A Babylonian Omen Text in the Redpath Museum

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Among the 16 cuneiform tablets and clay cones in the collection of the Redpath Museum of McGill University in Montreal are two texts of particular interest. The first, a Seleucid tablet describing a legal dispute, was published in the previous issue of ARRIM by G. J. P. McEwan. The second, published here, is a tablet of possibly Middle Babylonian date recording liver omens. The tablet is only partially preserved and measures 10 x 8.3 x 3 cm. Only a portion of one surface and the right edge of the tablet is extant; the curvature of that surface would suggest that it is the reverse of the tablet. Lines from the other side of the tablet run over onto the surface preserved at two places. The museum accession number on the tablet is no longer readable.

The tablet, insofar as it is preserved, contains a series of liver omens, dealing specifically with the 'station' (manzāzu, KI. GUB). On the basis of the representation of the 'station' on models of sheep's livers from Boghazköy (e.g., KUB 4, 71-73), R. D. Biggs suggests that 'there is some likelihood that it can be identified as the reticular impression, or perhaps, more specifically, as a crease which may occur at the top of the reticular impression.' I. Starr notes that on what he terms the 'orientation liver' it seems to occupy the area of both the reticular and abomasal impressions.

A Middle Babylonian date for the tablet is suggested by a number of the sign forms. In addition, the use of KI. GUB for manzāzu is common in that period, but is rare in the first millennium. Similarities with the texts from Boghazköy include the use of ḫē where one would expect ḫē, diš for ana, ʾaš for ina, and the mixed usage of ʾšu and ʾšū.

TRANSLITERATION
Obverse?
lacuna
1) [...] x UGU-šu-nu GU3 DIB-it MIN-ma DIB-ma gaz-ak
2) [...] ti
3) [...] 
4) [...] 
5) [...] x x x lacuna
1) [...] x Uš1.MES lacuna
Reverse?
lacuna
1) [BE] x x [...] 
2) [BE] ina SAG ZAG K[I.GUB] [...] x [...] 
3) [BE] ina ša MURUB4 K[I.GUB] BABBAR ku-u[p] pu-tu, ŠUB ŠIN.DINGIR1 x (x) [...] 
4) [BE] SAG KI.GUB GIM KA GIŠ.ŠI.KAK SIG NUN ina KUR X X X TI X 
5) [BE] KI.GUB GU.MES BABBAR.MES ŠUB.ŠUB ÉRIN-ʾi IMMIN DIB-bat 
6) [BE] KI.GUB GU.MES SA5.MES ŠUB.ŠUB ŠUB SAG.KAL LUGAL 
7) [BE] KI.GUB GU.MES SIG7.MES ŠUB.ŠUB KUB-ri 
8) BE KI.GUB SIG; GIŠ.TUKUL LUGAL-NA 
9) BE KI.GUB SIG; ŠUB.ŠUB ĶI7.UD.MES ʾšKUR RA

1 Permission to publish this tablet was kindly granted by J. C. McLellan, Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University, and M. Bisson, Honorary Curator of Ethnology of the Redpath Museum. My thanks must also be expressed to Professor D. Runnalls of McGill University for her assistance. R. D. Biggs and A. K. Grayson read an early draft of this article and made a number of valuable suggestions.
2 The origin of the collection of tablets in the Redpath Museum has been discussed by Yetman in RTC 1 (1983) pp. 5-11.
3 The older term for this feature of the sheep's liver was napplastu (gu.b.ar). NA usually replaces KI. GUB as the logogram for manzāzu in texts from the first millennium. For napplastu/manzāzu, see in particular Goetze, YOS 10 pp. 5-6; Biggs, JNES 33 (1974) pp. 352-53; and I. Starr, The Rituals of the Diviner (Malibu, 1983) pp. 77-78.
4 Starr, Rituals of the Diviner p. 78.
5 The similarities with the Boghazköy omen texts were pointed out to me by R. D. Biggs.
10') BE KI.GUB SA₃. SUB.SUB 'KI.UD₃.ME₃ ḫI.ZI RA
11') BE ina SÀ MURUB₃. KI.GUB BAR-tu₄, a'ZUEN
NIN.DINGIR ir-ri-i₄ ū lu AN.TA.LU
12') BE KI.GUB GE₄.GE₄. SUB ÉRIN-i₄ BE KI.GUB
'tU₄ HUM SUB ku-ub-ri
13') BE KI.GUB ina SÀ KI.GUB (GAR)-ma ū ūS
DU.DU zi me-ḥe-e bûr-qì ū ku-us-ṣi
14') BE KI.GUB.ME₃ 2-ma ina bi-ri-ṣu-nu BÛR.ME₃
SUB.SUB.ME₃ MU₃ LÛ t-na-dī-ṣa-ak
15') BE KI.GUB SAG.U S GAR-ma MAN-ru ana ID.TU₃
ma-qìt ÉRIN-ka ina SAG A.SÀ-ṣa DINGIR.ME₃ ša
TAK₃.ME₃-ṣi tI₄-[tAR-ru₄(...)] ar-bu-tiду-ak
16') BE DAL.BA.NA AL.TE ū KI.GUB BÛR ū SUB-ti GU₃,
ū lu ūSUB 〈MÁŠ〉. ANŠE
17') BE-ma ina a-ḥi-it LU BA. ūS ūS-at
18') BE KI.GUB GI₄ UD.SAKAR GI MU₃ GI₄.TUKUL
LUGAL-GI.NA
19') BE ina SÀ KI.GUB BÛR.ME₃ SUB.SUB LUGAL
NUN.ME₃-ṣi ū-ṣam-qat x (x) [...]
20') BE KI.GUB ū GĪR kAB-su-ma ū 〈RA₄〉 x x [...]
21') DINGIR.ME₃ BĀRA TAK₄.ME₃-MA [...]
22') [BE] KI.GUB ū GĪR 〈kAB₅〉-su-ma [...]
23') [(x)] DINGIR.ME₃ 〈BĀRA₃ [...
24') [...] x [...] lacuna

Redpath Museum

TRANSLATION

Obverse?
Too damaged for connected translation.

Reverse?
lacuna
1') [If] ... [...]
2') [If] in the top right of the 'station' [...]
3') [If] there is a compacted white spot inside the middle of the 'station'—downfall of the entu-
priestess [...]
4') If the top of the 'station' is thin like the tip of a thorn—a noble ... in the land.
5') If the 'station' is covered with white filaments—
thirst will seize my army.
6') If the 'station' is covered with white filaments—
downfall of a high official of the king.
7') If the 'station' is covered with green filaments—
defeat of the mass of the army.
8') If the 'station' is green—sign of Sargon.
9') If the 'station' is covered with green spots—
the god Adad will devastate the threshing
floors.
10') If the 'station' is covered with red spots—fire
will ravage the threshing floors.
11') If there is a cross-(shaped mark) in the
middle of the 'station'—the god Sin will
request an entu-priestess; or an eclipse.
12') If the 'station' is black—defeat of my army.
If the 'station' is ...—defeat of the mass of
the army.
13') If (there is) a 'station' inside the 'station' and
it bleeds constantly—there will be a violent
storm, lightning, and cold weather.
14') If there are two 'stations' and there are holes
in between them—a snake will bite a man.
15') If there is a normal 'station' and a second one
descends to the nār takalti—your army in
seeking its goal, the gods who
abandoned it [...] will take flight.
16'–17') If there is a hole in the area between
the 'yoke' and the 'station'—disease among
the cattle or disease among the herds; or
the deathly ill person among his acquaintances
will die.
18') If the 'station' ... like the crescent-moon—sign
of Sargon.
19') If there are holes inside the 'station'—the king
will bring his nobles low ...
20'–21') If the 'station' and the 'path' are bent
and ...—[(...)] the gods will abandon (their)
sanctuaries and [...]
22'–23') If the 'station' and the 'path' are bent
and ...—(...)] the gods will [...] (their)
sanctuaries and [...]
24') [If] ... [...] lacuna

COMMENTARY

8') Sargon, king of Akkad (2334–2279 BC), is fre-
quently mentioned in omens; allusions to historical
figures in Old Babylonian omen texts were collected
L. C. George is preparing a study of historical omens as a doctoral dissertation (University of Toronto).

12') ūzu (or st) ħum is unclear. Possibly a D-stative.

13') If interpreted correctly, ūš DU.DU, 'it bleeds constantly', would be unique since one does not expect the mamzāzu to bleed.

15') The identification of the nār takalti is uncertain. Biggs (RA 63 [1969] p. 167) suggests that it may be another name for the nār amūti, the portal vein. On the apodosis, see TCL 6, 3 rev. 22 and 37 and Boissier, Choix p. 45:5.

16') The 'yoke' (nīru, AL.ĪE) is probably to be identified within the area of the omasal impression (see Biggs, RA 63 [1969] p. 166 and Starr, Rituals of the Diviner p. 91).

18') Although the signs GI.MUS are clear upon the tablēt, their meaning here is elusive.

20') The 'path' (padānu, īr) is to be identified with a deep fissure on the ventral part of the liver (see Starr, Rituals of the Diviner pp. 78–79).