

The Slave-Girl's Child: A "Literary" Fragment from the Istanbul Sippar Archive*

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[In this article, we publish a fragmentary clay tablet from the Sippar Collection in the Cuneiform Tablets Archive of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, inventoried under the museum number Si 735. The tablet seems to record in literary language the ruminations of a man about a female slave who had given birth to his son – but due to its poor state of preservation, many aspects of the unusual text remain unclear. After introductory remarks on the nature of Si 735 and a short discussion of the Sippar Archive in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, we provide an edition of the text, notes on its orthography, language, structure, and genre, and a philological commentary.]

Keywords: Sippar, Babylonian Literature, Gender, Slavery.

1. Introduction

In ancient Mesopotamia, men would often engage in sexual relations with female slaves. This happened especially when their legal wives remained childless and the men in question wished to make sure that their "name and seed" would live on. Unions between free citizens and slave-girls, and the legal status granted in such cases both to the woman and the offspring that might result from them, are topics quite extensively documented in the cuneiform textual record, in law collections, legal texts, and letters.¹ There are also a number of "instructions" and proverbs that mention sexual relations between masters and slave-girls, often expressing skepticism as to their desirability.² However, no narrative cuneiform texts (and no rituals) dealing with such matters have

* The bibliographical abbreviations used in this article can be found in M. P. Streck (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. Berlin, 2011, volume 12, I-L.

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1. For summaries of the evidence, see R. Westbrook, "The Female Slave". In: V. H. Matthews *et al.*, *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Sheffield, 1998, pp. 214-238 and M. Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*. Boston/Berlin, 2016, pp. 165-199, especially pp. 168-170, both with references to additional literature. For early Mesopotamia, see also N. Reid, "The Children of Slaves in Early Mesopotamian Laws and Edicts". *RA* 111 (2017) 9-23.

2. The *Instructions of Šuruppak* state: "Do not have sexual intercourse with your slave girl; she will neglect you (géme-zu-úr giš na-an-dù zu-úr šu m[u]-ri-in-sa); see B. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*. Bethesda, MD, 2005, p. 66, line 49. Several proverbs emphasize the mistress's authority over the household slave-girl, the need to restrain the latter, and the slave-girl's secretly held resentment of household authority; see Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient*

been discovered so far. This is in marked contrast to the Hebrew Bible, which includes in the book of Genesis a number of famous stories whose protagonists have children with slave-girls. In Genesis 16, for example, when his wife Sarai does not bear him children, Abram “goes to” Hagar, an Egyptian maid of Sarai, who thereupon gives birth to a son, Ishmael. In Genesis 29–30, Jacob has sexual relations with Bilhah, the slave-girl of his second wife Rachel, who initially cannot conceive either; and later, when his first wife Leah ceases bearing children, she gives Jacob her maid Zilpah. Each of the two slave-girls bears Jacob two sons.

Disregarding the aforementioned instructions and proverbs, the fragment published in this article may be the first example of a Mesopotamian literary(?) text about a slave-girl bearing a free man’s child. There is an important *caveat*, however. The fragment is so poorly preserved and so difficult that our understanding of it may have to be substantially revised should one day additional pieces or duplicates be found. All the same, it seems best to no longer withhold it from the scholarly community.

2. Si 735, the Istanbul Sippar Archive, and Scheil’s Excavations in Sippar

The tablet presented here, Si 735, is housed in the Cuneiform Archives of the Ancient Orient Museum, one of the three museums that together constitute the Istanbul Archaeology Museums (earlier known as the Imperial Museum), founded in the later nineteenth century. After the renowned Ottoman Turkish intellectual and statesman Osman Hamdi Bey was appointed director of the Museum in 1881, he committed himself to creating a Museum that would promote the preservation and scientific study of antiquities, and rival its counterparts in the West, such as the British Museum or the Louvre. His efforts led to the drafting and enactment of the 1884 *Âsâr-ı Atîka* (Ancient Antiquities) Act, which required that antiquities excavated in Ottoman lands were to be handed over or returned to the Ottoman state and its Imperial Museum.³ Most of the artifacts in the Istanbul cuneiform collection derive from excavations that took place in Ottoman territories between 1884 and 1925.

Osman Hamdi Bey also organized excavations conducted directly on behalf of the Imperial Museum. The Istanbul Sippar Collection is to some extent the result of such Ottoman efforts, by Osman Hamdi Bey and other officials, and the scholars and workmen they employed in the field in Iraq. One of them was the French Dominican scholar and Assyriologist Jean Vincent Scheil, who dug at Tell Abu-Ḥabba, ancient Sippar, in the aftermath of Hormuzd Rassam’s and various other excavations at that site. When Scheil and Bedri Bey, his assistant from the Imperial Museum, arrived at Abu-Ḥabba on January 6, 1894, the site had indeed already been intensively explored for several decades. As Scheil noted, “*En approchant, on s’aperçoit que le sol est ravagé par de grandes tranchées, et comme criblé de puits communiquant, par des tunnels, à d’autres puits. Ainsi*

Sumer, pp.89-90, lines 193-197; id., *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World’s Earliest Proverb Collections*. Bethesda, MD, 1997, pp. 88 (3.41), 89 (3.42), 244 (Sec. B 5). A Sumerian proverb from Collection 7 indicates the socially compromised position of the husband of a slave-girl: “He whose speech is humble, his wife is a slave-girl” (ka ba-a-n-lá-a/dam-a-ni gi4-in-nam. Akk.: *šá pi-šu ma-tú aš-ša-as-su a-mat*); see Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, p. 159 (7.44).

3. For historical background, see Z. Çelik, *About Antiquities: Politics of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire*. Austin, 2016.

s'attestent, sur presque tous les monticules, les travaux de Rassam, de la Liste civile, et des Arabes."⁴

During the first four months of 1894, Scheil concentrated on the excavation of some private houses in Sippar, in most of which he discovered tablets. Particularly rich in tablet finds was a house belonging to the *nadītum*-priestess Amat-Šamaš, from the time of Samsu-ilūna (1749-1712 BCE). Scheil succeeded in identifying the remains of an Old Babylonian school, which yielded many copies of literary texts. He also surveyed several segments of the Ebabbar temple, where he found both Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian texts, including many administrative documents.

Scheil published his results in his 1902 report of the excavations (*Une saison de fouilles à Sippar*), which includes the first catalogue of the tablets excavated at Sippar on behalf of the Istanbul Imperial Museum.⁵ At present, 1043 cuneiform tablets and fragments from the Istanbul Sippar Collection have been officially catalogued, including both Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian tablets in Akkadian and Sumerian, with many different text genres represented. Knowledge of the contents of the collection remains incomplete, and several hundred tablets require more specific identification. Only a limited number of the tablets from the collection have so far been published.⁶ An up-to-date catalogue is currently being prepared by the Istanbul Sippar Project, which was initiated in 2018 and is carried out by İlgi Gerçek (Bilkent University), Selim Ferruh Adalı (Social Sciences University of Ankara), and Dinçer Cevher and Müge Özcan (Istanbul Archaeological Museums). Preliminary findings of the Istanbul Sippar Project have been presented at the 65th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale held in Paris in 2019.⁷

3. Edition

Si 735 is an upper left fragment of a clay tablet. It measures 4.3 cm in height and 3.5 cm in width and is 1.5 cm thick (photo and hand copies are attached). It is hard to say how much is missing of the tablet's bottom and right side. The piece is not among the Istanbul Sippar tablets copied or transliterated by Geers,⁸ but it is briefly mentioned as a "fragment commençant par *amat erāti*, mutilé, insignifiant" by Scheil in his 1902 report.⁹ The tablet has no colophon, and nothing certain can be said about its scribal background. Its exact find spot remains unclear as well; it was apparently discovered in the course of V. Scheil's excavations at Sippar in 1894, but as pointed out above, Scheil's workmen dug in several areas on the site, and there is no information as to where precisely the tablets they uncovered were actually found. Given the overall chronological patterns

4. V. Scheil, *Une saison de fouilles à Sippar*. Cairo, 1902, p. 3.

5. V. Scheil, *Sippar*, 1902, pp. 95-141.

6. As of February 21, 2020, the online catalogue of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative refers to 246 tablets of the Istanbul Sippar Collection published or mentioned in Scheil's catalogue and several other publications. During a short stay in Istanbul between June and September 1947, the German-American scholar F.W. Geers produced line drawings of a total of 109 tablets from the collection. His copies are found in "Heft Ac", now accessible online at the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative. See: <http://cdli.ucla.edu/?q=downloads> (Heft Ac under Geers-Hefte) [accessed 02/20/2019] and E. Jiménez and S. F. Adalı, "The 'Prostration Hemerology' Revisited: An Everyman's Manual at the King's Court". *ZA* 105 (2015) 156, n. 14.

7. İ. Gerçek and S. F. Adalı, "The Istanbul Sippar Collection: Preliminary Observations of the Istanbul Sippar Project", conference held at the 65th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: *Gods, Kings and Capitals in the Ancient Near East* (Louvre, Paris, July 10th, 2019). See <https://rai2019.digitorient.com/>.

8. See above note 6.

9. V. Scheil, *Sippar*, 1902, p. 139.

of first millennium literary and religious tablets discovered at Sippar, it seems likely, however, that the text was written at some point between the seventh and the early fifth century BCE.¹⁰

Transliteration

Obverse

1. GÉME *e-ra-a-ti* KIMIN ṛx' [...]
 2. *i-na* ^{iti}NE *hab-bur-ru* ṛše²'-[er²'-u² ūlid(?) (...)]
 3. *ina* ITI *ma-gar* ^{iti}AB GÉME *te*-[...]
 4. *ta-ḫal-ti ul ak-kal* EN *ši-t*[i²...]
 5. ṛšū²-zu-ub-bu *in-dar-ru in*-[...]
 6. ṛTIN²'-ta A TIN-ia KIMIN šá *zu-um-r*[i²-ia² ...]
 7. *šu-pa-la* GİR^{II}-ia *i-kab*-[...]
 8. [u]l-tu *ú-ru-šá* EN *é/ki d* ṛx (x)' [...]
 9. [(x)] ṛx-tu²' *ina* BĀD.AN^{ki} ṛx' [...]
 10. [x (x)] ṛtu² *ma/ba*²' [l]a² [...]
- (gap of unknown length)

Reverse

- 1'. ṛx' [(x)] ṛx a² x' [...]
 - 2'. u d ṛgu l' zu *im-ma-ṛlil*' [...]
 - 3'. KIMIN *ma-ri id-da-ṛni*²' ṛx' [...]
 - 4'. *a-na-da-ni-ka ma-ru-ti* ṛx' [...]
 - 5'. *ina* IGI ^d+EN *la ta-qab-bi ina* ṛpa-ni²'(-)[...]
 - 6'. *šu-ú ma-ru ú-ad-di-ma* ṛx (x)' [...]
 - 7'. *ina pa-an* ^d+EN 6-šú ṛtad x' [...]
- (horizontal ruling followed by empty space and lower edge of the tablet)

Translation

obv. 1) (*O*) slave-girl, you are (or: were?) pregnant; ditto (= *o* slave-girl) ... [...]. 2) In the month of Abu (V), the furrow [gave birth to] a shoot [...]. 3) In an auspicious month, the month of Ṭebētu (X), (*o*) slave-woman, you [...]. 4) I will not eat *taḫaltu*-food until the issue [...] 5) is saved ... [...]. 6) You are alive, son of my life; ditto (= you are alive, son) of [my] body [...]. 7) The lower part(s) of my feet tread [...]. 8) From her *pudenda* towards ... [...]. 9) ... in (the city of) Dēr ... [...]. 10) [...] ... [...]

(gap of uncertain length)

rev. 1') ... [...]. 2') ... he played [...]. 3') Ditto my son ... [...]. 4') In order to give you the (legal) status of a son ... [...]. 5') You shall not say before Bēl, before [...]. 6') He is a son; I shall make (it) known ... [...]. 7') Before Bēl six times you ... [...].

(finis opusculi)

10. See C. Waerzeggers, "The Babylonian Revolts Against Xerxes and the 'End of the Archives'". *AfO* 50 (2003/04) 150–173 (who identifies 484 BCE as the year when the major cuneiform archives of Sippar came to an end) and P. Clancier, *Les bibliothèques en Babylonie au 1er millénaire av. J.-C.*: diss. Université Paris 8. Vincennes-Saint-Denis 2005, pp. 24–79, especially pp. 63–71.

4. Orthography, Language, Structure, and Genre of the Text

Our unusual little fragment presents many challenges. Its orthography is somewhat inconsistent. Logographic writings alternate with syllabic ones: *ina* in obv. 3 and rev. 5' and IGI in rev. 5' are to be compared to *i-na* in obv. 2 and *pa-an* in rev. 7'. Rev. 4' seems to provide a Sandhi writing, and *ḥab-bur-ru* in obv. 2 and 'šu'-zu-ub-bu in obv. 5 display grammatically unwarranted doublings of consonants. The finite verbal forms (?) in obv. 5 and rev. 3' are problematic, and one wonders if the scribe made mistakes here, although this is not certain. As indicated by *ina* ITI *ma-gar* in obv. 3 and [u]l-tu *ú-ru-šá* in obv. 8, case endings (even a genitive ending followed by a possessive suffix) are rendered without an attempt at consistency.

The language of the text is probably Standard Babylonian, although there are few diagnostic passages and *immalil* in rev. 2' looks more like an Assyrian form. Word choice and style seem to belong to an elevated register. In the first millennium BCE, *mēlulu*, for example, was no longer used in everyday documents; the phrase found in obv. 2 may have been inspired by a bilingual proverb;¹¹ obv. 3 showcases the author's familiarity with menological lore; and the expression at the beginning of rev. 2' has a somewhat artificial Sumerian touch. Obv. 4 may provide a sophisticated word play. Also noteworthy are several repetitions, indicated by the sign KIMIN (see obv. 1, 6; rev. 3'), which add to the text's poetic character. On the other hand, the word *taḥaltu* (obv. 4) is so far attested only in archival texts, not in literary or religious ones.

Due to its poor state of preservation, the overall structure of the text remains unclear. Much of it seems to render the direct speech of an individual, apparently a man, who, at least initially, interacts with a female slave. At the beginning, she is pregnant, presumably by the speaker, and then seems to give birth to a child. First person singular verbal forms occur in obv. 4 and rev. 6'(?), first person singular possessive pronouns in obv. 6 and 7 and rev. 3'. The man's speech seems first addressed to the slave-woman (note the second person singular feminine forms in obv. 1 and perhaps 3), but then there is a shift: obv. 8 seems to talk of the slave woman (who has apparently given birth at this point) in the third person. Obv. 9 mentions, in broken context, the city of Dēr, perhaps indicating the place where the action was (initially) set (and the text possibly composed), even though this remains uncertain. After a break of unknown length, the man's speech seems to continue, first referring to the son(?) in the third person (*immalil* in rev. 2') and then addressing him(?) directly in the second person (rev. 4', 5', 7'(??)). The last lines seem to describe a ceremony in which the speaker legally acknowledges the child as his own or, less likely, dedicates it to the god Bēl. The references to the latter may indicate that the action has shifted to Babylon at this point.

It is hard to determine what genre the text belongs to. Si 735 seems neither primarily magical, medical, or legal in nature, and no immediate parallels come to mind. The obverse and the first lines preserved on the reverse have a literary flavor, while the last lines are somewhat reminiscent of ritual texts. One text that shows certain similarities with our fragment is a Neo-Assyrian "elegy"

11. For details on this and other references provided in this section, see the comments on individual lines of the text further below.

from Nineveh, K 890, about a woman dead in childbirth.¹² The elegy, like our text known from only one tablet, deals with pregnancy and child birth as well; although written in the Neo-Assyrian language, it has all the trademarks of a literary text; it consists for the most part of direct speech in the first person singular (primarily from the perspective of the – dead – woman); and, as we can assume is the case with our text as well, it is quite short – and written on a one-column tablet, with the last line followed by a horizontal ruling, but no colophon. Obviously, the text presented in this article lacks the tragic implications that make the Neo-Assyrian elegy such a touching piece, and the fact that its last lines seem to refer to symbolic acts that may be part of legal procedures likewise distinguishes it from the elegy. But the aforementioned parallels are nonetheless noteworthy.

5. Philological Notes on Individual Lines

Obverse

1) Depending on whether *e-ra-a-ti* is a second or a third person feminine singular stative of *erû*, there are two different translation options. We consider the first possibility more likely (note that line 3 may include another verbal form in the second person singular), but assuming an overhanging vowel is added to *erât*, one could also translate: “The slave-girl (or: my slave-girl) is pregnant.” After KIMIN, one expects a second verb, perhaps also in the stative: “O slave-woman, you are (or: were) pregnant; ditto (= o slave-woman), you ... [...].”

2) The line seems to provide an agricultural metaphor that refers either to the growth of the child in the womb or to its birth (see the note on the next line). The uncertain restoration suggested here is based on a bilingual proverb, attested in several first millennium BCE proverb collections, that uses similarly coded language when referring to a rotten child: *ḥabbūru lā išāru šer’u ay ūlid zēru ay ibni // ḥénbur si nu-sá ab-sín-e na-an-ni-íb-tu-ud še-numun na-an-ni-íb-dím-ma*, “An improper shoot, the furrow should not (have) give(n) birth to it, the seed should not (have) create(d) it.”¹³

3) Ṭebētu (X) being five months after Abu (V), the month mentioned in the previous line, it is clear that the reference to the latter does not mark the beginning and that to the former the end of the gestation period. It could conceivably, however, be the other way around. If the conception of the child took place at the beginning of month X, the year in question included an intercalary Addaru (XIIa), and the birth occurred at the end of month V, there would be a nine-month interval between

12. Editions: A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. Helsinki, 1989, no. 15; A. R. George, “The Assyrian Elegy: Form and Meaning”. In: S. C. Melville and A. L. Slotsky, *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*. Leiden/Boston, 2010, pp. 203–216.

13. That the proverb refers to a child is indicated by a similarly phrased proverb found in the Sumerian Proverb Collection 1 from Old Babylonian times: *dumu si nu-sá ama-a-ni na-an-ù-tu dingir-ra-ni na-an-dím-dím-me*, “A disorderly child, his mother should not (have) give(n) birth to him, his god should not (have) create(d) him”. For references and discussion, see E. Frahm, “The Latest Sumerian Proverbs”. In: S. C. Melville and A. L. Slotsky, *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*. Leiden/Boston, 2010, p. 160. An earlier Akkadian version of the proverb mentioning the *ḥabbūru*-shoot is found on the Old Babylonian tablet BM 108868, obv. 6–7 (M. Streck and N. Wasserman, “‘I Was Not Warm in the Cold’. Another Old Babylonian Proverbial Collection”. *Iraq* 81 (2019) 241–245).

the two dates.¹⁴ If line 3 really references the conception of the child, one could restore at the end: GÉME *te-[ri ...]*, "(o) slave-woman, you became [pregnant]," with the preterite *tēri* indicating the punctual moment of conception, in contrast to the stative in line 1, *erāti*, which would refer to the state of pregnancy. Due to the poor preservation of the text, all these considerations remain, of course, entirely hypothetical.

Several hemerologies and menologies provide information on auspicious and inauspicious months and days for conception and birth,¹⁵ and while the evidence is incomplete and not fully consistent, it is interesting that an abridged version of the menology *Iqqur īpuš*, known from Assur and Nineveh, characterizes the months II, III, V, (VII), VIII, IX, XI, and XII, but explicitly not X, as favorable for the birth of a child (¹⁶TUR Ū.TU).¹⁶ A menology from Hattusha indicates that both months V and X were bad for giving birth,¹⁷ but in first millennium Babylonia, this tradition may no longer have been known.

4) *Taḥaltu*, apparently an edible item, is poorly attested and does not seem to occur in any known literary, magical, medical, or ritual texts. A Middle Assyrian document indicates that one of its ingredients was flour, and a Neo-Babylonian letter from the Eanna archive in Uruk, TCL 9, 117, mentions in line 41 a heap(?) (*tab-ku*) of *taḥaltu* together with dried meat and other foodstuffs.¹⁸ It is possible that *taḥaltu* is mentioned here because the term was considered by the author as related to the verb *ḫiālu*, *ḫālu*, "to be in labor."¹⁹

The ŠI towards the end of the line looks slightly odd. In Neo-/Late Babylonian texts, the sign usually ends in two verticals of equal size. It should be noted, however, that the penultimate vertical of the ZU sign in obv. 5 and 6 and in rev. 2' of our text is shorter than the final vertical as well. If the restoration *ši-t[i?...]* is correct, the line probably refers to the child issuing from the womb (*šītu*, *šīt ūri*, or *šīt libbi*). Based on the traces, alternative readings such as *še-e[ḫ-ru]*, "the little one," or GENNA(TUR-DIŠ) (= *šerru*, "baby") seem less likely.

14. Mesopotamian sources differ with regard to the length they ascribe to the gestation period; it is said to be either nine or ten months long. According to modern calculations, the full term of gestation is 280 days, which is slightly more than nine months. For discussion, see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting. With a Chapter by F.A.M. Wiggermann*. Groningen, 2000, pp. 23–25.

15. See M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, pp. 91–95.

16. KAR 177, obv. iii 30–32, and K 98+, obv. 2'; see E. Jiménez, "Commentary on Iqqur īpuš, série générale (CCP 3.8.1.A)". In: E. Frahm, E. Jiménez, M. Frazer, and K. Wagensonner, *Cuneiform Commentaries Project*, 2013–2018, see <https://ccp.yale.edu/P370904>. DOI: 10079/tdz08zr.Jiménez 2017 [accessed 03/10/2018].

17. "If in the fifth month a child is born, its days will be short. If in the tenth month a child is born, in whatever house it is born, that house will become empty" (for details see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, pp. 92–93, with bibliography).

18. For exact references, see CAD T, 40. See also E. Reiner, "Supplement to *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* T (Volume 18)". *JNES* 66 (2007) 48, where the form *teḫiltu* is listed as a variant of *taḥaltu*. It occurs in a document from Old Babylonian Mari together with *kinītu*-cereal, both sowed in a field.

19. For a discussion of *ḫiālu*, and references to labor and delivery in ancient Near Eastern texts, see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, pp. 122–129.

5) The writing *šu-zu-ub-bu*,²⁰ with an artificially doubled final consonant, is also attested in A 5' of the Babylonian Chronicle BCHP 18 from 130 BCE.²¹ Whether the word refers in our text to the “safe” delivery of the child remains unclear. The meaning of *in-dar-ru* is even more obscure. The first radical of the word’s root might be an *m*, and the *d* an infixed *t*; but neither of these permutations yields a satisfactory form.²² Since the reduplication of the *r* could be a purely graphic phenomenon (cp. *šu-zu-ub-bu* at the beginning of the line and *hab-bur-ru* in obv. 2), and the DAR sign could also be read as *tár*, *ṭár*, or *ṭir*/*ṭer*,²³ one could very tentatively consider that the sign sequence represents a corrupt N stem form of *eṭēru*, whose meaning, “to be rescued,” would be semantically compatible with the preceding *šūzubu*.²³ All this, however, is highly speculative.

6) It should be stressed that our understanding of this line is uncertain and not supported by any parallels. We assume that ʾTINʾ-*ta* is to be read as *baltāta* and A as *māru*, even though the latter word is otherwise rarely represented by the sign A.²⁴ ʾTINʾ-*ta* could also be understood as standing for *balṭūtu*, “state of being alive” or *balīṭtu* (the feminine form of *balṭu*, “alive”); or one could read the first signs as ʾḥiʾ-*ta-a* (an imperative of *ḥatû* II (i/i) “to strike down”?). None of these solutions, however, yields a meaningful translation.

7) *i-kab*-[...] is probably to be restored as a form of *kabāsu* (“to tread”), perhaps *i-kab*-[*ba-su/sa*], which makes it somewhat unlikely to understand the first half of the line in the light of the well-attested adverbial phrase “below my feet,” usually found in phrases referring to submission (see CAD Š/3, 315–316). If one assumed that the verb is actually *kapālu* or *kapāpu*, one could imagine the line referring to a newborn child crawling at the feet of the father, but this seems altogether improbable. Note that *šupāl šēpē* is also attested (in Amarna and Neo-Babylonian texts) as a term for a foot-stool.

8) This line can be understood in a variety of ways, and without a better-preserved duplicate, it will remain impossible to establish with certainty which one is correct. Given the context, the most likely interpretation of *ú-ru(-)šá* is “her pudenda (*ūru* II),” even though *ú-ru* could also represent *ūru* I “roof,” *urû* I “stable,” and a few other words. The sign EN stands either for *bēlu* “lord” or for *adi* “towards.” Since the line begins with *ultu*, “from,” and the EN in obv. 4 is likely to represent *adi* as well, the latter solution seems preferable, even though a reading *bēl bīti*, “master of the house,” would make sense. The sign following EN, apparently É or KID, but not KAL (compare the KAL sign in obv. 4), could represent the word *bītu* “house,” but it could also be read syllabically, as *bit*, *kit*, or in some other way.²⁵ One possible reading is É-ʾiaʾ “(towards) my

20. A reading ʾsu-luʾ-up-pu “date” is unlikely; the second sign does not seem to have the vertical wedge on the left that characterizes the LU sign.

21. See R. J. Van der Spek, “The Size and Significance of the Babylonian Temples under the Successors”. In: P. Briant and F. Joannès, *La transition entre l’empire achéménide et les royaumes hellénistiques*. Paris, 2006, p. 284.

22. It seems unlikely that the word should be understood as *indaḥrū* (< *imtaḥrū*) “they received”.

23. Note that the verb *eṭēru* is actually found in the Assyrian elegy about a woman dead in childbirth (see above). In line 10 of this text, the woman speaker implores the mother goddess to “spare (her) life” (*e-ṭi-ri-i napultī*). The elegy also includes, in line 7, a reference to labor pains (*ḥīlūya*).

24. See R. Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*. Münster, 2003, p. 435, with references. In rev. 3ʾ, 4ʾ, and 6ʾ, the word *māru* is written syllabically (but note that *pānu* is written both logographically and syllabically in our text; see rev. 5ʾ and 7ʾ).

25. A reading EN.LÍL (for Enlil or Nippur) seems unlikely, since there is no DINGIR before EN and no KI after LÍL.

house," another *kit-tur*-[ri(-)...] "(towards) a *kit(t)ur(r)u*-stool."²⁶ It may be that the line describes the child, having emerged from the womb, being moved into the house or into some kind of chair, but this remains completely conjectural.

9. Why the city of Dēr (modern Tell al-ʿAqar near Badra), situated in eastern Mesopotamia on the border with Elam, is mentioned here is unclear. Was it the place where the slave-girl gave birth? Later, however, in rev. 5' and 7', references to the god Bēl (i. e., Marduk) point towards Babylon as the city where the action takes place. Dēr seems to have played an important role in Late Babylonian times as a center of the art of (liturgical) lamentation (*kalātu*), and it is mentioned in a number of prominent historical, literary, and religious texts of the period, including the "Cyrus Cylinder," the "Babylonian Map of the World," and the "Uruk Prophecy."²⁷ Its main deities, Anurabū (or Ištarān) and Šarrat-Dēr, are not known, however, for any close connection with birth or women (unless one interpreted their possible patronage of Emesal compositions in this light).

The last sign before the break might be AMAR, perhaps to be read *atmu*, "small young animal, fledgling," a term occasionally also used, in transferred meaning, for human beings. The sign could also be read syllabically, however, as *sur*.

Reverse

2') The first signs of this line pose significant problems. If the reading *u d ʿ gul* is correct, what first comes to mind is Sumerian *ù-gul ... gá-gá*, the Akkadian equivalent for *utnēnu* "to pray," which is once attested in the writing *u₄-gul* instead of *ù-gul*.²⁸ The following *zu* could perhaps be the Sumerian possessive suffix for the second person singular. Considering, however, that there is no *gá-gá*, and that our text includes otherwise no Sumerian passages and only fairly common logograms, this interpretation is fraught with difficulties. The following *im-ma-lil* is most likely a preterite of *mēlulu* "to play,"²⁹ probably referring to the child.

Even though highly speculative, one should perhaps not entirely exclude the possibility that the line has mythological connotations and is about the child(?) "playing" with an otherwise unattested "storm that knows destruction" (*u₄-gul-zu*). A somewhat similar scenario is found in

26. One could speculate that the stool in question was used as a birth-stool – even though, as pointed out in M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, pp. 118–122, birth-stools are so far attested only in Ugaritic(?) and Hittite texts, but not in Mesopotamian ones. Note that the Ugaritic passage possibly referencing a birth-stool (*ks'n*) is about two "slave-girls"(!) giving birth. One serves the god Yariḥ and the other the goddess Athirat, and both are receiving instructions from El on how to deliver.

27. For Dēr in the first millennium, see J. Oelsner, "Spätbabylonische Texte aus Dēr". *AoF* 22 (1995) 265–268, J. N. Postgate and R. Mattila, "Il-Yada' and Sargons's Southeast Frontier". In: G. Frame, *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A. K. Grayson*. Istanbul, 2004, pp. 235–254, E. Frahm, "Assurbanipal at Der". In: M. Luukko *et al.*, *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*. Helsinki, 2009, pp. 51–64, and E. Frahm, "Teaching Liturgical Lamentations in Hellenistic Uruk". In: U. Gabbay and J. J. Pérennès, *Des polythéismes aux monothéismes: Mélanges d'assyriologie offerts à Marcel Sigrist*. Leuven, 2020, 189–220.

28. KAR 73, rev. 21'–22: *en u₄-da ti-la-me-en u₄-gul mu-un-ni-gá-gá / a-di u₄-mu ba-laṭ-ku lut-in-ki*, "As long as I live I shall pray to you". B. Böck, *The Healing Goddess Gula: Towards an Understanding of Ancient Babylonian Medicine*. Leiden/Boston, 2014, p. 84 reads *lud-lu¹-ki*, but since *ù/u₄-gul ... gá-gá* is otherwise never attested as an equivalent of *dalālu*, it seems preferable to accept *lut-in-ki* and take it as a defective writing of *lutmenki*.

29. Note that this seems to be an Assyrian form; the Babylonian one should have been *immelil*.

Enūma eliš I 105–106, where young Marduk’s childhood frolics are described as follows: *ibnima šār erbeta u’allid anum / qātuššu umallâ mārî lim-mel-li* “Anu formed and gave birth to the four winds; / He delivered them to him (Marduk), (saying:) ‘My son, let them whirl.’”³⁰

3’) Whether KIMIN refers back to *u d ʿgu l ʿ zu* or to a word or expression in the lost second half of the previous line is unclear. *id-da-ʿniʿ?* could be a third person singular preterite of *nadû*, followed by a first person singular suffix, which would mean something like “(my son) rejected me.”³¹ If this is correct, one would have to assume that the relationship between the father, the slave-girl, and the son had soured at this point (see also the note on rev. 6’). It may be more probable, however, not least because of what is said in the next line, that *id-da-ʿniʿ?* is a corrupt form of the verb *nadānu*. A reading *id-da-ʿniʿ-inʿ?* “has become strong” is not completely impossible either.

4’) The translation offered by us assumes that *a-na-da-ni-ka* is a Sandhi form of *ana nadānika*.

5’) Whether the last sign is really a NI remains questionable. Given that in the previous lines the father seems to be speaking, it appears at first glance as if the second singular form *taqabbi* addresses the son, who, however – unless a substantial amount of time has passed since his birth – seems too young at this point to make any public statements. There may, hence, be a change in narrative perspective – but the matter remains unclear.

6’) There is again some uncertainty as to how to interpret this line. It may provide the words that are supposed to be spoken on the occasion, in contrast to those not to be used, which are referenced in rev. 5’. The phrase *šū mārū* brings to mind the verba solemnia *lū mārū’a šū*, “He shall be my son,” which according to legal documents were regularly pronounced in Neo-Babylonian times to formally ratify adoptions.³² The sequence of the two words is conspicuously inverted, however, and *u’addi* is otherwise not attested in such contexts. One can also not entirely exclude that one should read *šu-ú ma-ru-ú-<a> ad-di-ma*, “This son of mine – I rejected him” (cp. *id-da-ʿniʿ?* in rev. 3’ and the discussion above) – which would completely reverse the meaning of the line.

One of several possible restorations for the sign(s) before the break is *ina q[é-reb ...]* “in the midst [of ...].”

7’) While many Mesopotamian texts, especially ritual ones, refer to acts that had to be repeated seven times, repeating something six times seems highly unusual.³³ It remains unclear how to restore the word before the break, probably another verb in the second person singular. Possibilities include *tat-ʿtaʿ-[din]* (“you have given”) or some form derived from *našû* or *nadû*.

30. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Winona Lake, IN, 2013, pp. 56–57.

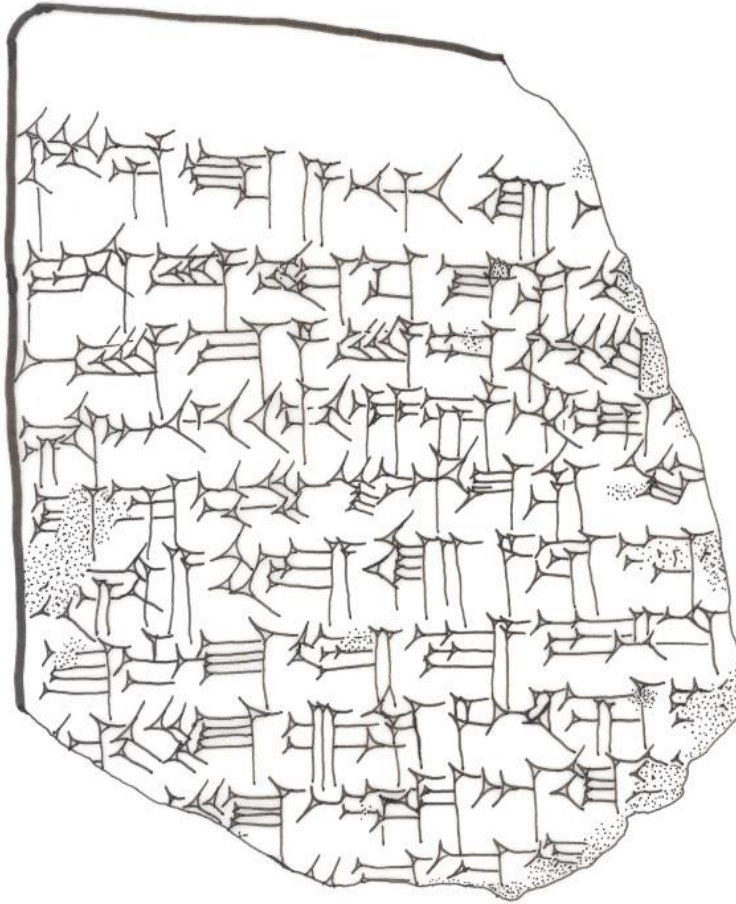
31. Cp. *Ludlul* I 43: *id-dan-ni* DINGIR.MU, “my god has rejected me.”

32. See, for example, BM 54139+, obv. 5 (C. Wunsch, “Findelkinder und Adoption nach neubabylonischen Quellen.” *AfO* 50 (2003/2004) 227–228): *lu-ú DUMU-ú-a šu-úʿ*.

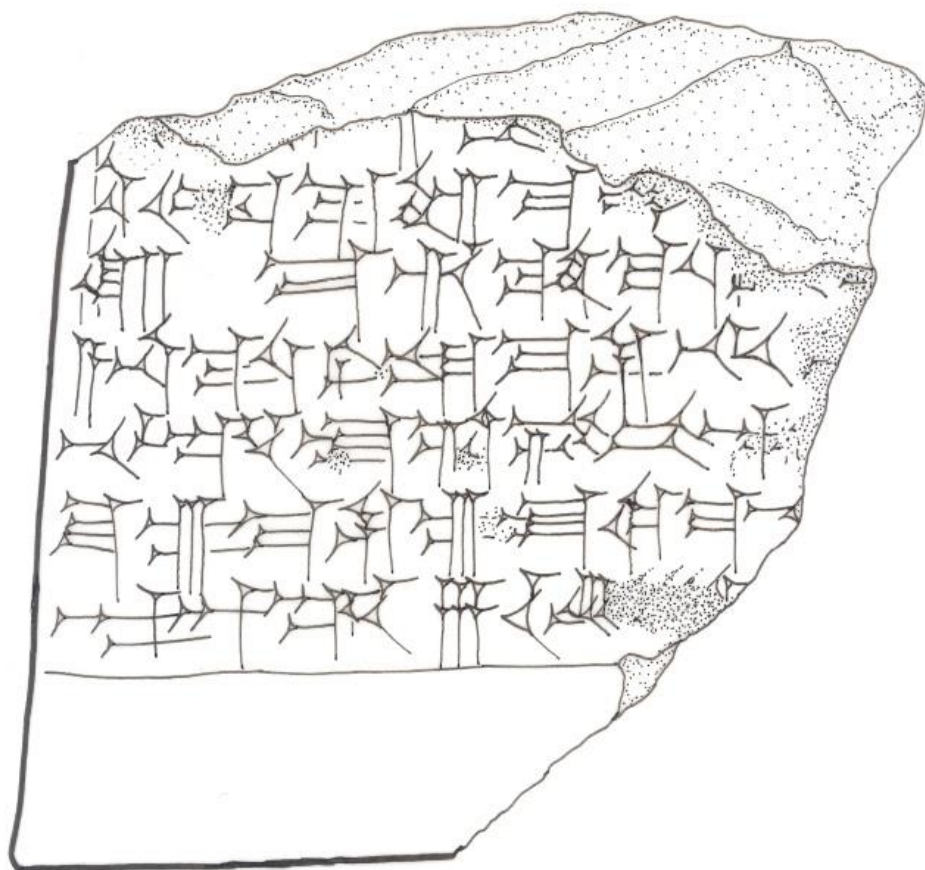
33. For an overview of the few relevant attestations of *šeššū*, see CAD Š/2, 338a.



Si 375 (photo by Selim Ferruh Adalı)



Si 375 Obverse (hand copy by Eckart Frahm)



Si 375 Reverse (hand copy by Eckart Frahm)