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"An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story."

First Published in:
An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story

In a previous issue of this journal I gave evidence for a type of polysemy in Gilgamesh XI which acts to parallel both that which precedes and that which follows. The device, until then known only from the Bible as “Janus Parallelism,” was noted in XI: 25-27.

25. muššir mešrê še napšati
   Abandon wealth! Seek life!

26. makkûra zerma napišta bullišt
   Spurn property! (Construct a boat!) Keep living beings alive!

27. [S]ulima zêr napšati kalama ana libbi gisêlippi
   Make all living beings go up into the boat!
An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism

As "Spurn property!" line 26 connects with line 25, "Abandon wealth!." As "Construct a boat!" the sentence alludes to the *ana libbi gišelippi* in the following line.

A related use of polysemy occurs in Gilg XI:14.

14. ṣakān ābūbi ubla libbāšunu ilānī rabûti

the great gods determined to bring about the deluge.

Here *ubla* means either "to want, desire, yearn for, to determine," in which case it anticipates *libbāšunu,* or "to carry off, sweep away (said of water)," in which case it relates back to *abūbi.* That both readings are acceptable by context suggests that both were intended. Unlike the polysemy in XI:25-27, this example, also known from the Bible, is of the asymmetrical type, i.e., it is not accomplished in three stichs.

As noted by Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, similar word manipulation is common and quite meaningful in the Gilgamesh epic and is often accompanied by clues given by the characters in the story. Accordingly, one wonders if such subtleties are alluded to in XI:9-10 by Uta-napištim when he proclaims *luptēka 4Gilgameš amat niširti u pirišta ša ilānī kāša luqbiša* "I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden, a secret of the gods I will tell you!"

Notes

1. I would like to thank Prof. David I. Owen for his helpful comments on this note.


3. *CAD* Z 98, s.v. zêru; *CAD* M/1 133-136, s.v. makkûru.

4. *CAD*, § 349, s.v. ešêru.


6. So *CAD* A/1 21-22, s.v. abâlu.

7. *libbu* frequently occurs as the subject of *abâlu.* See *CAD* A/1 21, s.v. abâlu.

8. *CAD*, A/1 16-17, s.v. abâlu. Note also that the verb occurs in XI:241: "let him wash, throw away his pelts, let the sea carry (them) away" (*libil tâmu*). For this see *CAD* A/1 16b, s.v. abâlu.

9. Note that *sakānu* also can mean "to inflict loss or calamity," *CAD* Š/1 129, 130, 155, s.v. *sakānu.*

10. For biblical examples see C. H. Gordon, "Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,"
Corrections and Additions to “Collations to the Rosicrucian and Stanford University Texts in SET” (ASJ 15)

Subsequent to the publication of collations of the Rosicrucian and Stanford Ur III texts, done by John Carnahan (who also copied certain seal impressions) and myself, I noticed several errors. I hope here to correct at least most of the errors. My apologies for any inconvenience they may have caused.

R. Englund had reconstructed the portions of SET 130 dealing with fats, and had come up with a few lines that differed slightly from my own. This prompted me to recheck the figures against the tablet, resulting in some slightly revised readings.

In addition to thanking R. Englund and those people mentioned in the introduction to the collations in ASJ 15, I would like to thank H. Waetzoldt, who offered a suggestion about the seal impression of SET 19, and J. Carnahan for checking his collation notes and supplying the correction to SET 274 i 14.