

A Babylonian Omen Text in the Redpath Museum

GRANT FRAME
University of Toronto

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.¹ The tablet is only partially preserved and measures 10 × 8.3 × 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).² 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.'³ I. Starr notes that on what he terms the 'orientation liver' it

¹ Permission to publish this tablet was kindly granted by J. C. McLelland, 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.

The origin of the collection of tablets in the Redpath Museum has been discussed by Yetman in *RTC* 1 (1983) pp. 5–11.

² The older term for this feature of the sheep's liver was *naplastu* (IGL.BAR). NA usually replaces KI.GUB as the logogram for *manzāzu* in texts from the first millennium. For *naplastu/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.

³ *JNES* 33 (1974) p. 353.

seems to occupy the area of both the reticular and abomasal impressions.⁴

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 *hé* where one would expect *he*, DIŠ for *ana*, AŠ for *ina*, and the mixed usage of *šu* and *šú*.⁵

TRANSLITERATION

Obverse?

lacuna

1') [...] x 𒀭UGU-šu²-nu GU² 𒀭DIB-it MIN-ma DIB-ma
GAZ-ak

2') [...] TI

3') [...]

4') [...]

5') [...] x x x

lacuna

1'') [...] x 𒀭UŠ 𒀭MEŠ

lacuna

Reverse?

lacuna

1') [BE] x x [...]

2') [BE] ina SAG ZAG K[I.GU]B [...] x [...]

3') [BE] ina ŠÀ MURUB₄ K[I.GU]B BABBAR ku-u[p]-pu-
tu₄ ŠUB 𒀭NIN.DINGIR 𒀭x (x) [...]

4') [B]E SAG KI.GUB GIM KA GIŠ.ŠI.KAK SIG NUN ina
KUR x x x TI x

5') [B]E KI.GUB GU.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ ŠUB.ŠUB ÉRIN-i
IMMIN DIB-bat

6') [B]E KI.GUB GU.MEŠ SA₅.MEŠ ŠUB.ŠUB ŠUB SAG.KAL
LUGAL

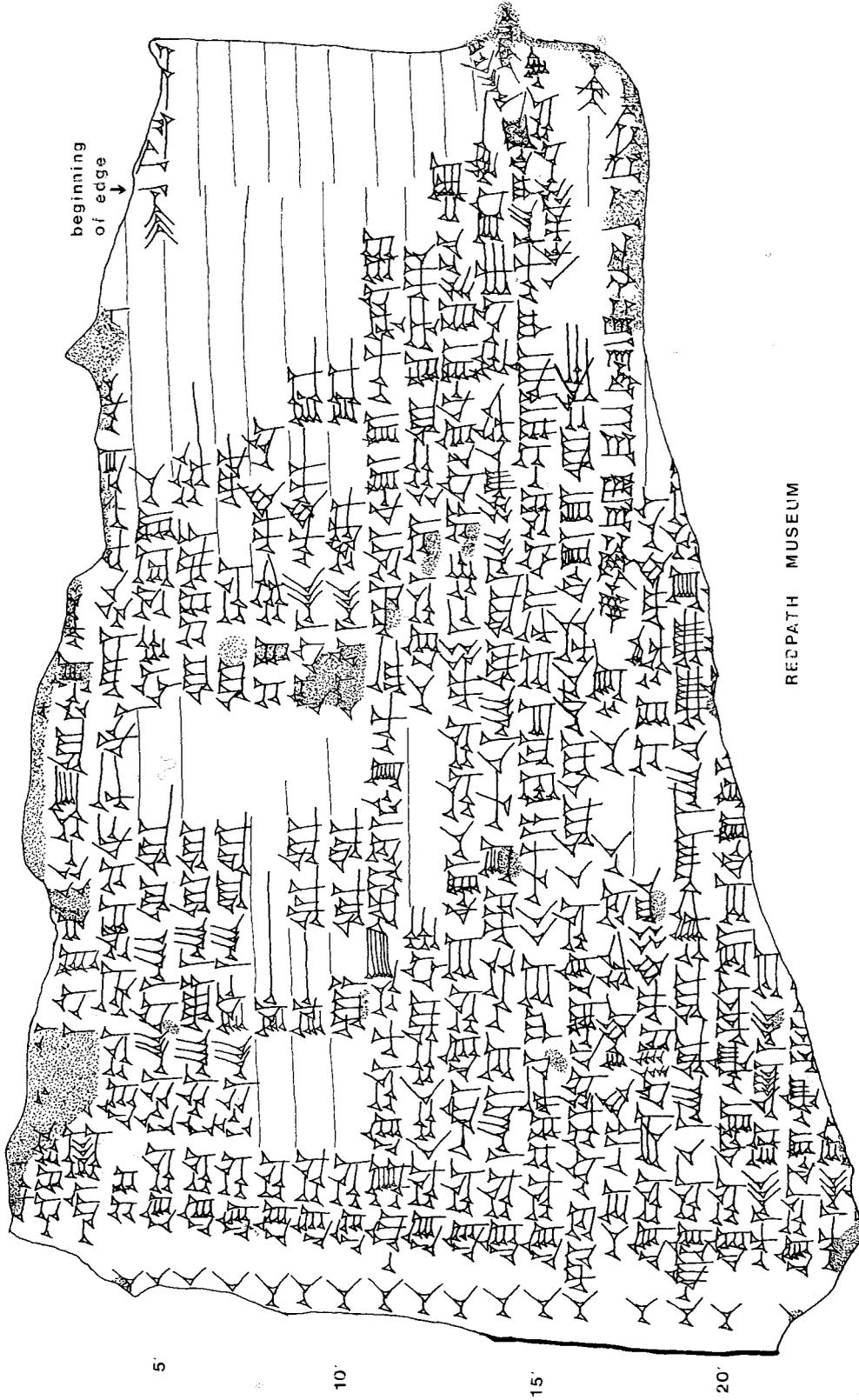
7') [B]E KI.GUB GU.MEŠ SIG₇.MEŠ ŠUB.ŠUB ŠUB kub-ri

8') BE KI.GUB SIG₇ GIŠ.TUKUL LUGAL-GI.NA

9') BE KI.GUB SIG₇ ŠUB.ŠUB 𒀭KI 𒀭UD.MEŠ 𒀭IŠKUR RA

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.



beginning
of edge
↓

RECPATH MUSEUM

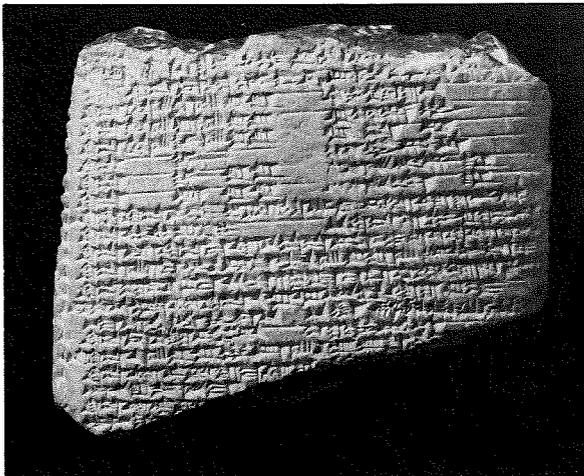
5

10

15

20

- 10') BE KI.GUB SA, ŠUB.ŠUB 𒀭KI.UD𒀭.MEŠ IZI RA
 11') BE ina ŠÀ MURUB, KI.GUB BAR-tu, dZUEN
 NIN.DINGIR ir-ri-iš ù lu AN.TA.LÙ
 12') BE KI.GUB GE, GE, ŠUB ÉRIN-i BE KI.GUB
 𒀭ZU𒀭 𒄀UM ŠUB ku-ub-ri
 13') BE KI.GUB ina ŠÀ KI.GUB <GAR>-ma ù úš
 DU.DU ZI me-ḫé-e bír-qi ù ku-uš-ši
 14') BE KI.GUB.MEŠ 2-ma ina bi-ri-šu-nu BÜR.MEŠ
 ŠUB.SUB.MEŠ MUŠ LÚ i-na-áš-ša-ak
 15') BE KI.GUB SAG.UŠ GAR-ma MAN-nu ana ÍD.TÙN
 ma-qiṭ ÉRIN-ka ina SAG A.ŠÀ-ŠÁ DINGIR.MEŠ ŠÁ
 TAK, MEŠ-ŠI 𒀭i-1-[tar-ru? (...)] ar-bu-tú DU-ak
 16') BE DAL.BA.NA AL.TE ù KI.GUB BÜR ŠUB ŠUB-ti GU,
 ù lu ŠUB <MÁŠ>.ANŠE
 17') BE-ma ina a-ḫi-it LÚ BA.ÚŠ ÚŠ-at
 18') BE KI.GUB GIM UD.SAKAR GI MUŠ GIŠ.TUKUL
 LUGAL-GI.NA
 19') BE ina ŠÀ KI.GUB BÜR.MEŠ ŠUB.ŠUB LUGAL
 NUN.MEŠ-ŠÚ ú-šam-qat x (x) [...]
 20') BE KI.GUB ù GÍR kab-su-ma ù 𒀭RA? x x x [...]
 21') DINGIR.MEŠ BÁRA TAK, MEŠ-ma [...]
 22') [B]E KI.GUB ù GÍR 𒀭kab-1-s[u-ma ...]
 23') [(x)] DINGIR.MEŠ 𒀭BÁRA? [...]
 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 red 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 Sîn 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 [return and ...] 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 frequently mentioned in omens; allusions to historical figures in Old Babylonian omen texts were collected by A. Goetze (*JCS* 1 [1947] pp. 253-65).

L. C. George is preparing a study of historical omens as a doctoral dissertation (University of Toronto).

12') 「ZU」 (or SI) 𒄠UM is unclear. Possibly a D-stative.

13') If interpreted correctly, ÚŠ DU.DU, 'it bleeds constantly', would be unique since one does not expect the *manzāzu* 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.TE) 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 MUŠ are clear upon the tablēt, their meaning here is elusive.

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