

“I WAS NOT WARM IN THE COLD”. ANOTHER OLD BABYLONIAN PROVERBIAL COLLECTION

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BM 108868, an unpublished Old Babylonian tablet containing a collection of moral and existential sayings is edited here for the first time, accompanied by a commentary, photos and a hand-copy. With this discovery, the existence of a solid 2nd millennium tradition of monolingual Akkadian proverbial sayings is established.

Introduction

Following our publication of the Old Babylonian tablet BM 13928,¹ we present here another Old Babylonian specimen of a collection of Akkadian proverbial sayings.² One of these sayings (ll. 6–8, §3 in our translation, below) has an almost verbatim parallel in a 1st millennium bilingual collection of proverbs: ḥén[bur s]i-nu-sá ab-[s]i[n-e na-an-ni-ib-tu-ud še-numun na-an-ni-ib-dím-ma // ḥabbūru lā išar[u] šer’u ay ū[lid] zēra ay i[bni] “May the furrow not give birth to a non-straight shoot, may it not create seed” (BWL p. 244, 30–33). This indicates that there was a 2nd millennium tradition of collecting monolingual Akkadian proverbial sayings, which led to that of the 1st millennium, and thus adds to the evidence presented by the publication of BM 13928.

The almost intact tablet BM 108868 (=1914–04–07, 34), measuring 6.0 × 8.6 × 2.4 cm, has a landscape format. This format is not common for OB literary texts and may point to a later date in this period. As in BM 13928, no separation lines are found between the different sayings. There is also no colophon, and the tablet’s provenance is unknown.

As we understand it, the tablet contains nine consecutive observations, or reflections regarding moral and non-moral human behavior, arranged along a thin associative thread. Unlike other proverb collections (and BM 13928), no animals are found. The tablet, in our opinion, may be an extract of a longer, as yet unknown collection, or an *ad-hoc* compilation of proverbs. In §1, impious behavior – contrary to the natural sense of justice – does not result in economic losses. In §2, wishes for divine favor are expressed. In §3, we find the hope that an unjust deed would have no profitable consequence. §4 advises that one should absolve one’s sin, for this is the choicest of things. In §5 comes a warning against challenging one’s own fate. In §6, wrongdoing is cursed, and in §7 it is to be judged by a god or a king. In §8 stands a metaphor of warmth vs. cold. Man acknowledges his gratitude to the generosity of others in times of need. In the last paragraph, §9, the person is worried, unable to rest, because of the steady diminution of his goods.

The tablet shows a cursive OB hand. The lines sometimes flow from obverse to reverse (ll. 1, 3, 5, 7), suggesting the text was copied from another tablet. The text employs several basic logograms, which may indicate a curricular background. The loss of initial *w* in *ašib* (l. 11) may hint to a relatively late date in the OB period, but mimation is used everywhere.

The tablet is presented in photos and hand-copy (NW), followed by a transliteration, translation and short commentary.

Transliteration

Obv.

- 1 *tú-pu-ul-šu ú-ul i-ni Á-^rsú¹ ^rú¹ SAG*
- 2 *a-nu-um-ma ra-i-du-um a-wi-lum*

¹ M.P. Streck and N. Wasserman, “On Wolves and Kings. Two Tablets with Akkadian Wisdom Texts from the Second Millennium B.C.” *Iraq* 78 (2016), 241–252. See that publication for further bibliography.

² The late W. G. Lambert went over the text, and his preliminary notes can be found in his folios (no. 9924, s. <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/contrib/lambert>).



Fig. 1 Photo of BM 108868 obverse by N. Wasserman and side by M. Weeden, courtesy of the trustees of the British Museum.

3 *ú-ul i-šu wu-tu-ur-ra-a-am ṣ[i-ib-]tam*
 4 *šum-ma ni-is-sà-tum [l]i-sà-ap-p[i-iḫ]*
 5 *šum-ma ku₆-ru-ú-um ZÁLAG li-ka-al-^rli¹-ma-ni*
 6 *^rḫa¹-ab-bu-ra-am-mi la i-šar-ta[m]*
 7 *še-er-ḫu-um a-ia ú-wa-al-li-id NUMUN ^ra¹-i[a] i[b-n]i*
 8 *en₆(IN)-ne-et pa-ṭa-ri-im na-aḫ ri-iš-tim*
 9 *di-in NAM la ta-bi-a-am TI*

Rev.

10 *ma-mi-tum-mi iz-za-az bi-la-at ar-n[im]*
 11 *mu-ṭa-ap-pí-il ni-iš i-li-im*

a-ši-ib ḫ-na IGI BÁRA

12 *ú-ul aš-ḫa-an i+na ḫal-pi-ma ad-di i-ši-k[a]*
 13 *i+na ra-ap-ši-im li-ib-bi(erasure)-ka*
 14 *úr¹-ri qá-li-iš ú-ul a-ti-lam*
 15 *i+na a^rlu¹ ša ta-ap-ḫa-ri iš-^rta¹-pí-lu*

Translation

§1

- 1 His insulting did not change his wage and capital.
- 2 Now, the trembling man
- 3 has no profit (and) interest(?).

§2

- 4 If there is sorrow, let it be dispersed!
- 5 If there is depression, let (god) show me the light!

§3

- 6 May the furrow, they say, not give birth to a bent shoot,
- 7 may it not create a seed.

§4

- 8 A sin to be absolved is the best of lard.



Fig. 2 Photo of BM 108868 reverse by N. Wasserman, courtesy of the trustees of the British Museum.

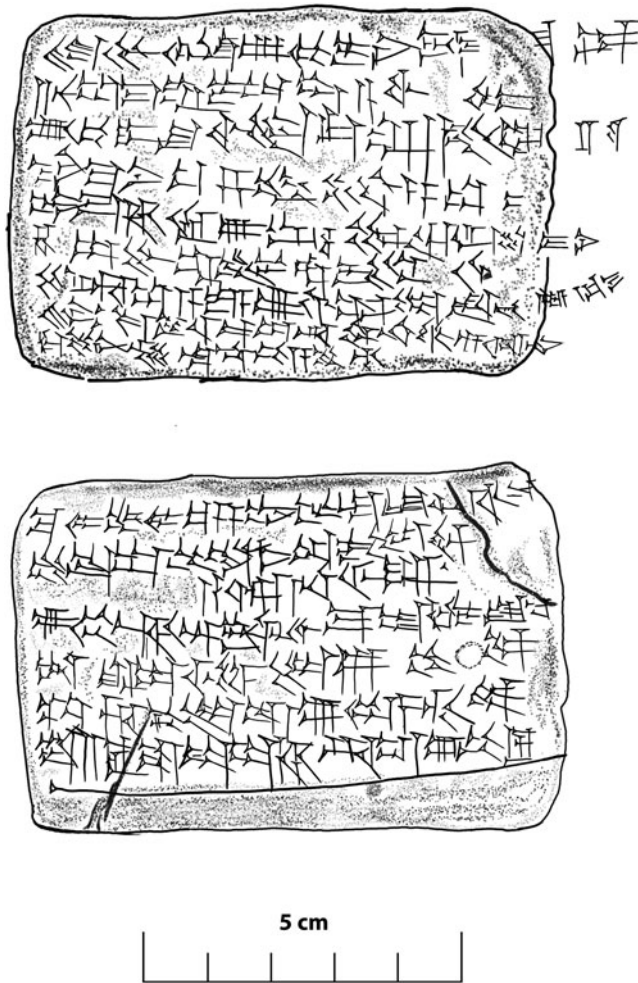


Fig. 3 Hand-copy of BM 108868 by N. Wasserman.

§5

9 Call (your) fate to judgement! Did you not summon (your own) life?

§6

10 The curse, they say, is standing ready as the burden of wrongdoing.

§7

11 He who insults the oath of god sits before(!) the throne.

§8

12 I did not get warm in the cold, so I threw you[r] wood (into the fire)

13 by your magnanimity.

§9

14 (Throughout) the days, I cannot rest quietly

15 in a city in which my collected possessions are constantly reduced.

Commentary

- 1: We analyze *ṭu-pu-ul-* as inf. D *ṭuppu-*, rather than a constr. form of an unknown substantive **ṭuplum*.
- 2: *rā'idum-awīlum* is a new example of the well-known *awīlum*-formations attested in different literary texts, as, e.g., *lullū-amēlu* Gilg. SB I 178 and Or. 56, 56: 32, *ḥābilu-amēlu* Gilg. SB I 113, or *māliku-amīlu* Or. 56, 56: 33 etc.
- 3: *wuturrūm* is the Old Babylonian counterpart of Old Assyrian *uturrā'um*, first time attested.
- 5: The learned syllabic value *ku₆* for ḪA is elsewhere attested only in the 1st millennium. The spelling with *plene u* is unexpected, as the word is *kūrum*. (One might consider a contamination with *kurūm* “short”.) – For *nūram kullumum*, cf. CAD K 524 s.v. *kullumu* 4c.
- 6: The fem. adj. *išartam* shows that *ḥabbūrum* is fem., unlike in the late parallel at BWL p. 244, 30 (see, *Introduction*, above).
- 9: The negation *lā*, and not *ul*, as in ll. 1, 3 and 12 indicates a rhetorical question.
- 12: Note the use of *pi*, although elsewhere *pī* is used (ll. 4, 11 and 15). This is the first non-lex. Old Babylonian attestation of *ḥalpū*.
- 12–13: Note the end-rhyme *iška – libbika*. More often than not Akkadian literary texts avoid this literary device.
- 13: On *libbum rapšum*, see CAD R 163a s.v. *rapšu* 1e and 165 s.v. *rapšu* 3b.
- 14: This is the first Old Babylonian attestation of *qāliš*, hitherto found only in literary texts from the 1st millennium.
- 15: *ālu* is a locative. Judging by this new context, *tapharum* means “private collected possessions” rather than “goods or payments collected for a temple” as in Old Assyrian and early Old Babylonian documents (CAD T 179f.).

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"لم أن أشعر بالدفئ في البرد". مجموعة أخرى من الأمثال البابلية
بقلم: مايكل بي. ستريك، جامعة لايبزيك

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