with battle as with a garment.” For the girding of weapons, cf. LKA 63 rev. 3: kakki ētēsi namurrē “he girded himself with awe-inspiring weapons.”

23: The tentative restoration of erṣetu is inspired by the assumption that lines 22 ff. describe the lethal fate of any enemies that attack the speaker. The word muttalikū probably refers to enemies who roam the steppe like wild animals or demons.

24 f.: The tentative restorations given above for these two lines are based only on the
present context and are not supported by parallels. Clearly the two lines contained a closing formula of the type *ina amāt (iqbû)DN₁ DN₂*. The gods named are Ištar (Tiruru) and, probably, Marduk. The name of Marduk is not mentioned in the preserved text, but it is very likely that the two epithets *šar kīšatī* and *bēl ili* refer to Marduk as the ruler of the gods and the universe. The traces preceding *šar kīšatī* cannot be reconciled with any known writing for Marduk, but in view of the traces preserved before *nim* the restoration *iq-b[...]u-nim* is quite uncertain. According to An: *Anu ša amēli*, line 89, Tiruru is a name of Ištar (cf. also KAV 173 obv. 15 // 48 r. col. 11’). The *Göttertypentext* describes Tiruru as a winged female figure with the head and feet of a bird, clad in a resplendent linen garment; see Köcher (1953, 80–83, vi 24–36). The bird-like features suggest that Tiruru is a form of Ištar associated with the goddess’s descent to the netherworld. The (mostly restored) epithet *rubāt ṭarrānātī* “queen of campaigns” would be attested here for the first time. It fits the present context well, but, of course, other restorations are possible. Note especially that the beginning of the broken sign tentatively restored as *r[u-ba[t* looks slightly different than the preceding *ru* signs in Tiruru.

26–29: The tentative restoration in line 26 is based on the rubric *ka-in-im-ma dē-n-na dī-bē-da-kam* that precedes a ritual parallel to lines 28f. in K 9875 rev. i (31’: rubric; 32f.: ritual instructions); see Meier (1937–39, 141–144). For the enemy, robber and lion mentioned side by side in rituals for safe travel and a successful campaign, see the incantation catalogue K 2389+ (ed. Maul 1994, 197–198) obv. 7, 8, 9; cf. also obv. 16 and the discussion of obv. 13 above.

30: The incantation incipit in the catchline is not known to me from other sources.

References

Köcher, F. (1953): Der babylonische Göttertypentext, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung 1, 57–107
Addendum:
As E. Jiménez Sanchez points out to me (oral communication), in obv. 13 one should better read *mu-šam-ši-i* “who spends the night (among wild animals)”. In light of this, *še-ri-im* may also represent a form of *šēru* “to rise early” (rather than *šēru* “morning”), though the spelling does not favour an interpretation as a participle.