Prof. Scott B. Noegel  
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization  
University of Washington  

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

First Published in:  
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 on NA judicial documents by Remko Jas³. As well established by Jas, the text records the settlement of a lawsuit brought by one Šarru-nāri against Sēr-nāri on a matter on which no specific details are given *ina UGU GEME.ME.S. « 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 KU.BABBAR 1.MAN.ZALĀG (13) l.e-er-nu-Eù ina URU.ni-nu-u (14) TA* e-bi-su qa-hi (15) 2 MA.NA KU.BABBAR 1 1/2 MA.NA KU.BABBAR (16) 4.IM e-te-ne-di (17) u-sa-IGII IL i-ii-din (18) šu-ma ina bi-ir-si-li<nu>. Since Grayson's rendering of was a bit too liberal « *(In fact) Sēr-nāri has paid in full two minas of silver (to) Šarru-nāri at Nineveh by means of bundles of reeds (worth) two minas of silver, (although) Adad imposed only two 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-nāri, Sēr-nāri 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 *(to Šarru-nāri) 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-nāri: Sēr-nāri, in Ninu, 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 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 Ninu 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-nāri: 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-nāri - 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-nāri 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.

2. SAAB 4 (1990), 73-75.
4. Grayson, cit., 127.
5. SAAB 4, 74.
7. Ibid.

Frederick Mario FALES (24-03-97)
via S. Vitale 15/D
1-37129 VERONA, ITALIE

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"kukku..." a remark that has long been seen as a wordplay on " darkness, " and kibatu " cakes" and kibatu " heaviness. "¹⁴ E. A. Speiser referred to these puns in this way: "Wily Eа plays on this ambiguity: To the populace, the statement would be a promise of prosperity: to Уапашшум, it would signal the impending deluge. "¹²
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While this play has found wide acceptance,¹ two other allusive lexemes in Ea's speech which add
disastrous import to his words have escaped attention. The first is the polysemous verb *zādānu* (ll. 43, 47, 87, and 90), which in addition to meaning «rain down», as it usually is translated, also means to «provide with food», often in connection with a temple or city. Though the verb *zādānu* meaning «provide with food» is to my knowledge not attested in the III/1 conjugation, the forms *ugazanaakktu* (ll. 43, 47) and *uazaaana* (ll. 87) echo the homonym especially in juxtaposition with the parts *kickku* and *kibatu*. In addition, with one exception, the variant texts we possess record the verbal form in line 90 ambiguously as *u-za-am-na-ru*, perhaps to make the play more transparent when the threat is repeated for the last time.

The second suggestive lexeme in Ea’s speech is *nuhāju* «abundance, prosperity» (l. 43), which can refer to prosperous agricultural yields and also to the abundance of flood waters. The cleverness of Ea’s initial message, therefore, hinges not just on two wordplays, but on four. Elsewhere I have pointed out additional perhaps to make the play more transparent when the threat is repeated for the last time.7

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, *Über die Wortspiele in Gilgamesch* (1924). 210.
4. As it is in CAD Z 43, s.v. *zādānu* (A).
5. CAD Z 43-44, s.v. *zādānu* (B).
6. K 3375 has *u-la-us-ta-na-na*. 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], 328–342) who notes 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 Time-Continuum, in the Book of Job *JSOTSup* 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, see especially pp. 160–162. Similarly, see the dream interpretation: DIS I-GIS MUSEN SUM-lā-i-su r i-su r i-su r KA-ú “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 463 [1956]; Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1956), p. 279, n. 87 remarked: “The obvious pun with *izzurur* “bird” is difficult to explain philologically. One expects *izzur* (U1) or *izzur* (U2), but not i-su r.”
8. CAD N/2 320–321, s.v. *nāgasā*.
9. CAD N/2 320–321, s.v. *nāgasā*.
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 a-i-ba-ra-am-ma* usually normalized *meš-bēši-a-nu* and translated *He will bring you a harvest of wealth*. “suggest by way of a logographic reading of the signs MES.RA.A, mādītu, malāšsu/dāku, and mā, respectively. The visual message, therefore, hints that “many” will be “annihilated” by means of “water.” For mādītu in conjunction with the flood see also Gilg XI: 130. For the logographic readings see CAD M/1 20, 23. s.v. *mādītu*. CAD M/1 72. s.v. *malāšsu*. CAD D 35. s.v. *dānu*. CAD M/2 149. s.v. *mā*.
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: *ma-nūrta ta id 4ē zādānu šumūlu* «Who, other than Ea, can devise words» (XI: 175-176)?
13. Perhaps one also should add P. Machalowski’s observation that the boat sailor *Purun-Nammutu* (ll. 94) bears a name meaning «Protection of Enil» (reading *kūr* as a name of Enil), i.e., an unpropitious «omen omen». See ibid. “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 pentameter anticipated in line 69 when we are told that the boatman stored away (upuzzarzi) quantities of oil.

Scott B. NOEGEL (27-03-97)

Rice University, MS-15 6100 S. Main St.
Houston, TX 77005-1892, USA
snoegel@rice.edu