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**“Raining Terror: Another Wordplay Cluster
in Gilgamesh Tablet XI (Assyrian Version, ll. 45-47).”**

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41) **The price of a bundle of reeds** – The Neo-Assyrian text *Ladders to Heaven* no. 84 was first published in a catalogue by A. Kirk Grayson¹, then re-transliterated and translated by the present author², and most recently included in a full-length treatise of NA judicial documents by Remko Jas³. As well established by Jas, the text records the settlement of a lawsuit brought by one Šarru-nūri against Sēr-nūri on a matter on which no specific details are given (*ina* UGU GĒME.MEŠ, «concerning the slave girls», Obv. 3). The case is heard by the god Adad, who imposes a fine of 1 1/2 minas on the defendant. The usual formulae of judicial «peace» conclude the main part of the document, followed by the names of the witnesses.

The left-hand edge of the text bears an interesting note of 7 lines, viz.: (12) 2 MA.NA KÙ.BABBAR 1.MAN.ZALÁG (13) 1.se-er-nu-E! *ina* URU.ni-nu-u (14) TA* e-bi-su qa-ni (15) 2 MA.NA KÙ.BABBAR 1 1/2 MA.NA KÙ.BABBAR (16) d.IM e-te-me-di (17) u-sa-IGI^{II} it-ti-din (18) šul-mu *ina* bir-ti-šú<-nu>. Since Grayson's rendering of was a bit too liberal («*In fact* Šir-nuri has paid in full two minas of silver (to) Šarru-nuri at Nineveh by means of bundles of reeds (worth) two minas of silver, (although) Adad imposed only one and one-half minas of silver. They are mutually satisfied») ⁴, the present author attempted to focus more precisely on the text, while basically accepting Grayson's idea that the reeds had a counterpart in weight/value of 2 minas of silver («*(Concerning): The two minas of silver of Šarru-nuri. Šer-nuri was in Nineveh, and out of a bundle of reeds of 2 minas of silver in weight, the god Adad imposed the 1 1/2 minas of silver and gave it to him (= Šarru-nuri) in full. There is judicial peace between them (?)*») ⁵. This translation was subjected to criticism by Jas, on the grounds that «the weight of the reeds is completely irrelevant here» ⁶; his translation accordingly runs as follows: «Two minas of silver of Šarru-nūri: Sēr-nūri, in Ninū, from a bundle of reeds paid in full (the equivalent of) two minas of silver. Adad imposed 1 1/2 minas of silver. There is peace between them».

The present author finds himself in basic agreement with Jas' translation – save for the minor point of discussion on whether URU.ni-nu-u was a relatively rare orthography for Nineveh, (SAAB 4, 75 note 4) or referred instead to «probably a town in the vicinity of Guzana» (Jas, p. 23), albeit lacking parallels as such. On the other hand, Jas' commentary sticks him back with all previous authors into the quagmire of considering the difference between the value of the reeds and the fine imposed by the god, with all sorts of ensuing speculations: «The reason why the fine in silver is paid in reeds worth 1/2 mina of silver more than the fine imposed by Adad is the conversion of the silver debt into a debt of reeds, a favor of the creditor which usually entailed expenses. It is also possible that the extra reeds were intended to make up for the cost of transporting them from Ninū to Guzana» ⁷.

But there is actually no need to reach out this far. Taking a closer look at the text, the issue of prices is fully spelled out – although none of the previous commentators had hitherto seen it. L. 21, in point of fact, reads: «*(Concerning): the two minas of silver of Šarru-nūri*»: now, these two minas are nowhere previously mentioned in the document itself. The sum must therefore refer to a preceding credit which this man had with the defendant Sēr-nūri – and it was presumably the very sum «concerning the slave-girls» due to which the judicial hearing, on the part of Adad was held.

If this were the case, then the note on payment would be crystal-clear, since (ll. 22 ff.) «Sēr-nūri paid in full the 2 minas of silver – and the god Adad imposed on him 1 1/2 minas of silver – from a bundle of reeds (sold) in Nineveh (!). There is judicial peace between them». In conclusion, the famous bundle of reeds from which the defendant paid back all his dues would have been worth not two, not one and one-half, but three and one-half minas of silver.

1. O.W. Muscarella (Ed.), *Ladders to Heaven. Art Treasures from the Land of the Bible*. Toronto 1981, pp. 126-127.

2. SAAB 4 (1990), 73-75.

3. R. Jas, *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures*, Helsinki 1996, no. 11, pp. 22-24.

4. Grayson, cit., 127.

5. SAAB 4, 74

6. Jas, p. 23.

7. Ibid.

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42) **Raining Terror: Another Wordplay Cluster in Gilgamesh Tablet XI (Assyrian Version, ll. 45-47)** – When Utnapishtim asks Ea what he should tell the people of the city when he begins constructing his boat, Ea responds with a witticism. Utnapishtim is to tell them that Ea will shower down *kukku* «cakes» and *kibātu* «wheat», a remark that has long been seen as a wordplay on *kukkū* «darkness» and *kibitū* «heaviness.» ¹ E. A. Speiser referred to these puns in this way: «Wily Ea plays on this ambiguity: To the populace, the statement would be a promise of prosperity: to Utnapishtim, it would signal the impending deluge.» ²

While this play has found wide acceptance, ³ two other allusive lexemes in Ea's speech which add

disasterous import to his words have escaped attention. The first is the polysemous verb *zanānu* (ll. 43, 47, 87, and 90), which in addition to meaning «rain down,» as it usually is translated,⁴ also means to «provide with food,» often in connection with a temple or city.⁵ Though the verb *zanānu* meaning «provide with food» is to my knowledge not attested in the III/1 conjugation, the forms *uša-zanakkunūši* (ll. 43, 47) and *uša-zannu* (l. 87) echo the homonym especially in juxtaposition with the puns *kukku* and *kibātu*. In addition, with one exception,⁶ the variant texts we possess record the verbal form in line 90 ambiguously as *i-za-an-na-nu*, perhaps to make the play more transparent when the threat is repeated for the last time.⁷

The second suggestive lexeme in Ea's speech is *nuḫṣu* «abundance, prosperity» (l. 43), which can refer to prosperous agricultural yields and also to the abundance of flood waters.⁸ The cleverness of Ea's initial message, therefore, hinges not just on two wordplays, but on four. Elsewhere I have pointed out additional instances of wordplay in Ea's words to Utnapishtim⁹ and it now appears that the god's warning is replete with puns and paronomasia.¹⁰ The observations here would seem to confirm Samuel N. Kramer's remark that the reader of Ea's words «must be wary, prepared for ironic turns, double talk, and wit even in the most sacred of contexts.»¹¹ The two additional examples of lingual cleverness adduced here add an even further dimension to the sophistication of Ea's message and demonstrate what in a previous issue of this journal¹² I have dubbed wordplay clustering.¹³

1. The first to spot the wordplay was Carl Frank, «Zu den Wortspeilen *kukku* and *kibati* in Gilg. Ep. XI.» ZA 36 (1925), 216.

2. In James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 93, n. 190.

3. In addition to Speiser see, e.g., CAD K 498, s.v. *kukki*, and more recently Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 110, 112, 133.

4. As it is in CAD Z 43, s.v. *zanānu* (A).

5. CAD Z 43-44, s.v. *zanānu* (B).

6. K. 3375 has *u-ša-az-na-na*.

7. Moreover, puns need not be grammatically accurate to be effective. See, e.g., M. Malul («A Possible Janus Parallelism in the Epic of Gilgamesh XI, 130.» ASJ 17 [1995], 338-342) who misses the point when he remarks that the pun I noted in «A Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story.» ASJ 13 (1991), pp. 419-421 is unconvincing on grammatical grounds. Moreover, the example he chooses was discussed already in my dissertation which has since been published as *Janus Parallelism and the Linguistic Transference in the Book of Job (JSOTSup)*, 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), see especially pp. 160-162. Similarly, see the dream interpretation: DIŠ I-GIŠ MUŠEN SUM-ŠU *i-sur i-sur* KA-Ū «If one gives him bird "oil": they will shout "Watch out! Watch out!";» about which A. Leo Oppenheim, (*The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East: With a Translation of the Assyrian Dream Book* [Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Volume 46/3 (1956): Philadelphia, PA.: American Philosophical Society, 1956], p. 279, n. 87) remarked: «The obvious pun with *išsuru* "bird" is difficult to explain philologically. One expects *ušur* (U1) or *išsar* (U2), but not *i-sur*.»

8. CAD N/2 320-321, s.v. *nuḫṣu*.

9. Scott B. Noegel, «A Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story.» ASJ 13 (1991), pp. 419-421; «An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story.» ASJ 16 (1994), pp. 10-12.

10. Though partially broken, the legible portion of line 45 also might constitute a pun, but of a visual type. Note how the signs *meš-ra-a e-bu-ra-am-ma*, usually normalized *mešra ebūramma* and translated «He will bring you a harvest of wealth,» suggest by way of a logographic reading of the signs MEŠ.RA.A. *mādātu. maḫāšu/dāku*, and *mū*, respectively. The visual message, therefore, hints that «many» will be «annihilated» by means of «water.» For *maḫāšu* in conjunction with the flood see also Gilg XI: 130. For the logographic readings see CAD M/1 20, 23, s.v. *mādu*. CAD M/1 72, s.v. *maḫāšu*. CAD D 35, s.v. *dāku*. CAD M/2 149, s.v. *mū*.

11. Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 5-6. Note also Ninurta's words: *mannuma šu lā dEa amātu ibann[u]* «Who, other than Ea, can devise words» (XI:175-176)?

12. See Scott B. Noegel, «Janus Parallelism Clusters in Akkadian Literature.» NABU 1995/71, pp. 33-34; and compare Jonas C. Greenfield, «The Cluster in Biblical Poetry,» *maarav* 55-6 (1990), pp. 159-168.

13. Perhaps one also should add P. Michalowski's observation that the boat sealer Puzur-dAmurri (l. 94) bears a name meaning «Protection of Enlil» (reading ^dKUR as a name of Enlil), i.e., an unpropitious «nomen omen.» See his «Sailing to Babylon: Reading the Dark Side of the Moon,» in Jerrold S. Cooper and Glenn M. Schwartz, eds. *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), p. 189. Moreover, this name is punningly anticipated in line 69 when we are told that the boatman stored away (*upazziru*) quantities of oil.

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